Putting Tamar in her Place

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy.

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Putting Tamar in her Place: Rosalie Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh

Tamar and Genesis 38 strayed by accident into my life during MPhil research. Such an intriguing account inspired this dissertation, which set out to answer three questions:

- What part does this unusual story play in the bible and especially in the Book of Genesis?
- What does Genesis 38 tell us of the Hebrew understanding of God?
- In particular, what is Tamar's role in answering both these questions?

 A significant breakthrough in understanding the text occurred when it became clear that the chapter had to be approached both diachronically and synchronically. In particular it became evident that Tamar's role can only be understood through an exploration of the different compositional phases of the story. My study shows that initially Genesis 38:1-26 was a discrete story which circulated independently in pre-exilic times. This story focused on the theme of levirate marriage and the extraordinary lengths Tamar undertook to conceive a child. Subsequently the story was inserted into the Joseph narrative. Drawing on the insights of David Bosworth[1] it became clear that Genesis 38:1-26 then acted as a *mise-en-abyme*, a proleptic story within a story, for the Joseph narrative. Finally a post-exilic coda was added, probably in the time of the Chronicler, describing the birth of Tamar's twins and establishing the lineage of her descendant David through Tamar to the patriarchs.

Each stage reveals different facets of Tamar's character and role: the committed mother, the *alter ego* of Joseph, and the fifth matriarch beside Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. Taken together they also show how the story serves as a lynchpin in Genesis uniting the patriarchal stories and the Joseph narrative. Most importantly it becomes clear that contrary to conventional scholarly opinion the chapter is a deeply theological one, where Tamar is revealed as an agent of God who embodies the divine qualities of righteousness, holiness, justice and חסד, and where the Hebrew belief that God can work through fallible humankind is expressed.

Of special methodological interest was the discovery of the weight of evidence which confirmed Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme* and the remarkable realisation that it is Tamar, not Judah, who foreshadows Joseph. I also proposed and applied a new development of the device: the reciprocal application of the *mise-en-abyme,* where the macrocosm can shed new light in turn on the microcosm. This application evoked surprising new insights on Tamar as a family woman, business woman, survivor of trauma, and woman of God.

Among the new areas for research prompted by such rich material three stand out as most deserving of further exploration in relation to other parts of the Hebrew Bible: the application of the concept of reciprocity in a *mise-en-abyme*; the examination of trauma in individual cases, and the negative impact of certain aspects of reception history on the understanding of Tamar's role and significance.

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[1] David A. Bosworth, *The Story within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,* CBQMS 45 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008).

Contents

Acknowledgements

An Irish proverb reminds us, "*Is ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine*." This can be translated as, "It is in each other's shadow that we flourish," where the word "shadow" implies protection and shelter in a supportive community. In completing this dissertation I have been blessed and sheltered by three such communities in the University, Cambridge, and Cork.

In my academic community my greatest debt is due to my supervisor, Janet Tollington. Since she first opened the treasures of the Hebrew Bible to me in 2009 she has been unfailing in nurturing me and my work. With typical generosity Janet has given ceaselessly of her time, her wisdom and her scholarship. This dissertation would not have been completed without her immense support and encouragement – and her eagle eye for the smallest detail.

My sincere thanks are also due to my MPhil supervisor, Nathan MacDonald, whose insightful comments fuelled my interest in Tamar, and to his colleagues Katharine Dell and James Aitken; the members of the Miqra Society/OT Graduate Seminar for their encouragement and advice, especially Sebastian Selvén, Olga Fabrikant-Burke, Simon McGuire, Srećko Koralija, Bruno Clifton, Ruth Norris and Suzie Millar; my former fellow students in the Cambridge Theological Federation, Anne Lewitt and Val Reid; Clemens Gresser and the staff of the Divinity Faculty library and Simon Sykes, Kate Arhel and the staff of Tyndale House, who have all been indefatigable in providing the resources I needed; Roger Mosey, Hugh Shilson-Thomas and my graduate tutor, David Smith, who welcomed me so warmly to Selwyn College; and all the scholars, whose works have been a source of inspiration, insight and joy.

For nearly eight years the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology has been my second home. It has been a rare privilege to be part of such a prophetic women-led community, who have

A special word of remembrance and gratitude for those who have gone "ar shlí na fírinne", on the Way of Truth to their eternal reward: Sr. Joseph Mary, St Aloysius School, and John Fogarty, University College Cork, who fostered my academic beginnings, and, above all, my beloved brother-in-law, Jim Furney, and parents, Helen and Liam Moloney.

I have been particularly strengthened by the loving encouragement (including the reunions thoughtfully arranged by my Waterford cousins to coincide with my visits home) of my extended family, the Furneys, Moloneys, O'Mahonys, Falveys and Flahives, and of my immediate family, Liam, Sabrina, James, Robert, Deanne, and Redempta. Redempta is a truly superb sister and a matriarch *par excellence* in her own right. Her love and her unfailing practical, financial, and prayerful support have sustained me through three theological degrees and eight years of study. This dissertation is dedicated to her with my love and thanks.

Abbreviations and Notes

Abbreviations

The abbreviations used throughout this dissertation are those cited in the second edition of

The SBL Handbook of Style.[1]

In the occasional instances where an abbreviation for a journal is not supplied in the

Handbook, the title is given in full in the footnotes.

For the purposes of standardisation, contrary to SBL practice, the titles of all journals and

series are listed in full in the bibliography.

List of Abbreviations (excluding journals and series)

ANET   *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by James B.

Pritchard. 4d3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969

ARM   Archives royales de Mari

CTA   *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit*

de 1929 à 1939. Edited by Andrée Herdner. Mission de Ras Shamra 10; Bibliothèque

Archéologique et Historique 79. Paris: Geuthner, 1963

GKC   *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A.E.

Cowley. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006.

HB   Hebrew Bible

KJV   King James Version

MAL   Middle Assyrian Law

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[1] Billie Jean Collins, Bob Buller, and John F. Kutsko, *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by

Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997

NJPS   *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional*

Hebrew Text

NRSV   New Revised Standard Version

RSV   Revised Standard Version

TDOT   *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and

Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 16 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

1974-2006.

TWOT   *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.* Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L.

Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation used is the NRSV.

2. The Hebrew text of Genesis 38 is a remarkably stable one with very few variants.

Discussion of any relevant ambiguities or variants will take place in the appropriate

chapters.

3. All biblical references are to the Book of Genesis unless otherwise indicated.

Introduction

Prologue

This dissertation has been seven years a-growing. The seed was sown in the summer of 2011, as I strolled above the harbour of Kinsale with a visiting fellow-student from Cambridge, discussing potential themes for my final year BTh special study. She recalled a friend's question, "Why are there so few women in the psalms?" That evening I read the entire psalter in one sitting and concluded this was a question eminently worth exploring. A year later the study was completed as "Finding the Feminine in the Hebrew Psalms."

That work led me to another male-dominated space for my MPhil thesis, when I traced "The Women at the City Gate." There I encountered Tamar for the first time, posing as a prostitute at the entrance to Enaim, בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם אֲשֶׁר עַל־דֶּרֶךְ תִּמְנָתָה, and I wondered what such a strange story was doing in the Bible. My interest was further piqued by a passing comment made by my MPhil supervisor concerning the theological relevance of Tamar's actions.

This dissertation sets out to answer three principal questions concerning Genesis 38 prompted by those experiences:

- What part does this unusual story play in the Bible and especially in the Book of Genesis?
- What does Genesis 38 tell us of the Hebrew understanding of God?
- In particular, what is Tamar's role in answering both these questions?

Tamar's Story through Scholars' Eyes

For many centuries both scholarly and popular reaction to Tamar's story has been one largely of neglect, indifference and even disdain.[1] This neglect has been compounded by its omission or diminution in Jewish and Christian liturgy. A passage in the Mishnah suggests that at one point the chapter was read in the synagogue but not translated into oral Aramaic, the daily language of the congregation at that period,[2] because of "the unseemly nature of its contents."[3] Many Christian lectionaries either omit the chapter altogether or assign it to be read on a weekday and it is generally considered inappropriate for homiletic use.[4] It is also passed over in the list of prescribed texts from Genesis to be studied for the University of Cambridge Elementary Hebrew examination[5] and from high school biblical curricula in Israel.[6] Interestingly there has been similar neglect of Tamar's story in art[7] and the relatively few representations most often depict her as a passive figure or *en déshabillé*.[8]

In the last quarter of the 20th century fresh interest in Tamar was triggered by three main factors: a new focus on narrative techniques in the Bible which gained momentum in 1981

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[1] Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 519. The disdain began early. In his 1st century CE rendition of Genesis (*Ant.* 1.27-2.200) Josephus omitted only two passages totally: Genesis 38 and 35:22.

[2] m. Meg. 4.10: "the story of Tamar is to be read and interpreted." This instruction may suggest that it is countermanding a prior instruction which had stipulated that the chapter be read in Hebrew but was not to be translated into Aramaic for the congregation.

[3] Esther M. Menn, "Sanctification of the (Divine) Name: *Targum Neofiti*'s 'Translation' of Genesis 38.25–26," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition,* ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 154; SSEJC 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 239.

[4] See H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 2:990: "Entirely unsuited to homiletical use, much as the devout Bible student may glean from the chapter"; Walter Russell Bowie, "The Book of Genesis: Text, Exegesis, and Exposition," *IDB* 1:757: "Certainly few people would choose this chapter as a basis for teaching or preaching"; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 357: "Some preachers may wish to give this chapter a wide berth in preaching a series on the Joseph narratives."

[5] www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/about-us/settexts/view

[6] Yairah Amit, "The Case of Judah and Tamar in the Contemporary Israeli Context: A Relevant Interpolation," in *Genesis: Texts @ Contexts*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Archie Chi-Chung Lee, and Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 213.

[7] See Reiner Haussherr, "Juda und Thamar," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 2:443; Yvonne Bleyerveld, *Hoe bedriechlijck dat die vrouwen zijn: Vrouwenlisten in de beeldende kunst in de Nederlanden circa 1350–1650* (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2000), 247-48.

[8] See, e.g., *Tamar, Belle-Fille de Juda* in Marc Chagall*, Dessins Pour La Bible*, new ed. (London: Prestel, 2011); Horace Vernet, *Judah and Tamar*, 1840, Wallace Collection, London.

with Robert Alter's work on Genesis 38 in *The Art of Biblical Narrative;*[9] the attention

generated by the new wave of feminist Hebrew scholars, such as Phyllis Trible, towards

hitherto ignored or neglected minor female characters;[10] and the use of the chapter as a

source for socio-economic studies.[11] Since then there has been a plethora of articles in journals

and edited volumes as well as references in numerous monographs which touch on the subject

of Tamar.

The key themes discussed include levirate marriage,[12] endogamy,[13] common and cult

prostitution,[14] and folklore motifs.[15] Tamar's links with deception[16] have been explored from

different angles: from seduction[17] and the "bedtrick"[18] to the concept of the trickster as both

cunning[19] and comedic.[20] Others have discussed Tamar's righteousness[21] and traced Tamar's

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[9] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

[10] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives,* OBT 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[11] See, e.g., Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Calum M. Carmichael, *Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).

[12] Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 1," *VT* 31 (1981): 138-44; Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 2," *VT* 31 (1981): 257-68; Dvora E. Weisberg, "The Widow of Our Discontent: Levirate Marriage in the Bible and Ancient Israel," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 403-29.

[13] Steven L. McKenzie, "Tamar and Her Biblical Interpreters," in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition: Festschrift für Matthias Köckert*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn and Henrik Pfeiffer, BZAW 400 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 197-208.

[14] Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119-39; Michael C. Astour, ''Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs,'' *JBL* 85 (1966): 185-96; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, and Qadištu* and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *HTR* 82 (1989): 245-65.

[15] Mordechai A. Friedman, ''Tamar, a Symbol of Life: The 'Killer Wife' Superstition in the Bible and Jewish Tradition," *ASJR* 15 (1990): 23-61.

[16] Johanna W.H. Bos, ''Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3,'' *Semeia* 42 (1988): 37-67.

[17] Rachel Adelman, "Seduction and Recognition in the Story of Judah and Tamar and the Book of Ruth," *Nashim* 23 (2012): 87-109.

[18] The motif of going to bed with someone mistaken for someone else has been examined in particular by Wendy Doniger. See Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Doniger, "Myths and Methods in the Dark," *JR* 76 (1996): 531-47.

[19] Chi Wai Chan, "The Ultimate Trickster in the Story of Tamar from a Feminist Perspective," *Feminist Theology* 24 (2015): 93-101; André Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar (Gn 38): Une approche narrative," *ScEs* 51 (1999): 265-83; Peter Bekins, "Tamar and Joseph in Genesis 38 and 39," *JSOT* 40 (2016): 375-97.

[20] Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Melissa Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 29-46.

[21] Johanna W.H. Bos, "An Eyeopener at the Gate: George Coats and Genesis 38," *LTQ* 27 (1992): 119-23; Casper J. Labuschagne, "The Story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38: Its Compositional Structure and Numerical Features," *Order* 501 (2008), np.

progress from victim to victor.[22] Still others have focused on literary critical analysis of the chapter,[23] its relationship with the Joseph narrative,[24] and its contribution to the Jacob story.[25] Sandra Collins summarises the range of perspectives on Tamar as follows: "characterizations of Tamar, the roadside seductress of Genesis 38, run the gamut from harlot to loyal widow to yearning womb to mother of righteousness to overlooked daughter and so on."[26]

Surprisingly only five full-length monographs on Genesis 38 have been published to date. The first was the 1992 publication in Hebrew by Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch.[27] As the sub-title makes clear, *Genesis 38 in the Bible, the Old Versions and the Ancient Jewish Literature,* their major focus is the collection and discussion of the early Jewish exegetical sources. Their work is completed by two chapters on the literary analysis of Genesis 38 and on the story of Judah and Tamar as reflected in post-biblical literature.

Eva Salm's exegetical study was published in 1996.[28] Drawing significantly on the methodology of Bernd Willmes's "extreme exegesis,"[29] Salm conducts an exhaustive analysis of the text both diachronically and synchronically, the latter at word, sentence and text level, and she presents the details of her analyses in nine tables. As the main title suggests (*Juda und Tamar*), she deals with both characters. She has a particular interest in the theological message of the story but she concentrates ultimately on the repentance of Judah which is triggered by Tamar's

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[22] Yairah Amit, "Tamar, from Victim to Mother of a Dynasty," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination,* ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 295-305; Marina H. Hofman, "Tamar as the Unsung Hero of Genesis 38" (MA thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 2007); Susan Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *HTR* 72 (1979): 143-49.

[23] Dohyung Kim, "The Structure of Genesis 38: A Thematic Reading," *VT* 62 (2012): 550-60; Clifford, "Genesis 38," 519-32; Margaret Parks Cowan, "Genesis 38: The Story of Judah and Tamar and Its Role in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1990).

[24] Jonathan Kruschwitz, "The Type-Scene Connection between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Story," *JSOT* 36 (2012): 383-410; Anthony J. Lambe, "Judah's Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return," *JSOT* 24 (1999): 53-68.

[25] Clifford, "Genesis 38," 519-32.

[26] Sandra Ladick Collins, *Weapons upon Her Body: The Female Heroic in the Hebrew Bible* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 9.

[27] Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *The Story of Judah and Tamar: Genesis 38 in the Bible, the Old Versions and the Ancient Jewish Literature,* Hebrew (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1992).

[28] Eva Salm, *Juda und Tamar: Eine exegetische Studie zu Gen 38,* FB 76 (Würzburg: Echter, 1996).

[29] Bernd Willmes, *Bibelauslegung - genau genommen: Syntaktische, semantische und pragmatische Dimensionen und Kategorien für die sprachliche Analyse hebräischer und griechischer Texte auf Wort- und Satzebene,* BN 5 (Munich: Görg, 1990).

involvement in the "'Heilsangebot' Gottes." In many instances I go beyond or differ from

Salm's conclusions, for example, her contention that levirate marriage is merely a motif in the

story.[30]

Esther Marie Menn's very fine 1997 study offers many insights into Tamar's situation and

character which will be drawn on frequently during this dissertation but her primary focus is an

exploration of how "new meanings emerge through encounters between ancient texts and

later communities."[31] Using Genesis 38 as a case study she examines in detail three early

Jewish interpretations of the text: the *Testament of Judah, Targum Neofiti* and *Genesis Rabba*

[*sic*].

As his title suggests, Walter Hilbrands' 2007 reworking of his dissertation focuses largely on the

later reception of Genesis 38: *Heilige oder Hure? Die Rezeptionsgeschichte von Juda und Tamar*

(Genesis 38) von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit.[32] After giving a chapter-long analysis of

various aspects of the text he surveys its reception from the Pseudepigrapha to Luther.

Esther Blachman's book, which is a revision of her 2003 dissertation, was published in 2013.[33]

Blachman's main interest is in how Jewish biblical commentators, from the Targumim to *Iturei*

Torah, interpreted Tamar, and how the resultant "transformation of her character reflects the

changing spiritual and social needs of Jewish communities." Although described in Blachman's

acknowledgements as a "revision," it is worth noting that the most recent of the publications

listed in her bibliography appeared in 2002.[34]

These and other works have provided an invaluable springboard for the current study but they

also act as a reminder that there is a clear need for a full-length work which focuses primarily

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[30] Salm, *Juda und Tamar*, 208, 150.

[31] Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1.

[32] Walter Hilbrands, *Heilige oder Hure? Die Rezeptionsgeschichte von Juda und Tamar (Genesis 38) von der Antike bis zur Reformationszeit*, CBET 48 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

[33] Esther Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar (Genesis 38) in the History of Jewish Interpretation*, CBET 71 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

[34] Blachman, *Transformation of Tamar*, xiii, 353-69.

on the character of Tamar and on the biblical text of Genesis 38, rather than on later Jewish and other interpretations.

To avoid repetition, other secondary scholarship will be discussed in the appropriate chapters. It must be stressed that the key conversation partner in this dissertation is the Hebrew text itself. Secondary texts will provide information, illumination and inspiration, but always at the service of the text.

Caveat

Certain theories and themes are deliberately excluded from this discussion, most notably purported links between Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel. Gary Rendsburg has proposed that Genesis 38 refers "more to David and his family than it does to Judah and his" and that its main purpose was to foreshadow events from David's life. According to Rendsburg the author of Genesis 38 matched characters from that story with personalities from David's circle as follows: Judah (יְהוּדָה) = David (דָּוִד); Hirah (חִירָה) = Hiram (חִירָם); the daughter of Shua (בַּת־שׁוּעַ) = Bathsheba (בַּת־שֶׁבַע); Er (עֵר) = deceased firstborn son of David and Bathsheba; Onan (אוֹנָן) = Amnon (אַמְנוֹן); Shelah (שֵׁלָה) = Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה) and Tamar (תָּמָר) = Tamar (תָּמָר).[35] Subsequently Craig Ho attempted to demonstrate that there were many connections between the stories of Judah and David[36] while Graeme Auld claimed that Genesis 38 is heavily dependent on 2 Samuel 13.[37] It suffices to note that if it were not for the coincidence of the name of Tamar it is doubtful if any such links would have been made between two fundamentally different

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[35] Gary A. Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis xxxviii," *VT* 36 (1986): 441.

[36] Craig Y.S. Ho, "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and David: A Study of Their Literary Links," *VT* 49 (1999): 515.

[37] Graeme Auld, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph," *SEÅ* 65 (2000): 105.
It should be noted that different motivations are proposed for the proposed links. Auld (103) claims the transposition of David-family themes to a Jacob-family "mirror the transitions, from royal Davidic motifs in the Psalms, to talk of the chosen Jacob and servant Israel in Isaiah 40-55." Ho (531) believes they were to prove David's Jewishness while Rendsburg (444) believes they were intended to mock David and his court.

stories.[38] Equally improbable is Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes' suggestion that Genesis 38 is a midrash on 2 Samuel 13 as "a rehabilitation of the Tamar who is condemned to the limit of patriarchy where women are completely powerless – (as victims of) rape."[39]

Mark Leuchter proposes that both narratives may draw from "an old myth regarding a woman of the same name who symbolized the principle of the land's numinous fertility in rural lore."[40] The proposal that the two narratives may be descended from an ancient shared myth is a plausible possibility.

Putting Tamar in her Place

The title of this dissertation is intentionally double-edged. Like so many biblical women, for example, Ruth and Hannah, Tamar fades rapidly from the narrative once she gives birth. It is easy to assume that she has been "put in her place," deliberately diminished, deflated and demeaned and relegated to oblivion. This tendency on the part of biblical narrators has been eloquently described by Esther Fuchs:

> "The report about a successful parturition usually precedes the last reference to the mother-figure in the nativity narrative. As soon as she has fulfilled her procreative role, the mother-figure is whisked off the stage. Though most mother-figures 'die' diegetically, by simply not being mentioned after the birth of their sons, some nativity

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[38] For further discussion see Paul R. Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," *VT* 52 (2002): 219-52. Noble dismisses the purported resemblances as "a disorderly hotch-poch [*sic*] of generally quite imprecise parallels" (227).
Absolom's daughter, Tamar (2 Samuel 14:27), who is named after David's daughter, can similarly be ignored. For her naming see Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 55; Amy Kalmanofsky, *Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 113.
[39] Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy: Between Rape and Seduction (2 Samuel 13 and Genesis 38)," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal, BLS 22 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 137.
[40] Mark Leuchter, "Genesis 38 in Social and Historical Perspective," *JBL* 132 (2013): 226. Related links may be prompted by the triple pledges Tamar wins from Judah. These may echo the triple insignia associated with certain deities in Ugaritic texts, e.g. 'Anat, Baal, and Tlš. See Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1949), 19n1, 41n1, 53n1.

narratives prefer mimetic deaths, whereby mother-figures are said to have died

shortly after the birth of their sons."[41]

The reality concerning Tamar, as will become apparent, is much more complex. Putting Tamar

in her rightful place involves three aspects:

bringing different *perspectives*

to *re-view* the text,

resulting in new *insights* into Tamar and the role of the whole chapter.[42]

Perspectives

The first perspective is that of the authors of Genesis 38 who consciously - and unconsciously -

shed light on Tamar's place. In the absence of consensus on the composition of the Pentateuch

I refrain from giving them any specific identity. As will become clear in chapter 1 I postulate

two main authors, who are responsible for Genesis 38:1-26 and Genesis 38:27-30 respectively.

Each brings a particular perspective to bear on Tamar's role.

As important as the visible viewpoints of the authors on Tamar are their "invisible (and often

unconscious) values and assumptions."[43] Cheryl Exum correctly suggests that "counterreadings

can be produced by using the clues most authors provide (even if unconsciously) to alternative

ways of reading the stories they narrate"[44] and Jacqueline Lapsley argues that in many ways

"the most interesting aspects of a text are those that are embedded without the conscious

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[41] Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*, JSOTSup 310 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 86.

[42] These three sight-related aspects are particularly relevant to a chapter which is permeated by images of sight, insight and recognition. See Talia Sutskover, "The Semantic Fields of Seeing and Oral Communication in the Joseph Narrative," *JNSL* 33 (2007): 33-50; Bos, "Eyeopener at the Gate," 119-23; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 2, 9-10; William K. Bechtold III, "Sight Elements in the Characterization of Judah (Gen. 37-50)": 1-21. https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/22444030/sight-elements-in-the-characterization-of-judah-gen-37-50-.

[43] Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated,* ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 2.

[44] J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. G.A. Yee, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 68.

knowledge of the author."[45] The identity of the authors is less important than the perspectives they bring to bear. When examined in detail a very different view of Tamar's place will emerge, as it becomes evident that within the superficially limited role they assign to Tamar lies the seeds of a very different depiction.[46]

The second perspective arises from the theological framework within which the whole Bible is set. Fuchs argues that "the biblical text reduces women to auxiliary roles, suppresses their voices and minimizes their national and religious significance."[47] These arguments are valid but they should not detract from the self-evident truth that the Hebrew Bible chronicles the relationship between God and the chosen people as understood, articulated, and transmitted over numerous generations. As such it is a profoundly theological work. Tamar's place must also be examined from a theological perspective to discover how she reflects and participates in that relationship.

The final perspective is mine. Influenced by feminist biblical interpretations I adopt the "remnant standpoint," described by Mary Ann Tolbert, as a "conscious effort to retrieve texts overlooked or distorted by patriarchal hermeneutics. . . . [It] focuses its attention on texts involving women characters and explores their functions without the patriarchal presumption of marginality."[48] Although 35 years have passed since Tolbert put forward this viewpoint in the seminal volume on "The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics," the task of retrieval, especially in regard to Tamar, is still incomplete. One of my tasks is to give expression to Tamar's voice, which is latent in the text; to make plain the reality that she is more than a ventriloquist's dummy who mouths her authors' conscious views but rather has a depth and significance which requires more than a superficial reading.

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[45] Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 10.

[46] See Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "Torah as Narrative and Narrative as Torah," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honour of Gene M. Tucker,* ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 21.

[47] Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 11.

[48] Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 28 (1983), 122.

Re-views

Re-viewing the text entails viewing it anew with fresh eyes and within fresh contexts from the viewpoint of the different perspectives. Several kinds of re-view will be employed.

It is almost axiomatic that the synchronic view of a text always takes precedence but an examination of Genesis 38 will suggest that this subtle and complex chapter needs both a synchronic and diachronic approach if a full understanding of the text is to be achieved. Either approach on its own is insufficient; it implies a sophisticated readership, both ancient and modern, who can hold the two aspects in tension simultaneously.

Further significant discoveries will be made when the text is viewed intertextually, that is, brought into comparison and conversation with other texts that shed light on the meaning of the chapter and on Tamar's role, texts such as other parts of Genesis, the book of Ruth and 1 Chronicles.[49] From the outset two forms of intertextuality must be distinguished: the first is restricted to text production; the second to text reception. Ellen van Wolde summarises the differences in the following useful table.[50]

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[49] David Carr uses the term "intratextual" to denote "interactions of various layers of Genesis with texts now standing *within* the same book." [Carr's emphasis]. See David Carr, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality - Joining Transmission History and Interpretation History in the Study of Genesis," in *Bibel und Midrasch: Zur Bedeutung der rabbinischen Exegese für die Bibelwissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Bodendorfer, Matthias Millard, and Bernhard Kagerer, FAT 22 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 97. In light of the multiplicity of texts – sources, documents, fragments, redactions – which form not only Genesis but the rest of the Bible as well, and given the fluidity of boundaries between certain texts, the distinction between "intertextual" and "intratextual" is unnecessary and may be unhelpful. Accordingly "intertextual" will be used, when required, in the spirit of the definition by Steve Moyise, who states that *intertextuality* "is best used as an 'umbrella' term for the complex interactions that exist between 'texts' (in the broadest sense)." See Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J.L North*, ed. Steve Moyise, JSNTSup 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 41.

[50] Ellen van Wolde, "Intertextuality: Ruth in Dialogue with Tamar," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and* Strategies, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 430.

Intertextuality: Text Production	Intertextuality: Text Reception
Writer	Reader
diachronic	synchronic
sources	functions
causality	analogy
indexicality	iconicity
compulsory relations	potential relations

Adele Berlin believes that intertextuality is in "the mind of the reader, not the writer"[51] but it will become apparent that this study proposes that both types are at work in Genesis 38. On the one hand the author of Genesis 38:1-26 deliberately makes connections between the text and other texts. This will be seen most clearly in the application of the concept of *mise-en-abyme* which creates a particular relationship between one text and another in the form of a "story within a story."[52] Here the writer relies on an educated listener/reader who has the opportunity to hear/read the text again, perhaps in a cultic or scribal setting, to identify the connections the author intends to make. The author knows that his contemporary readers/hearers have become increasingly adept in the art of hearing, remembering, repeating, reciting and reading the scriptures (Deut 6:7, 17:19; Neh 8:8).[53] After all the Hebrew word for the scriptures, מקרא, means reading, not writing. It is no coincidence that in the final chapter of Genesis, Joseph implicitly invites his brothers to re-read the events they have

[51] Adele Berlin, "Literary Exegesis of Biblical Narrative: Between Poetics and Hermeneutics," in *'Not in Heaven': Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative,* ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson Jr., ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 124.
[52] See David A. Bosworth, *The Story within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, CBQMS 45 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008).
[53] That is not to assume that the highest levels of intertextuality will be accessible to all biblical hearers and readers. Beth LaNeel Tanner (*The Book of Psalms through the Lens of Intertextuality*, StBibLit 26 [New York: Lang, 2001], 39n11) gives an appropriate warning: "The intended reader is not necessarily the entire reading public. The most sophisticated forms of intertextuality appear in texts whose full meaning can be grasped only by readers who possess the secret keys to decode them and can grasp its full meaning."

experienced: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (50:20).[54]

A second use of intertextuality which is employed in this study will go beyond a merely mechanical identification of demonstrable comparisons or connections between texts, such as "linguistic echoes or thematic resonances, parallel or contrary framing of characters, narrative parallels or inversions."[55] This more mechanical form of identification is evident, for example, in the comparisons made between Tamar's story and that of Lot's daughters (Gen 19:30-38). The two do bear certain similarities: they are all women, deprived of potential husbands, who bear children through deception with a man to whom they have an incestuous relationship.[56] These similarities, however, do little to illuminate the central questions being asked in this study. Instead a more creative form of intertextuality will be at work in which a reader is invited not just to compare two texts but to bring information from other texts to complement and interpret Genesis 38 itself.

Lastly, the text will be viewed anew by applying the insights offered by modern trauma theory to the experiences depicted in Genesis 38.

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[54] Jean-Pierre Sonnet, "En-tête et *da capo*: Lire et relire le récit bibliques," in *Le Lecteur: sixième colloque international du RRENAB, Université Catholique de Louvain, 24-26 mai 2012,* ed. Régis Burnet, Didier Luciani, and Geert Van Oyen, BETL 273 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 271.
A balance in the identification of intertexts must nonetheless be maintained. Biblical scholarship is hugely indebted to Julia Kristeva for her application of Bakhtinian literary theory, which has influenced significantly the development of the concept of biblical intertextuality, but I believe that her insight that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1986], 37) must be applied in moderation.
[55] Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, "Sex and the Singular Girl: Dinah, Tamar, and the Corrective Art of Biblical Narrative," *BTB* 47 (2017): 198.
[56] Doniger, *Bedtrick,* 255-64; Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters," 29-46; Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 111; Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145-46.

Insights: Outline of the Study

Each insight will be afforded its own chapter.

The first chapter deals with the genesis of Genesis 38 and outlines key propositions about its composition. I will argue that Genesis 38:1-26 was originally an independent story which was inserted into the Joseph narrative when that text was combined with the patriarchal history. Drawing on internal and external evidence it will become clear that a coda (38:27-30) was added at a later date.

The second chapter examines Genesis 38:1-26 whose primary theme is that of levirate marriage. This chapter investigates the story from Tamar's perspective, exploring what she is thinking and feeling as the events unfold.

The third chapter is devoted to the placement of Genesis 38:1-26 in the broader narrative and demonstrates how Genesis 38:1-26 acts as a *mise-en-abyme* of the Joseph Narrative. It suggests that consequently Tamar parallels Joseph as the main protagonists in their respective contexts. In a new application of the theory of *mise-en-abyme,* insights from the larger Joseph narrative will then be brought to bear on the shorter Genesis 38 text, resulting in new light being shed on our perception of Tamar.

The fourth chapter argues that the coda (Genesis 38:27-30) was added to support the claim that David and the Davidic line were descended from the patriarchs. This development has implications for our understanding of Tamar when she is viewed in her new role as a dynastic matriarch.

The fifth chapter explores the theological significance of Genesis 38, a chapter which is often dismissed as secular, and discusses Tamar's characterization as an agent of God.

Finally, I will draw some conclusions that put Tamar in her place.

Chapter 1

The Genesis of Genesis 38

As far back as the 3rd century CE the unusual nature of the Genesis 38 narrative was noted:

Genesis Rabbah wondered,

> What precedes this passage? *And the Midianites sold him into Egypt,*
>
> which is followed by *'and it came to pass at that time;'*[1]
>
> yet surely Scripture should have continued with *And Joseph was brought down to*
>
> *Egypt.*[2]

In 2007 Judy Fentress-Williams was equally bewildered: Chapter 37 "concludes with Jacob in mourning while Joseph is sold to Potiphar and an uncertain future. What will become of Joseph? Will he survive? Will his father ever discover the truth? It is with anticipation that the reader turns to the following chapter only to discover that the narrator has shifted gears and is now telling what appears to be a completely different story – one having to do with Joseph's brother Judah."[3] In this chapter I will examine briefly the evidence for considering Genesis 38 an interpolation and then trace the development of the text in three stages: the original story (vv. 1-26); its inclusion in the Joseph Narrative; and the composition of the coda (vv. 27-30).

Genesis 38 stands out from the surrounding Joseph Narrative in a number of ways. As Genesis Rabbah noted, it interrupts the continuity of the story. The focus switches abruptly from a set

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[1] The opening words of Gen 38:1.
[2] *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis II,* trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino, 1939), 788 (85.2).
[3] Judy Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location: Tamar in the Joseph Cycle," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 3 (2007): 20.1.

of brothers and "international interaction" [4] to the experience of a single man in Canaan; from the emphasis on Joseph, the main protagonist of the story, to his older brother Judah.[5] Moreover if the chapter were removed, its absence would pass unnoticed.[6]

The chronology of the chapter is hugely problematic. As far as the Joseph Narrative is concerned no time passes between the end of chapter 37 and the beginning of 39 and yet the intervening chapter spans three generations: Judah, his sons and grandsons. This seems particularly incongruous in light of the fact that the chronology of the rest of the Joseph Narrative is painstakingly established. In 37:2 it is explicitly stated that Joseph is "seventeen years old". By 41:46 "Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh." Seven years of plenty and two of famine then elapse before Joseph eventually reveals himself to his brothers (45:6). In total twenty-two years have intervened between the sale of Joseph and his reunion with his brothers. During those years Judah has gone from being a single man to being married with three sons, at least two of them of marriageable age, and has subsequently become a grandfather (and father), and is accompanied to Egypt by those children, Perez and Zerah (46:12). Umberto Cassuto performed valiant work to prove the events of chapter 38 could be squeezed into twenty-two years.[7] While Cassuto's scheme is theoretically possible, his endeavours were misplaced. It would have been wiser to accept the internal evidence offered by 37:36 and 39:1 that Genesis 38 was recognised, even in biblical times, to be an interpolation. In 37:36 "the Midianites had sold him [Joseph] in Egypt to Potiphar" and in 39:1 it is stated again, "Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar… bought him from the Ishmaelites."[8] This is a clear example of resumptive repetition, a common

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[4] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 212.

[5] The chapter is appropriately described in German as a "Fremdkörper", a foreign body. See Walter Dietrich, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 22.

[6] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 363.

[7] U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental* Studies, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), I: 39-40.

[8] The discrepancy between references to the Midianites and Ishmaelites is noted but is considered insignificant.

literary device,[9] whereby an editor, after an interpolation, "returns to the point of interruption and before continuing repeats part of what immediately preceded the interpolation."[10] It is an indication of a deliberate break and an implicit recognition by an ancient author or redactor that the intervening episode was an interpolation.[11]

At this point it is worth quoting in full Paul Noble's understanding of how the Bible was formed:

> "Diversity in the final form has been almost universally interpreted as evidence for a concomitant diversity of origin and development - family stories, travel itineries [sic], genealogies, etc., arising from a wide variety of socio-cultural settings, feeding into independent streams of oral tradition, progressively collected and ordered by various redactors (perhaps, at some stage, into written documents akin to the J, E, D, and P of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis) - yet generally being handled by tradents and redactors who sufficiently respected the traditional form of the material as to preserve its diversity, rather than imposing a more uniform style upon it."[12]

Noble highlights several aspects that are relevant to the composition of Genesis 38: diverse origins, an oral tradition, collection and redaction, and respect for the original core. John Emerton's remarks are equally relevant: "It cannot be taken for granted that a story in Genesis had a single meaning and purpose and retained them unchanged throughout its history first, probably, as an independent unit of oral tradition and then as part of a written document."[13] It will become evident that the purpose of Genesis 38 changed throughout the successive stages

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[9] The device was first identified by Harold M. Wiener, *The Composition of Judges ii 11 to I Kings ii 46* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929), 2-3. It was termed *Wiederaufnahme* by Curt Kuhl: "Die 'Wiederaufnahme' - ein literarkritisches Prinzip?," *ZAW* 64 (1952): 1-11.

[10] Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Evolution of the Pentateuchal Narratives in the Light of the Evolution of the *Gilgamesh Epic*," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism,* ed. Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 48.

[11] Yairah Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 280; John R. Huddlestun, "Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion: The Garment Motif in Genesis 37–39," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 53n18.

[12] Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 247.

[13] J.A. Emerton, "Judah and Tamar," *VT* 29 (1979): 403.

of its development. These statements by Noble and Emerton reflect my understanding of how Genesis 38 developed.

Stage 1: Original Story

If Genesis 38 is an interpolation, who composed the original story, and where, why and when? While some have argued that the story is contemporary with the Joseph Narrative into which it was inserted, most scholars believe that it had an older independent existence and at a subsequent date, as will be explained in Stage 2, it was inserted in the Joseph Narrative. It is my contention that this insertion consisted of verses 1 to 26 only.[14] As will become evident in Chapter 4, verses 27-30 form a later coda, composed by an author with a different style and purpose, and it did not form part of the original story. The subject matter, style and narrative thrust of the first 26 verses form a coherent whole. An account of Judah's marriage and his children's births leads to the description of the death of his elder sons and to the central theme of the importance of adhering to the levirate law. In a skilfully orchestrated narrative the initiative passes from Judah to Tamar when she takes considerable risks to ensure that she conceives a child in the name of her dead husband(s). Playing on images and themes of deception and concealment and insight and revelation the tables are turned on Judah, and Tamar successfully bears twins.[15] When it is read as an independent short story, it is centred on "a woman's clever solution to a serious problem", and "Tamar, not Judah, becomes the main character and hero."[16]

Emerton suggests a Canaanite origin for the independent story. He believes that a story concerned with the origins of the clans of Judah would be of interest and importance to the Canaanites with whom they were intermarried. Subsequently it passed to the people of Judah. Emerton weakens his claim by speculating that the Canaanites were willing to acknowledge

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[14] The extant text may have been adapted in minor ways when inserted in the Joseph narrative.

[15] It is probable that verses 27-30 replace a briefer statement concerning the birth of Tamar's children.

[16] Paul E. Koptak, "Reading Scripture with Kenneth Burke: Genesis 38," *Covenant Quarterly* 55 (1997): 87. See also Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 106.

Yahweh's existence. That may be true but it is not reflected in the text. He is correct when he suggests that the story tells of "the ancestors of clans of Judah and reflects a period when members of the tribe were living along-side Canaanites and intermarrying with them."[17]

David Carr and Leuchter favour a Judahite origin. Carr believes that much of Genesis 38 was once part of a group of traditions describing the patriarchs' settlement of the land.[18] Leuchter maintains that Genesis 38 reflects "a hinterland culture very much like that which characterized rural Judahites uprooted from their lands during Hezekiah's urbanization project of 705–701 B.C.E." Accordingly he suggests that Genesis 38 was composed by an author of rural Judahite stock, "in times well beyond the Hezekian era." Leuchter believes that it was either transmitted by a non-literate audience or was written by a scribe who engaged with that audience. In the event it is difficult to be absolute about the source of the original story but in practice this ambiguity does not affect the story's impact.[19]

Genesis 38, even in its final form, is eminently suitable for oral transmission. Drawing on the work of Frank H. Polak, Leuchter has argued convincingly that a simple syntactical style, closer to oral performance, results from a scribe working in a culture with very limited literacy. Much of Genesis 38 is characteristic of this simple style.[20] Leuchter also refers to the absence of written pledges as evidence of a pre-literate audience: Judah gives his cord and staff but not his written signature.[21] At what stage the story was first written down is impossible to determine. Redford believes that the redactor of the Joseph story found it in written form.[22] This may be corroborated by Polak's work, according to which Genesis 38 also reveals

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[17] Emerton, "Judah and Tamar," 411-12, 414.
[18] David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 250.
[19] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 223, 217.
[20] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 216.
[21] While this may reflect a non-literate society, the production of Judah's personal possessions is a far more telling gesture and is in keeping with the dramatic way in which the story is told.
[22] Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)*, VTSup 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 18n2.

evidence for an "intermediate" style, that is, "a form of expression generally oral in character but containing periodic flourishes of complex characteristics."[23]

Stage 2: Inclusion in the Joseph Narrative

I will now describe the text into which the story was inserted and consider briefly the questions of who inserted the passage and when they did so, and then I will examine the reasons for the insertion of the story.

The host text and its redactor

In the first instance the story was inserted into the Joseph Narrative. It is largely accepted that Genesis 37-50 began as a literary, rather than an oral, composition originally independent from the other patriarchal traditions.[24] It was then added to the stories of the early patriarchs. Some suggest this was accomplished by J (the Yahwist).[25] Other theories include that of Bill Arnold, who believes the Joseph Narrative was incorporated into the patriarchal texts by a redactor of the Holiness tradition from pre-exilic Israel[26] and that of Konrad Schmidt, following in the footsteps of Arndt Meinhold[27] and others, that the narrative is a "Diaspora novella" originating in the Persian period.[28]

It is important to note that scholars such as George Coats are probably incorrect when they propose that the Joseph Narrative is "the creative product of a single hand."[29] Genesis 38 is not the only insertion. While there are differing views about other passages there is broad

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[23] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 215.

[24] John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 317; Erhard Blum and Kristin Weingart, "The Joseph Story: Diaspora Novella or North-Israelite Narrative?," *ZAW* 129 (2017): 503, 510.

[25] George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature,* FOTL 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 266; John Van Seters, *The Yahwist: A Historian of Israelite Origins* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 126.

[26] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17-18.

[27] Arndt Meinhold, "Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Estherbuches: Diasporanovelle I," *ZAW* 87 (1975): 323.

[28] Konrad Schmid, "Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion*, ed. Jan Christian Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, BZAW 315 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 111.

[29] Coats, *Genesis,* 266.

agreement that the following sections were later additions: 37:2; 41:50-52; 46:8-27; 48; 49; 50:22-26.[30]

Many scholars associate J with the story of Judah and Tamar but the exact relationship with J is difficult to discern. For some J is the author of the story; for others he is the collector who integrated the story into the Joseph Narrative,[31] for yet others he is the redactor who edited the text in doing so. The language used to describe these activities can frequently be both tentative[32] and vague, for example, "to the literary activity of J one may possibly ascribe the insertion of the narrative of Gen. 38,"[33] "drawn from J,"[34] "linked with the J narrative,"[35] "an element of the J redaction." [36]

Three main grounds are proposed for associating J with the text: the use of יְהֹוָה in verses 7 and 10; the linguistic and thematic links between Genesis 38 and chapters 37 and 39,[37] which are two chapters usually attributed to J, and the inclusion in 38 of some of the thematic hallmarks of J. As outlined by Joel Baden these hallmarks include a reduced interest in priestly affairs, "a marked propensity" toward aetiology, a strong interest in family affairs, and a

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[30] Carr, *Reading the Fractures,* 271-2; Coats, *Genesis,* 264; Brian Peckham, *History and Prophecy: The Development of Late Judean Literary Traditions* (New York: Yale University Press, 1993)*,* 99nn55-56; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 461.

[31] See, e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 357: "the Yahwist … found the story in tradition."

[32] John Emerton's 1975 article, "Some Problems in Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 25 (1975): 338-61, offers an interesting case study. Although he has acknowledged the weaknesses in the various arguments linking the story to J, using words such as "inconclusive" and "questionable" (346) he nonetheless concludes, "Although the evidence considered above varies in strength, it establishes a strong cumulative case for the claim that Genesis xxxviii belongs to J" (347). It is unclear how a series of weak arguments can form "a strong cumulative case." By the following year his 1976 article,"An Examination of a Recent Structuralist Interpretation of Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 26 (1976): 79-98, had become slightly more nuanced: "most scholars believe that it belongs to J, *or to one of the strata of J*" (87). [My emphasis].

[33] Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions,* trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 233.

[34] W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 200.

[35] Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 73.`

[36] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs in Genesis," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 34.

[37] These will be outlined later.

tendency to represent the deity "working behind the scenes to affect the course of history, rather than directly interfering."[38]

Not all are in agreement about J. In light of the intrusive nature of the story Steven McKenzie suggests that Genesis 38 was inserted by a later author.[39] Brian Peckham makes a more specific identification: he believes the Deuteronomist added the story of Judah and Tamar.[40] Given the ambiguity attached to so many aspects of the authorship of Genesis 38, perhaps the only statement that can be made with confidence is that Jan Fokkelman is on shaky ground when he claims that the chapter "stands where it belongs and where it was put by a brilliant artist, right from the genesis of Genesis on." [41]

Judah the hero

There is considerable scholarly consensus that the story of Judah and Tamar was deliberately inserted in order to rehabilitate the character of Judah and to enhance his role in the story as befitted the eponymous founder of the pre-eminent tribe of the south,[42] "bearer of the line of the Abrahamic promise,"[43] and the ancestor of the Judaean monarchy and of David in particular.[44] Amit, for instance, proposes that this episode contributes to "the positive image enhancement of Judah."[45] John Van Seters explains the situation as follows: it was necessary to give Judah a role of leadership among his brothers "to reflect the obvious political reality of

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[38] Baden, *Composition of the Pentateuch,* 27-28.

[39] McKenzie, "Tamar and Her Biblical Interpreters," 201.

[40] Peckham, *History and Prophecy,* 42.

[41] Jan P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible,* ed. L.J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J.P. Fokkelman (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 181.

[42] Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 163.

[43] Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37-50* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 87.

[44] Auld, "Tamar between David, Judah and Joseph," 105. See also Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story or Jacob Story?," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen, VTSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 220-21.

[45] Amit, "Case of Judah and Tamar," 215.

the Judean monarchy and Judah's place in the national tradition."[46]

Chapter 37 had raised three important issues in relation to Judah: he was responsible for proposing that Joseph be sold into slavery (37:27); he had joined his brothers in convincing his broken-hearted father that Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal (37:33), and following the enforced disappearance of Joseph the reader assumes that Judah could be next in line to be Jacob's favourite. Judah's older brothers were not in the reckoning: Reuben had been disgraced because of his relationship with Jacob's concubine (35:22) while Simeon and Levi were condemned by Jacob for making him vulnerable to defeat by his enemies (34:30). In the absence of Jacob's favourite son, it was probable that Judah, Jacob's fourth son (29:35; 35:23), would take Joseph's place. Scholarly opinion therefore suggests that the unfavourable impression Judah may have created in chapter 37 must be redressed and chapter 38 was inserted to do so. Justification for focusing on Judah can be found in the introductory heading in Genesis 37:2: אֵלֶּה תֹּלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב. Chapters 37-50 are thus introduced as the family story of Jacob, not that of Joseph alone, despite the titles popularly given to the text,[47] and therefore any focus on Judah and on his role as future leader could be considered eminently reasonable.[48]

On examining Judah in chapter 38 some conclude that he is being presented in a favourable light. Yairah Amit goes so far as to applaud Judah's humanity and justice[49] while Bernhard Luther suggests that though he gets into a ridiculous situation vis-à-vis Tamar, "affection for

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[46] Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 317. Judah's future role is subtly indicated in other chapters, for instance, by a comparison between Genesis 37:7 where the brothers' sheaves bow down to that of Joseph and 49:8 where it is prophesied that it will be to Judah "your father's sons shall bow down."
[47] In defence of the traditional titles, following chapter 38 Joseph appears or is mentioned in all twelve chapters (39-50) while Judah features explicitly only in four (43, 44, 46 and 49).
[48] J. Coppens, "La bénédiction de Jacob: son cadre historique à la lumière des parallèles ougaritiques," in *Volume du Congrès: Strasbourg 1956,* ed. G.W. Anderson et al., VTSup 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 112; Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," *JBL* 96 (1977): 42-43; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 249.
[49] Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible,* trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 145.

Judah is linked with the laughter."[50] Several reasons are given for viewing Judah

sympathetically.[51] It is natural that after the death of his eldest sons Judah should fear for

Shelah's safety. He visits a prostitute only after his wife's death and only after the period of

mourning is over (v. 12). He is quick to acknowledge that he has been at fault and that Tamar

was justified in her actions (v. 26) and finally the birth of male twins is viewed as an indication

of God's approval.

The role of the narrator in protecting Judah's reputation has been particularly noted.[52] The

narrator, who is at pains to explain Judah's motives, orchestrates an interesting movement

from Judah's explanation of his motives in interior speech (v. 11) to Judah's public confession

of his wrong-doing (v. 26).[53] At all times the narrator stresses that Judah could not be aware of

Tamar's identity and consequently he is absolved of any insinuation of incest. Tamar had

deliberately removed her widow's weeds and concealed her face with a veil (vv. 14, 15, 19). In

case the point is lost the narrator makes it clear on two separate occasions that Judah had not

recognized her: "he thought her to be a prostitute" (v. 15) and "he did not know that she was

his daughter-in-law" (v. 16). Most important, once he knows that he is responsible for her

pregnancy, it is stressed "he did not lie with her again."

The narrator is also responsible for absolving Judah from another potential offence which

could damage his reputation, that of exogamy. In Genesis 24:3, for example, Abraham compels

his servant to swear "you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,"

but in Genesis 38:2 the reader is informed that "Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite

whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her" and there is no intimation of any

kind that Judah is at fault in marrying a Canaanite. There is no condemnation, either explicit or

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[50] Bernhard Luther, "The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas," in *Narrative and Novella in Samuel: Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906-1923,* ed. David M. Gunn, trans. David E. Orton, JSOTSup 116 (Sheffield: Almond, 1991), 114.

[51] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives,* 92, 145.

[52] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives,* 92, 163n28.

[53] James S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives: Volume II,* ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis and James S. Ackerman (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 104.

implicit, of his action. Similarly there is no implicit criticism because he arranged a marriage between his eldest son and a Canaanite woman.[54]

Accordingly chapter 38 seems to have placed Judah's reputation on a firm footing and has laid the foundation for further moments of grace evident later in the narrative, when Judah successfully pleads with Jacob to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt (43:3-10), subsequently appeals for Benjamin's release (44:18-34), reveals his empathy with his father's sufferings (44:31) and offers to remain in Egypt as Joseph's slave (44:33). The good reputation he acquires in chapter 38 seems enhanced still further in the prophetic passage of 49:8-12, where he is associated with images of majesty, שבט (sceptre), חקק (ruler's staff), יקהה (obedience) and compared to a regal animal, ארי (lion).[55]

Judah the villain

A closer scrutiny of Genesis 38 may reveal a less positive conclusion. Judah enters the chapter under a distinct cloud. Reuben had requested his brothers not to kill Joseph, urging them it appears on humanitarian grounds, "Shed no blood" (37:21-22). Judah jumps in to reinforce Reuben's message but with a very different motive. Admittedly he reminds them that Joseph is their "own flesh" but twice he refers to the prospect of financial gain: "What profit is it … let us

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[54] See pages 35-36 below for Tamar's Canaanite identity. Meir Sternberg ("Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading," *JBL* 111 [1992]: 486-87) argues that Judah's "Canaanite marriage starts a chain reaction … whereby everyone involved pays dearly along with the original and chief offender" but he is mistaken. In the latter part of Genesis exogamy is not presented as a problem. The marriages of only three of Jacob's sons are noted: both Judah (38:2) and Simeon (46:10) marry Canaanite women while Joseph's wife is Egyptian (41:45). They are "presented entirely without comment": Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 229n249. This lack of censure is also noted by Sarah Shectman ("Rachel, Leah, and the Composition of Genesis," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 210). Proposed links between the composition of Genesis 38 and the issue of exogamy can therefore be ignored, despite arguments such as that of Thomas Krüger: "Gen 38 seine vorliegende Gestalt im Zusammenhang der nachexilischen Diskussion über die Möglichkeit eines Konnubiums mit Nicht-Judäern bzw. Nicht-Juden erhalten hat" ("Genesis 38-Ein 'Lehrstück' alttestamentlicher Ethik," in *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Klaus Baltzer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Bartelmus von Rüdiger, Thomas Krüger, and Helmut Utzschneider, OBO 126 [Gottingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1993], 224).

[55] Lions can also have negative connotations. See Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,* OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

sell him" (37:26-27). בצע is the word Judah uses for profit, usually translated as "unjust gain,

extortion."[56] Habakkuk 2:9, for instance, qualifies the word with the adjective רע, "evil."

Almost without exception the 21 other uses of the word are negative.[57] This association with

extortion is the least of the guilt Judah is carrying with him to Canaan. Biblical law equates

selling a person into slavery with murder[58] and the death penalty applies: "Whoever kidnaps a

person … shall be put to death" (Exod 21:16) and "If someone is caught kidnapping another

Israelite, enslaving or selling the Israelite, then that kidnapper shall die" (Deut 24:7).[59] The

charge against Judah, who proposed and co-arranged the sale of Joseph (Gen 37: 27-28), is

very serious.

It is therefore necessary to re-examine Genesis 38 and assess the evidence that supports the

alternative view that Judah, far from being humane and just, is actually a villain,[60] a trickster

and a near-killer.[61] In verse 11 Judah, apparently seeing no possibility of guilt on his children's

part, jumps to the mistaken conclusion that Tamar is responsible for his sons' deaths. When he

sends Tamar to her father's house he deliberately implies to her that he will send for her when

Shelah grows up, although it is clear to the reader and eventually to Tamar herself (38:14) that

he is lying and has no intention of doing so. The premise of Tamar's encounter with him at the

entrance to Enaim is that Tamar can predict that if he sees a woman selling sex at the side of

the road, he will offer her his custom.[62] Clinton Moyer comments, "he is shown to be so lustful

that he is happy to divulge his symbols of authority rather than miss a chance to sleep with

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[56] David J.A. Clines, ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 53.
[57] Exod 18:21; Judg 5:19; 1 Sam 8:3; Job 22:3; Ps 30:9, 119:36; Prov 1:19, 15:27, 28:16; Isa 33:15; 56:11; 57:17; Jer 6:13; 8:10; 22:17; 51:13; Ezek 22:13, 27; 33:31; Mic 4:13; Mal 3:14.
[58] Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 99.
[59] Even though these passages may belong to later dates, "the operation of the postulate is visible in the very earliest laws": Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *The Jewish Expression,* ed. Judah Goldin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 25.
[60] George W. Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50," *JBL* 93 (1974): 17.
[61] Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories,* ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 95.
[62] Carol Smith, "The Story of Tamar: A Power-filled Challenge to the Structures of Power," in *Women in the Biblical Tradition,* ed. George J. Brooke (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992), 19.

Tamar" (38:18).[63] After the event he is more concerned about being considered a laughing-stock (38:23) than making good his pledge. As soon as he hears that Tamar is pregnant he hastily orders her summary execution without apparently making any attempt to hear her story (38:24) or to reach a considered judgment. The English translation of his sentence, "Bring her out, and let her be burned," softens a little the abruptness and barbarity of his two-word Hebrew command: הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשָּׂרֵף. His only saving grace is his admission of his wrong-doing when confronted with the evidence.

Links with adjacent chapters and other passages in the Book of Genesis

By now it is clear that focusing on the character and future role of Judah as the primary reason for the inclusion of the story is not as straightforward as may be claimed. A second possibility is that the story was inserted at this point because of the linguistic and thematic links between 38 and the surrounding chapters and with other parts of Genesis.

The sages quoted in Genesis Rabbah were among the earliest proponents of this theory. All their answers to the question, "Why were these two passages juxtaposed?" (Gen. Rab. 85:2) revealed the resemblances they had detected.[64] Rabbi Lazar thought it was in order to connect the one "descent" (38:1) with the other "descent"' (39:1); Rabbi Yohanan, to connect one 'recognition' statement (37:33) with another (38:25), while Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman said it was to associate the Tamar incident (38) with the incident of Potiphar's wife (39).[65] Jon Levenson believes that the answers the rabbis offer to their own question "expose continuities

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[63] Clinton J. Moyer, "Who Is the Prophet, and Who the Ass? Role-Reversing Interludes and the Unity of the Balaam Narrative (Numbers 22–24)," *JSOT* 37 (2012): 176. The juxtaposition of Judah's lack of sexual control with Joseph's self-restraint in resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39) is much noted, to the detriment of Judah: Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 91; Huddlestun, "Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion," 61; Joel S. Kaminsky, "Reclaiming a Theology of Election: Favoritism and the Joseph Story," *PRSt* 31 (2004): 141. Bosworth (*Story within a Story*, 44) rejects this contrast on the grounds that in the Old Testament sex with a prostitute is not considered wrong (Prov 6:26), while sex with another man's wife is (Deut 22:22). Bosworth's reliance on Proverbs 6:26 is untrustworthy as the Hebrew text of that verse is problematic.
[64] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection,* 158.
[65] Goldin, "Youngest Son," 28-29.

that lie deep beneath the incongruity of chapter 38 with both the incident that precedes it – the sale of Joseph – and that which follows – the episode in Potiphar's house."[66]

Several other links have been noted by later commentators. Joseph's robe was dipped in the blood of a goat שְׂעִיר עִזִּים (37:31) while Judah promised a kid גְּדִי־עִזִּים (38:17) as a fee for the prostitute.[67] Jacob conspicuously "refused to be comforted" וַיְמָאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם after the purported death of Joseph (37: 35) while a single verse (38:12) covers the death of Judah's wife, his period of mourning, וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוּדָה (lit. "Judah was comforted"), and his departure with Hirah to Timnah. Items of apparel also play a key role: Joseph's robe (37:31-33), Tamar's veil and widow's weeds (38:14, 19) and Joseph's garment retained by Potiphar's wife (39: 12-13, 15-16, 18). Judah speaks of concealing Joseph's blood, וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת־דָּמוֹ (37:26), while there are two references to Tamar covering or concealing her face: וַתְּכַס בַּצָּעִיף (38:14) and כִּסְּתָה פָנֶיהָ (38:15).

These linguistic links support the thematic connections between these chapters, such as deception, recognition and identity, and retribution. Judah and his brothers deceive Jacob (37:32) about Joseph's death, Judah deceives Tamar concerning the likelihood of marrying Shelah (38:11), and Tamar tricks Judah into believing that she is a prostitute (38:15) while Potiphar's wife deceives the members of her household (39:14) and her husband (39:17) about the nature of her encounter with Joseph. Evidence using personal items is used both to deceive (Joseph's robe in 37 and 39) and to proclaim the truth (Judah's signet, cord and staff in 38) and establish identity. In both 38 and 39 retribution for apparent sexual misdeeds is swift to follow. Tamar is condemned for her harlotry, זָנְתָה (38:24), and Joseph is alleged to have attempted to rape Potiphar's wife, בָּא אֵלַי לִשְׁכַּב עִמִּי (39:14). In both instances the guilty appear to get off scot-free while punishment is visited on the innocent parties: only at the last minute is Tamar saved from a death sentence (38:26) while Joseph is confined to prison (39:20).

Further correspondences can be observed in the later Joseph Narrative and other sections of

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[66] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection,* 160.
[67] Cf. the goat's meat dish presented by Jacob to Isaac (Gen 27:9-10, 19) and the goatskin disguise worn by Jacob to convince Isaac that it was Esau he was blessing (27:16, 22-23).

the Book of Genesis. Anthony Lambe maintains that themes and motifs, such as "identity, justice, responsibility, blessing, reconciliation, continuity and favouritism"[68] connect chapter 38 to the whole of the book of Genesis. Richard Clifford's list includes "exogamy, difficulty in begetting children (appearing elsewhere in the form of the barren wife), naming of the son, sons contending for firstborn status, the divine requirement that the father 'give up' his only son, mourning that incites the bereaved man to procreation, and meeting one's future wife at a spring."[69] There is considerable overlap with Joseph Blenkinsopp's version: "the overcoming of childlessness, the birth of twins under extraordinary circumstances, the subversion of primogeniture, and problematic relations with the Canaanite population." [70] It should be noted that some of these issues relate to the coda, not the original story, and that exogamy, as observed earlier, is not a problematic theme in Genesis 38. Other resemblances include Tamar's links to the patriarchal wife Rebekah (also a mother of combative male twins) [71] and to the other women who ensure the survival of the promised seed.[72] Similarly the theme of substitution in relation to cherished children is a common thread. A ram is substituted for Isaac, Abraham's beloved son (22:13). Judah offers to substitute for Benjamin (44:33), who in turn has become the substitute for the other beloved son of Jacob's old age, Joseph (37:3; 44:20). In complying with the terms of the levirate law in 38 Judah unwittingly substitutes for Shelah, who should have substituted for Onan, who in turn was the *de jure* but ultimately not the *de facto* substitute for Er.

One of the unusual linguistic and thematic links between Genesis 38 and the later chapters of the Joseph Narrative concerns the word עֵרָבוֹן, "pledge," derived from the root ערב.[73] In the

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[68] Lambe, "Judah's Development," 68.
[69] Clifford, "Genesis 38," 528.
[70] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible*, ABRL (London: SCM, 1992)*,* 108.
[71] Smith, "Story of Tamar," 22-23.
[72] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 209.
[73] The root ערב appears in only two other uncommon forms: the verb עָרַב which occurs 22 times of which two are in Genesis and the alternative noun form עֲרֻבָּה which occurs only in 1 Sam 17:18 and Prov 17:18.

form עֵרָבוֹן it occurs three times in Genesis 38, the only occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. Tamar demands a pledge from Judah to guarantee that he will send the kid he has promised her (38:17). Led astray by his desire, Judah asks the question Tamar must have hoped to hear: מָה הָעֵרָבוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶּן־לָךְ (38:18) and then supplies the signet, cord and staff she requested as the pledge. עֵרָבוֹן is mentioned for the last time when Judah sends Hirah to recover the pledge (38:20). The word is implied, although not explicitly repeated, when Tamar sends the items to identify the father of her child (38:25). Given the rarity of the root and the number of times it was repeated in Genesis 38, when Judah uses the verb form עָרַב in chapters 43 and 44 there is a strong probability that the listeners/readers would remember when they heard a similar word before. In 38:18 Judah had inadvertently become a pledge for Shelah, his youngest son, by fathering the child due to Tamar and thereby assuming the risk he feared that entailed (cf. 38:11). In 43:9 and 44:32 Judah consciously pledges himself as surety for Benjamin, his youngest brother. His commitment is underlined by the emphatic use of the personal pronoun: אָנֹכִי אֶעֶרְבֶנּוּ (43:9). A final link can be traced when it is observed that just as the pledge of the signet, cord, and staff revealed Judah's paternal identity, so Judah's action as a human pledge for his brother is the catalyst for the revelation of Joseph's identity (45:3).[74]

Despite the apparent variety and quantity of evidence for linguistic and thematic links a note of caution must be sounded. Before it can be definitively concluded that the story of Tamar and Judah was inserted at this point in the narrative because of those links, five general points must be considered.

First, the insertion of the story into the narrative is part of a creative process. Lindsay Wilson believes that the story was "purposefully and effectively woven into the final form of Genesis 37-50."[75] Amit expands on this concept by explaining that the editors took pains to connect it to its immediate surroundings "with fine ties, using repeated motifs and similar phrasing. That

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[74] Rachel Adelman, "Ethical Epiphany in the Story of Judah and Tamar," in *Recognition and Modes of Knowledge: Anagnorisis from Antiquity to Contemporary Theory,* ed. Teresa G. Russo (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2013), 65.
[75] Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise,* 79.

is why, though it is clearly a story that was imposed upon the text, it is neatly related to it."[76] In other words, some of the links described above may have been added deliberately to assist the integration process rather than being the original reason for its insertion.

Second, a corollary of this process is that the weaving and stitching of the text could work in both directions. Erhard Blum, for instance, believes that Genesis 37:32-33 has been modified to resemble 38:25-26.[77] Leuchter agrees that הַכֶּר־נָא may have been introduced as a redactional gloss inspired by the introduction of chapter 38 into the narrative and that the verse can be read perfectly well without it.[78] Another example is the motif of Joseph's robe (37:31) which may have been inspired by chapter 38 where Tamar's clothes are integral to the plot.[79]

Third, any links detected may be more apparent than real: the thematic commonalities may be attributed to a "common set of cultural tropes"[80] or as Michael Fishbane mentions, to a "shared stream of linguistic tradition."[81] Many of the themes already outlined, for example issues of family and fertility, are such common human themes, that they do not necessarily provide a foundation for claims of intentional links with other parts of the Joseph Narrative or the rest of Genesis.

Fourth, the quality of the links is more important than the quantity. John Huddlestun warns, for example, that the root ראה is found seven times in Genesis 37 but that it yields no particular exegetical significance.[82] In relation to הַכֶּר־נָא David Bosworth proposes that the two episodes have little in common: "Judah's recognition brings an end to Tamar's deception, but

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[76] Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 147.

[77] Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte,* WMANT 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 245.

[78] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 211. Conversely he also proposes that if 37:32 were the original usage the phrase could have been deliberately introduced into 38:25 to recall to readers' minds the family issues related to its first occurrence and thus divert attention from Judah's request for sex and Tamar's production of incriminating evidence.

[79] Redford, *Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 139n1.

[80] Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 212.

[81] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 288.

[82] Huddlestun, "Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion," 59n31.

Jacob's recognition is only the beginning of his sons' deception. These two deceptions have opposite moral significance. Tamar's deception is justified (38:26), but that of Jacob's sons is not."[83] Links must therefore be subject to rigorous testing.

Fifth, a consideration of the rabbis' deliberations in Genesis Rabbah provides the subject matter for a final valuable *caveat.* As Berlin explains, Midrash finds meaningful connections between pericopes which share the same words or phrases, but the connections are "*exegetical, not compositional*" [her emphasis]. To think otherwise is "to confuse hermeneutics with poetics."[84] The rabbis made exegetical connections between chapters 37 to 39 but this does not necessarily prove that the original writers or redactors consciously created those links. The same applies to the other correspondences that have been detected.

Taking all these factors into account it seems best to conclude that the story of Tamar and Judah was not primarily inserted into the Joseph Narrative because of the existence of thematic or linguistic links. Furthermore it becomes clear that there are, in fact, two questions to be answered, not just one: why was the story of Tamar and Judah preserved and why was it inserted at that particular point of the evolving text of Genesis.

Mise-en-abyme

A significant part of the solution to the problem may be found by reference to the device of *mise-en-abyme*, in which a part of a literary or artistic work reduplicates the whole. André Gide derived the term from the heraldic device that involves "setting in the escutcheon a smaller one '*en abyme*'."[85] Lucien Dällenbach developed Gide's theory and proposed that a literary *mise-en-abyme* could be prospective, retrospective, or retro-prospective. The last reveals events "before and after its point of insertion."[86] The most famous example is the play within the play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Scholars who have recognised Genesis 38 as an example of a

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[83] Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 46.
[84] Berlin, "Literary Exegesis of Biblical Narrative," 124, 125.
[85] André Gide, *Journals 1889-1949,* trans. Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 31.
[86] Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text,* trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), 60.

mise-en-abyme include Ai Nguyen Chi[87] and Bosworth[88] and I will use the latter's work to illustrate my argument.

Before evaluating Bosworth's theory it must be acknowledged that other scholars have also recognized the particular relationship between the story and the rest of the narrative, of the story within the story, a play within a play,[89] and terms such as "proleptic,"[90] "paradigm,"[91] and "microcosm" [92] have been used. Three main properties of the *mise-en-abyme* have been identified. First, the story has a role in shaping the readers' response to the main narrative and sensitising them to particular aspects. According to W. Lee Humphreys, "this digression informs our reading of the novella in which it is set."[93] Thus it offers readers an interpretative lens with which to look back on chapter 37 and also to employ as they read on through the rest of the text. Second, by placing the two stories side by side it reinforces some major aspects of the Joseph Narrative.[94] It underscores certain themes such as "deceit, different reactions to death, retribution, and acknowledged unfairness"[95] in the larger narrative. Third, it acts as a commentary on the main narrative. Alter sees narrative analogy as a particular feature of Hebrew narrative through which "one part of the text provides oblique commentary on another."[96] In this way it helps focus the principal ideas of the main narrative.[97] According to Donald Seybold, "This story within a story presents a paradox which mirrors those of the larger narrative and is essential to the final significance and pattern of the whole."[98]

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[87] Ai Nguyen Chi, "Le récit spéculaire de Genèse 38: Découverte du lecteur attentif," in *Le Lecteur: sixième colloque international du RRENAB, Université Catholique de Louvain, 24-26 mai* 2012, ed. Régis Burnet, Didier Luciani, and Geert Van Oyen. (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 407-18.
[88] Bosworth, *Story within a Story,* 37-69.
[89] Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location," 20.1.
[90] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 37.
[91] Clifford, "Genesis 38," 532.
[92] Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 87.
[93] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 37.
[94] Donald A. Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry in the Joseph Narrative," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives: Volume 1,* ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 61.
[95] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family,* 205.
[96] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed*.,* 22.
[97] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 369.
[98] Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry," 59.

A fundamental principle which differentiates Bosworth's theory from most of those mentioned above is that the parallels, for example in the parallel plots of the two narratives, are sufficiently extensive that Genesis 38 "represents the *totality*[99] needed in a *mise-en-abyme.* In other words, it duplicates salient aspects of the whole Story of Jacob's Line, not just miscellaneous parts." According to Bosworth "both stories begin with a *problem* that motivates a *crime.* The victim resorts to *deception*, the *recognition* of which leads to *confession* of the crime and *reconciliation.*"[100] The detail of Bosworth's arguments need to be scrutinized more closely before coming to a final conclusion about their value but a preliminary examination reveals three potentially fruitful aspects.

His emphasis on the totality and variety of the parallels encourages a more comprehensive approach to the text. It means that the focus on Judah and the links between Genesis 38 and other texts outlined above need not be rejected on the grounds that neither can bear the weight of being the primary reason for the inclusion of the text. Instead they can be incorporated as part of the web of parallels required for a *mise-en-abyme.*

Second, as Nathan's parable (2 Sam 12:1-7), the tale of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:1-20) and Jotham's parable of the trees (Judg 9:8-15) illustrate, the concept of a story within a story is a technique well embedded in Israelite storytelling and its significance is presumed to be readily understood by the reader. Moreover the *mise-en-abyme* approach possesses the considerable advantage that it draws on a technique familiar to the redactor and his audience, rather than imposing a hermeneutical tool conceived several millennia later.

Third and most important, the focus on Judah adopted by many scholars has distorted the emphasis of the original story. Any evaluation of the story has to recognise the central role of Tamar both in the events of the story and in its moral and social significance. Bosworth recognises that Joseph and Tamar are parallel characters. "Each is the victim of a crime

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[99] My emphasis.
[100] Bosworth, *Story within a Story,* 48. [Bosworth's emphasis].

perpetuated by family members. Each suffers alienation from the family and resorts to deception as a means of restoring their circumstances."[101] Far from being a minor character she now corresponds to the chief protagonist of the main narrative. As it is no longer necessary to focus disproportionately on Judah, Tamar can now assume her rightful role in the narrative within the larger context of the *mise-en-abyme.*

Links with the Patriarchal Narratives

If the primary purpose of the location of Genesis 38 is to look forward, it is not its only purpose. The redactor was also conscious that in placing the story so close to the end of the Jacob narrative, which comprises the concluding episodes of the patriarchal narratives, it also served the secondary purpose of strengthening the links with the earlier stories. In that way it acts as a Janus-like lynch pin drawing together the disparate strands of the patriarchal and the Joseph narratives (chapters 12-36 and 37-50), which are combined to form the main part of the book of Genesis.

Genesis 38 is not so dependent on the earlier stories, as the earlier stories are dependent on Genesis 38. In particular, as will become evident in later chapters, they are dependent on Tamar's role in illuminating and exemplifying some of the central themes of Genesis 12-36, including the role of women as mothers and matriarchs in fulfilling God's promises for the people of Israel.

Stage 3: Composition of the Coda

Verses 27-30 can be viewed in three different ways. They can be considered an integral part of the traditional story which was handed down to the redactor. Second, they could have been added by the redactor when he was inserting verses 1-26, either as his own composition or drawing on a separate fragment he found elsewhere. Lastly they could have been added at a

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[101] Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 1.

later date, again incorporating an existing fragment or a text specifically produced by a later redactor.

Such is the intricacy of this phase of the composition that it requires very detailed analysis. Chapter 4 is therefore devoted entirely to discussion of the topic. It will become evident that Genesis 38:27-30 is a later coda added to reinforce the claim outlined in 1 Chronicles 2 and Ruth 4 that David was a direct descendant of Perez, and of Judah and Tamar.

Dating of Genesis 38

Establishing the chronology of Genesis 38 is a complicated task, as it involves the dating of several steps. Moreover unanimity about the composition and dating of Genesis is far from being achieved despite the continuing complex discussions concerning Pentateuchal composition.[102] The range of proposed dates for Genesis 38, in whole or in part, is considerable. Emerton, for instance, suggests that the composition of J as a whole may be associated with the ninth-seventh centuries and admits that it is difficult to be more precise.[103] Walter Moberly acknowledges many scholars' former consensus of c.960-920 BCE as a date for J but confesses, "we do not know" when Genesis 12-50 was written.[104] Amit opts for the early Persian period for the whole of Genesis 38 but as some of her reasons relate to the contentious question concerning exogamy her view can be largely discounted.[105] These three options alone indicate a span of over 400 years. I will set forth a provisional dating for the

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[102] The scale of the task to achieve unanimity is evident from the stated aim of a symposium held in Zurich in 2010 "to foster dialogue between exponents of different approaches to the composition history of the Pentateuch." See Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, "Introduction," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), xiii. The language used to describe the event is more reminiscent of United Nations' negotiations between warring factions rather than a scholarly conference.
[103] J.A. Emerton, "The Date of the Yahwist," in *In search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 128.
[104] R.W.L. Moberly, "Genesis 12-50," in *Genesis and Exodus: With an Introduction by John Goldingay*, ed. John W. Rogerson, R.W.L. Moberly, and William Johnstone (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 138.
[105] Amit, "Narrative Analysis," 283.

various stages I have outlined above but stress that the relative chronology is more important than the absolute.[106]

It is impossible to state how long the story of Tamar and Judah circulated in oral form before it was recorded in writing. Shinan and Zakovitch, for example, describe the story as "an anti-Judahite tale, meant to mock the forefather of the tribe of Judah and the house of David."[107] Given its putative anti-Judahite flavour it is conceivable that the story was brought to Jerusalem, even in an early written form, some time after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians (722 BCE).

Genesis 38:1-26 was then re-written, possibly by J, before insertion in the Joseph narrative. This proposal would tally with the opinion of Jean-Louis Ska that "J should be considered the product of redactional work that elaborated on older narrative cycles," although he is agnostic on the question of whether J was composed before, during or after the Exile.[108]

There is considerable accord that in its present form the Joseph narrative is "a superb example of early prose fiction,"[109] a novella,[110] which is the product of a single hand.[111] It is an independent literary composition,[112] to which some minor additions were made in later redactions,[113] which may have had northern roots.[114] Dates for its composition can vary

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[106] See Reinhard G. Kratz, "The Pentateuch in Current Research: Consensus and Debate," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research,* ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 59.

[107] Shinan and Zakovitch, *Story of Judah and Tamar*, 220, quoted in Yairah Amit, "Endings - Especially Reversal Endings," *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 218.

[108] Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 144.

[109] John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible and the Deutero-Canonical Books,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 60.

[110] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 199.

[111] Coats, *Genesis,* 265; R.N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 59; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Redactional Structuring in the Joseph Story: Genesis 37-50," in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text,* ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 228.

[112] Thomas Römer, "The Narrative Books of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion,* ed. John Barton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 112; Van Seters, *Prologue to History,* 317; Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch,* 58.

[113] These may include: 37:2a; 41:45-46a, 50-52; 46:1-5a, 8-27; 48; 49; 50:22-26. See Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 316; Coats, *Genesis,* 264. Carr (*Reading the Fractures,* 271-72) suggests the following

between the reign of King Solomon[115] and the Persian era,[116] but the text is usually attributed to the Yahwist.[117]

I propose that the Yahwist inserted his re-written version of 38:1-26 into the Joseph Narrative at the same time as he combined the latter with the patriarchal stories to form the preponderance of the book of Genesis.[118] For J, aware of the disparity in style and content of the two main elements – the Joseph and the patriarchal narratives – 38:1-26 was the perfect lynchpin to combine the two.[119]

Although recent trends in the dating of the final form of Genesis tend towards the post-exilic,[120] an exilic date (586-539 BCE) is also possible. [121] This would allow a pre-exilic period for the various traditions to accumulate and then in the face of the theological, social, and political uncertainty of exile there is the impetus to recall God's promises of people and land, and God's abiding love and support even in the midst of difficulty and exile. The latter themes are outlined in chapters 37-50, including 38, where God's presence is made manifest through the actions of some of God's people, who are of both sexes and belonging to varying echelons of society.

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additions: 37:2; (41:46); 45:19-21; 46:5-7, 8-27; [47:5-6a, 7-10]; 47:11, 27b-28; 49:1a, 29-33; 50:12-13, 22-3, 26a.

[114] Van Seters, *Yahwist*, 126; Luther, "Novella," 118.

[115] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 29.

[116] Christoph Levin, "Righteousness in the Joseph Story: Joseph Resists Seduction (Genesis 39)," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research,* ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 224-25.

[117] Collins, *Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 60; Stahlberg, "Sex and the Singular Girl," 196.

[118] Von Rad (*Genesis,* 439) attributes the "incorporation of the Joseph story into the larger complex of the patriarchal stories" to the Yahwist.

[119] The actual location of the insertion was dictated by chronology. A story which ultimately depicts Judah as a grandfather could not precede Genesis 37 where he appears to be an unmarried young man who is still under the parental roof.

[120] Danna Nolan Fewell and R. Christopher Heard, "The Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 110: "An increasing number of scholars consider Genesis, at least in its final form, to be the product of the post-exilic community of Yehud (e.g., Whitelam 1989, 1991; Fewell 1996; Brett 2000; Heard 2001; Blenkinsopp 2004; Knoppers and Levinson, 2007; but cf. the contrary arguments in Schniedewind 2004, 165-194; 2013, 126-163)."

[121] See Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," 137.

The final step, the development of the coda, probably took place in the post-exilic period

around the time of the composition of Chronicles. Chronicles, which traced for the first time

David's genealogy in full back through the patriarchs to Adam, concludes with the restoration

after the Babylonian exile (2 Chron 36:22-23) so the work can be dated to the late Persian or

early Hellenistic period.[122] A *terminus ad quem* for the development of 38:27-30 may also be

provided by the coda of the book of Ruth which corroborates the Davidic genealogy.

Increasingly it is recognised that Ruth was written in the Persian or even the Hellenistic

period.[123] Since Ruth 4:18-22 (like Genesis 38:27-30) can rightly be considered a "virtual

appendix"[124] this raises the possibility of an even later date for the addition.[125] It is likely that

Ruth was influenced by Chronicles and Genesis 38 rather than the other way around.[126] Taking

both Chronicles and Ruth into consideration clearly supports a post-exilic date for the coda.[127]

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[122] Collins, *Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible,* 283; Sara Japhet, "Postexilic Historiography: How and Why?," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi, JSOTSup 306 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 171-72; Ehud Ben Zvi, "Late Historical Books and Rewritten History," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 309n3. Yigal Levin suggests the late fourth century BCE (Who Was the Chronicler's Audience? A Hint from His Genealogies," *JBL* 122 [2003]: 237, 244).

[123] Alice L. Laffey and Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), lxii; John Barton, "The Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion,* ed. John Barton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 4-5. The date of Ruth has been the subject of much debate and proposed dates can vary by as much as six centuries. Edward Campbell, for instance, associates the composition of Ruth with the Jehoshaphat reform "in the second quarter of the ninth century b.c.e." (*Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* [New York: Doubleday, 1975], 18).

[124] Collins, *Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 331.

[125] Peter B. Dirksen, *1 Chronicles,* trans. Anthony P. Runia, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 42-43.

[126] It seems unlikely that Ruth, despite its theological depth and narrative skill, would be accepted as the primary literary source for such a significant enhancement of David's genealogy. Genesis 38:27-30 was already in existence before Ruth 4:18-22 was added.

[127] It should be recorded that there is a dearth of any useful evidence from Qumran. Of the 23 Qumran texts containing portions of Genesis which are listed by Emmanuel Tov (*Revised Lists of the Texts from the Judaean Desert* [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 113-14) only one, the problematic 4Q364 (4QRP[b]), contains verses from Genesis 38. These verses are 14 -21 with v. 15 not represented at all and v. 17 represented by only one letter. In the event these verses follow the MT. See Harold Attridge et al., *Qumran Cave 4: VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1,* DJD 13 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 215-16; David L. Washburn, *A Catalog of Biblical Passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 16. All that can be said with confidence is that Genesis 38 was familiar to the Qumran community but 4Q364 cannot be used to throw any further light on the composition of Genesis 38. For revised views on 4QRP see Emanuel Tov, "From 4QReworked Pentateuch to 4QPentateuch (?)," in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Mladen Popović (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 73-92.

Conclusion

Genesis 38 is an extremely complex composition. The first 26 verses were originally an independent story focusing on Tamar, Judah and the levirate law, which circulated orally or in writing before the exile. Later, during the exile it was inserted into the Joseph Narrative where it serves as a *mise-en-abyme* and as a fulcrum uniting the two main narrative strands of Genesis. Finally, a post-exilic coda was added to support Davidic claims. To evaluate Tamar properly requires that her role in each of these three phases is discussed separately. Then and only then can she be put properly in her place.

Chapter 2

The Story from the Inside – Tamar: Levirate Widow

Genesis 38:1-26, as outlined in Chapter 1, was originally an independent story, whose primary theme was that of levirate marriage. As the story evolves it becomes clear that Tamar is the only character "thoroughly committed to the consummation of some sort of levirate union."[1] Putting Tamar in her place requires an exploration of the story from Tamar's perspective, considering what she is thinking and feeling as the events unfold. In doing so this chapter draws on the information supplied in the text and in other parts of the Bible, on our knowledge of ANE culture, and on our understanding of human nature, which in many respects has changed very little in the last three thousand years.[2]

Tamar's Marriage

The first reference to Tamar in Genesis 38 is in the context of her marriage: "Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar" (38:6). Nothing is revealed about her background and family but it is probable that, like her mother-in-law, she was a Canaanite (38:2).[3] The

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[1] Dvora E. Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 28.

[2] The approach adopted in this chapter must be distinguished from that espoused by scholars such as Ellen van Wolde (*Mr and Mrs Job*, trans. John Bowden [London: SCM, 1997]) and Athalya Brenner (*I Am…: Biblical Women Tell Their Own Stories* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005]). The former creates voices for Job's wife and Noah's wife when they write an imaginary letter to modern readers of van Wolde's book; the latter constructs a dozen fictionalised autobiographies of biblical women, individually and in clusters. This chapter suggests nothing about Tamar's actions and emotions that cannot be supported by reference to the text and to other biblical and ANE texts and no attempt will be made to put words in her mouth.

[3] Philo (*Virt.* 221) describes Tamar as a woman "from Palestinian Syria" (ἀπο της Παλαιστίνης Συρίας), that is, a Canaanite. For other commentators who agree she was a Canaanite, see Amit, "Tamar, from Victim to Mother of a Dynasty," 300; Richard Bauckham, "Tamar's Ancestry and Rahab's Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy," *NT* 37 (1995): 320; Philip F. Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Biblical Narrative with Its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 91; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 434; Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible,* ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 91;

references to Adullam[4] and Timnah[5] confirm a Canaanite location,[6] and Tamar's apparently

easy access to the road to Timnah (38:14) suggests that her parental home was in the locality.

One possible explanation for Judah's choice of Tamar as Er's bride is her family connections to

either his Canaanite wife or to his Canaanite associate, Hirah (38:1).

In any event the marriage was acceptable to her parents, who would have been pleased with

their future son-in-law's financial prospects. Judah came from a line of wealthy and influential

men. Er's grandfather, Jacob, for example, was conspicuously wealthy: "Thus the man grew

exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, and male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys"

(30:43). Judah is clearly a man of substance who may keep flocks in several locations: he

travels from his home to Timnah to oversee the sheep shearers he employs (38:12-13). The

personally engraved seal[7] which Tamar acquired from Judah is a luxury item and a mark of high

status (38:18).[8] Tamar's parents could look forward to a significant bride price.[9] In such

circumstances it is unlikely that Tamar was reluctant to accept Er, or if she had any

reservations, they were quickly dismissed.

Er's Death

When Er died unexpectedly and prematurely Tamar knew her courses of action were

significantly constrained, particularly as she had neither son[10] nor daughter.[11] In Israel there

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Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Chapman, 1977), 393; Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 506. Cf. Jub. 41.1 and T. Jud. 10.1, both of which identify her as Aramean.

[4] Charles Clermont-Ganneau, "The Site of the City of Adullam," *PEQ* 7 (1875): 168-77.

[5] George L. Kelm and Amihai Mazar, *Timnah: A Biblical City in the Sorek Valley* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 4.

[6] Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 115-16.

[7] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 368.

[8] William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 180, 226, 245.

[9] The attraction of a substantial bride price as an inducement to secure family consent to a match is implicit in Shechem's offer to Judah and his sons so that he might win Dinah (34:12).

[10] Judah instructs Onan to "raise up seed" וְהָקֵם זֶרַע (38:8) for his brother. This implies that Tamar and Er had no son. The related passage in Deuteronomy 25:5 has the word בֵּן, not זֶרַע. That בֵּן means a male child only is borne out in the verse which follows: "the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the

were no provisions enabling a widow to inherit the property of her dead husband.[12] According to Numbers 27:8-11, the order of inheritance is as follows: son, daughter,[13] brothers, father's brothers, nearest kinsman of his clan. The widow appears nowhere in the list. Tamar will therefore inherit nothing from Er and without an independent income Tamar risks joining the ranks of those widows and orphans who were at the mercy of charity.[14]

In theory on the death of her husband Tamar has four options: she can return to her parental home (Lev 22:13 and Ruth 1:8),[15] marry her *levir* (Deut 25:5-10), remarry (1 Sam 25:39-42; 2 Sam 11:27) or remain unmarried and try to support herself.[16] On closer examination the choices are not as numerous as they may appear. The situation of the priest's daughter may or may not be the norm. Ruth and Orpah were encouraged to go home because no *levir* was available. While undoubtedly there would be opportunities for some women to remarry, the marriage of Abigail and particularly that of Bathsheba to David are not the best examples of the possibilities available, especially when David had engineered the death of Bathsheba's husband so that he could marry her.

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name of the deceased brother" (Deut 25:6). הַבְּכוֹר refers only to the male first-born, cf. the feminine form בְּכִירָה used, for instance, of Lot's eldest daughter in Genesis 19:37. If the goal of the levirate law could be satisfied by a daughter, there would have been a specific reference in a legal text such as Deuteronomy (see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996], 231; S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy,* 3rd ed. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902], 282). Moreover a daughter would not continue a father's lineage beyond the first generation as her children would perpetuate her husband's line, not her father's. Onan is therefore expected to sire a son for his son-less brother.

[11] In the absence of any reference to Tamar taking a daughter with her to her father's house (38:11) it can be concluded that Tamar had not borne Er a daughter. The narrative thrust of the chapter implies the twins are Tamar's first children.

[12] Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 1," 138; Niditch, "Wronged Woman Righted," 145.

[13] The text indicates that this is a new legal provision beginning with the daughters of Zelophehad.

[14] These are reflected in the frequent condemnations of injustice towards widows and the provision of special measures to ensure their meagre subsistence. See, for example, Exod 22:21–23; Deut 14:29; 24:17; 26:12–13; 27:19; Isa 1:23; Ps 94:6; Job 24:3.

[15] The situation of another biblical widow may be relevant: David's sister, Zeruiah, first mentioned in 1 Samuel 26:6, may also have returned home on the death of her husband. His burial place is recorded in 2 Samuel 2:32. F.H. Cryer argues that the consistent use of the matronymic for her sons, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel (e.g. 2 Sam 2:18; 8:16; 16:9; 18:2) suggests that after the widowed Zeruiah returned to her father's house, her children assumed her name "in acknowledgement of their special status" ("David's Rise to Power and the Death of Abner: An Analysis of 1 Samuel XXVI 14-16 and Its Redaction-Critical Implications," *VT* 35 [1985]: 388n9).

[16] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 437.

In practice, as a childless widow who will inherit nothing from Er, Tamar has little option but to accept Onan as her *levir*. Tamar was well familiar with the application of the levirate law: she was reared in a region of the world where levirate marriage in different guises had been practised for a long time. Laws, marriage contracts and other documents, possibly dating from as far back as 17th century BCE,[17] record the custom. Evidence for levirate marriage has been found among the Assyrians,[18] Hittites,[19] and the citizens of Nuzi[20] and Ugarit.[21] Judah's instruction to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother" (38:8), is not an explanation of an unknown practice; rather Judah is reminding Onan of his duty to his dead brother and the narrator is setting the scene for what follows.[22]

Tamar's first reason for accepting a *levir*, therefore, was out of financial necessity. Her second reason was societal expectation, including the expectation of Judah and his wife and of her

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[17] Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 219.

[18] MAL §§ 30, 33 and 43 have been cited to support the concept of levirate law in neighbouring cultures. MAL §30 allows a father to give his son's widow to the son's brother who is betrothed but not yet married (Ziony Zevit, "Dating Ruth: Legal, Linguistic and Historical Observations," *ZAW* 117 [2005]: 579). MAL §33 deals with the issue of where a wife can live after the death of her husband (Benjamin Kilchör, "Levirate Marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Its Precursors in Leviticus and Numbers: A Test Case for the Relationship between P/H and D," *CBQ* 77 [2015]: 434). MAL §43 provides for a husband in the case of the deaths of both future father-in-law and betrothed (Paula S. Hiebert, "'Whence Shall Help Come to Me?': The Biblical Widow," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 128).

[19] HC 193 states, "If a man has a wife, and the man dies, his brother shall take his wife, then his father shall take her. If also his father dies, his brother shall take his wife (and also) the son of his brother shall (take her). (There shall be) no punishment" (Donald A. Leggett, *Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* [Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1974], 21).

[20] The text of Nuzi V 441 stipulates that if the bride's husband, Hanaya, dies, the bride will be given to his brother. See Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Status of Woman Reflected in the Nuzi Tablets," *ZA* 43 (1936): 163. According to Gordon ("Fratriarchy in the Old Testament," *JBL* 54 [1935]: 230) this is "levirate marriage in its crudest form."

[21] Admittedly the evidence from Ugarit is scanty. Ugarit 16144 is a curse by the childless King Arihalbu on "Whoever, after my death, takes/(in marriage) my wife Kubaba/daughter of/Takan (?), from/my brother" (Matitiahu Tsevat, "Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel," *JSS* 3 [1958]: 237). Tsevat believes that the document is based on the concept of levirate (Tsevat, 239-40), but John Gray (*The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament*, VTSup 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1957], 182) notes: "The fact that the marriage of a widow with any but her brother-in-law is here expressly forbidden by special deed suggests that even if levirate marriage was regular in Ugaritic society it was certainly not compulsory." Leggett (*Levirate and Goel Institutions,* 26) argues that the levirate did operate in some form in ancient Ugarit but the conclusion is based more "on inference than on direct statement."

[22] Similarly when Naomi (Ruth 1:11-12) refers to the impossibility of providing *levirs* for her Moabite daughters-in-law she does not need to explain.

own family that she would do so. Israelite society's understanding of the role of a woman is, that she is "either an unmarried virgin in her father's home or she is a faithful, child-producing wife in her husband's or husband's family's home."[23] If her husband has died, the next best option for Tamar is a levirate husband. An indefinite stay in her parents' home may not be a happy or easy alternative. Just as she accepted Judah's initial request for her hand for his eldest son, now Tamar acquiesces to accept his second son as her *levir*.

Perhaps Tamar's strongest motivation to accept a *levir* is her desire to bear a child.[24] She has four reasons for doing so: the birth of a child satisfies her maternal longings; secures her status in society; offers her long-term security; and satisfies her obligation to her dead husband. Her longing for a child Tamar keeps closest to her heart but perhaps it is reflected in the extraordinary measures she is prepared to take to achieve her goal of conceiving.

Second, it gives Tamar what Phyllis Bird describes as "a sense of womanly self-worth in bearing a child."[25] A childless woman counts for little in Israelite society. She may become a figure of scorn, disparagement and heartbreak, as the stories of Sarah (16:4-5), Hannah (1 Sam 1:6-7), and Rachel (30:1) illustrate so vividly. The psalmist's portrayal of a wife as "a fruitful vine" surrounded at table by her "olive shoots" of children (Ps 128:3) is not just an idealisation, but it is the perceived norm against which every Israelite woman is judged.

Third, it offers Tamar long-term support. If her husband dies she must rely for support on her children, who will inherit the property. In terms of long-term security in the social structure it was more important for a woman to become "her children's mother than her husband's wife."[26] Tamar must look to the future.

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[23] Niditch, "Wronged Woman Righted," 145.
[24] Child bearing as the *raison d'être* of levirate marriage is underlined by its irrelevance to post-menopausal women. See Carolyn S. Leeb, "The Widow: Homeless and Post-Menopausal," *BTB* 32 (2002): 161. It is noteworthy that for Naomi who is theoretically in the same situation as her daughters-in-law, a childless widow, "left without her two sons and her husband," (Ruth 1:5), there is no talk of finding a *levir*. As Naomi says, "I am too old to have a husband" (Ruth 1:12), in other words, too old to conceive.
[25] Bird, "Harlot as Heroine," 123.
[26] Niditch, "Wronged Woman Righted," 145.

Lastly, a levirate marriage satisfies her desire to perform her duty toward her dead husband.[27]

Did Tamar selflessly wish to ensure his name survived[28] or did she desire children from the same stock as her husband?[29] Was it love or loyalty or both? As depicted in 38.7 it is difficult to believe that Er was a deeply attractive figure, who merited Tamar's devotion, but the narrator supplies insufficient information to make any final judgement, although the reference to his evil character does not bode well.[30] A further motive – Tamar's desire to play her part in the fulfilment of God's promises to her husband's family – will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

Whatever the emotions and motivations behind Tamar's acceptance of Onan as her *levir* it is worth noting that the law as outlined in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 allows the *levir* to refuse, but it is assumed that the widow will and must agree.[31] Tamar has no power to opt out of her obligation to Er.[32] Even if she had that option, it is doubtful she would have been allowed to exercise it. Since Judah gives Onan no opportunity to refuse (38:8), it is inconceivable that he would allow Tamar to do so.

Onan the *Levir*

Once the die is cast, Tamar prepares for her new life with Onan. It is probable that the new relationship began a month after Er's death. This allowed for a maximum of a month's formal mourning for Er - both Moses and Aaron were mourned for 30 days (Deut 34:8; Num 20:29)[33] –

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[27] See Bird, "Harlot as Heroine," 123; Ai Nguyen Chi, "La voix narrative dans l'histoire de Joseph (Genèse 37-50)" (PhD diss., University of Laval, 2015), 131.

[28] Ellen van Wolde, "Texts in Dialogue with Texts: Intertextuality in the Ruth and Tamar Narratives," *BibInt* 5 (1997), 12; Calum M. Carmichael, *Law and Narrative in the Bible: The Evidence of the Deuteronomic Laws and the Decalogue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 299; O. Horn Prouser, "The Truth about Women and Lying," *JSOT* 19 (1994), 21.

[29] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 191.

[30] See page 152 below.

[31] As Randy L. Maddox points out, Tamar's legal and social status are dependent upon "a required relationship to a male—either father, husband, or son" ("'Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't': Tamar - A Feminist Foremother Genesis 38: 6-26," *Daughters of Sarah* 13 [1987]: 15).

[32] Dvora E. Weisberg, "The Babylonian Talmud's Treatment of Levirate Marriage," *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* 3 (2000): 59.

[33] Cf. Jacob was mourned for seven days (50:10).

and a month to discover if Tamar was already pregnant by Er.[34] Then they had to face the challenge of the levirate law which "calls on two individuals, the brother and widow of the deceased, to contemplate a transformed relationship, to shift from their roles as brother-in-law and sister-in-law to husband and wife."[35] For some levirate widows, even today, the *levir* may prove a kinder and more congenial partner than the first,[36] but Tamar's worst fears were soon to be confirmed. Tamar was not present at the conversation between Onan and his father but it is unlikely that the man, who was determined not to give "offspring to his brother" (38:9) and who thought only of his own line[37] and his own financial gain, would not have exhibited some of these selfish and self-centred traits beforehand. According to Numbers 27:9, Er's estate, if he has no heir, will pass next to his brothers. What is more, under the terms of the right of the firstborn Onan is due "a double portion" (Deuteronomy 21:17).[38] When Judah dies, if Er has no son (natural or surrogate), Onan will receive two-thirds of the estate and Shelah, one-third. If Onan fathers a son for Er, Er's son will inherit half and Onan and Shelah will receive a quarter each. The considerable difference between 67% of the estate and 25% offers a powerful motive to refuse. There is also a possibility that the son born of the union would also inherit a share of Onan's own personal estate. Effectively, as *levir* Onan is disinheriting himself to a significant degree.[39] Tamar was not therefore surprised to discover that he was a reluctant *levir* but in her wildest dreams she had never suspected that Onan would use *coitus interruptus* to evade his levirate responsibilities (38:9).

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[34] This estimate is based on Deuteronomy 21:12-13 where a captor waited for a month before having sex with a female captive: "she …shall remain in your house for a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife." Some later rabbinic texts suggest a waiting period of three months to determine a prior pregnancy, e.g. *t. Yebamot* 6:8. See Pearl Elman, "Deuteronomy 21:10-14: The Beautiful Captive Woman," *Woman in Judaism: A Multi-disciplinary e-Journal* 1 (1997): np.

[35] Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family,* xx.

[36] Conversation with Aloys Otieno Ojore, author of "A New Model of Pastoral Care: Resources from Luo Widows in Kisumu Archdiocese" (PrD diss., Anglia Ruskin University, 2017).

[37] If Onan and Tamar had a son, Onan would be merely the uncle, his son would be acknowledged as Er's son and heir, not his.

[38] This may also be implied in 2 Kgs 2:9. I am assuming the double portion goes to the eldest surviving son, not just to the first-born.

[39] Davies proposes ("Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 2," 259) that, as administrator of his dead brother's estate until Er's son would inherit, Onan could exploit the land to his advantage and enjoy its produce; therefore he need not necessarily incur a financial loss. Clearly in Onan's eyes this would be a poor substitute for a considerably larger inheritance.

Tamar is immediately caught in a cleft stick. Any hope that his behaviour was an initial

aberration is rapidly dispelled when Onan persistently rejects the opportunity to make Tamar

pregnant (38:9).[40] Her choices are limited. Any appeals to Onan clearly fell on deaf ears.

Moreover there is a possibility that she feared a violent reprisal from him, if she persisted.[41]

Her main option is to invoke the custom outlined in Deuteronomy 25:7: "But if the man has no

desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the

gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will

not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.'"

Tamar has two major difficulties with that solution. Ostensibly as far as Judah and the wider

community are concerned Onan is performing the duty of a husband's brother to her.[42] When

viewed in parallel the similarity of the phrases underlines the fact that Onan appears to be

following his father's command precisely:

(38:8) בֹּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיךָ

(38:9) אִם־בָּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיו

As instructed, Onan is "going in" to his brother's wife. The widow's complaint in Deuteronomy

implies that the husband's brother has come nowhere near her. There is an inherent dilemma

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[40] The consecutive perfect after the conditional particle אִם is used in a frequentative sense: GKC §159o. This is also reflected in the LXX: ὅταν εἰσήρχετο πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐξέχεεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν. The temporal conditional clause depicts "a continual violation of duty": Janice Pearl Ewurama De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an: A Cultural-Narrative Reading of the Hebrew Bible Barrenness Narratives,* BibInt 162 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 244n8. See also John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SCS 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 634.

[41] Judah's blood ran in Onan's veins. His father could contemplate with equanimity the prospect of killing his own brother (37:20) and he proposed the plan that they should sell rather than kill Joseph, not only to avoid the danger of blood guilt (von Rad, *Genesis*, 354) but, like Onan after him, in the interests of financial gain (37:26). See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 355. Judah's appeal to his brothers to agree to the plan on the grounds that "he is our brother, our own flesh" (37:27) should be read, I would argue, not as evidence of a tender heart but as a shrewd move to win his brothers' acquiescence to his greedy scheme.

[42] André Wénin notes how both Judah and Onan pretend to respect the law while secretly ignoring it because it is against their interests. Both father and son deny Tamar the opportunity to have children with complete disregard for her legitimate desires and rights. See "Personnages humains et anthropologie dans le récit bibliques," in *Analyse narrative et Bible: Deuxième colloque international du RRENAB, Louvain-la-Neuve, avril 2004,* ed. Camille Focant and André Wénin, BETL 191 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 61.

in the word יבם. The purpose of the practice is clearly spelled out: "perpetuate his brother's

name in Israel" (Deut 25:7), "raise up offspring for your brother" (38:8), but inevitably there

were some instances when a pregnancy did not ensue. Theoretically Onan could be seen not

to be at fault: an absence of pregnancy was not evidence that the *levir* was neglecting his duty.

Tamar's only recourse is to reveal the full truth to the elders at the gate using the

Deuteronomic ritual, described in rabbinic literature as the *halitza* ceremony. This creates two

further difficulties for her. First, it will be Onan's word against Tamar's. She would assume that

the elders at the gate, all men, will be more inclined to believe a man's word, particularly the

son of a man who has become influential in the community and who has carefully safeguarded

his own reputation.[43] Second, Tamar faces the dilemma of revealing such intimate details in

public to a male audience. She has been reared in a culture, far from the erotic frankness of

the author of the Song of Songs, where euphemisms for genitals and sexual acts are the

norm.[44] When a bridegroom slanders his bride, it is her parents, not the bride, who produce

the material evidence and it is her father, not the bride, who discusses the evidence with the

elders of the town (Deut 22:16-17). Onan rightly assumes that Tamar will not reveal the details

of their encounters either to Judah or to the elders. With the odds stacked against her Tamar

has no option but to continue bearing in silence Onan's mistreatment, an ordeal which ends

only when the LORD strikes him down (38:10).

Shelah

Tamar's hopes now depend on Er's surviving brother, Shelah. These are quickly dashed when

Judah tells her directly: "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"

(38:11). Tamar cannot compel Judah to arrange her marriage with Shelah. From contact with

Shelah since her marriage to Er, Tamar does realise that Shelah may be too young to carry out

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[43] See 38:23.

[44] John H. Elliott, "Deuteronomy – Shameful Encroachment on Shameful Parts: Deuteronomy 25:11-12 and Biblical Euphemism," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context,* ed. Philip F. Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 167-69; Teresa J. Hornsby, *Sex Texts from the Bible: Selections Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2007), xxviii-xxix.

his role; otherwise she could have challenged Judah's decision. It is certainly too soon for her

to bring a formal complaint against him to the elders in the gate,[45] although in this instance it

would be a more straightforward procedure than with Onan. How long she will have to wait

for Shelah to attain puberty is uncertain.[46]

She accepts the ultimatum and returns meekly to her father's house, awaiting the call to

return. The levirate widow is in a unique legal position; "she is not free to remarry as she

chooses, but must wait for her husband's brother to marry her or release her."[47] Tamar's

widow's clothes, אלמנות, symbolize the "permanently diminished existence and status" to

which she is now consigned (38:14, 19).[48]

Judah

Reluctantly Tamar returns to her father's house to await the moment when "Shelah grows up"

(38:11). Time passes. Both the Hebrew וַיִּרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים and the Greek ἐπληθύνθησαν δὲ αἱ ἡμέραι

emphasise that "the days have multiplied". An appreciable amount of time elapses as the very

length of the Greek phrase underlines.[49] Gradually Tamar began to realise that "Shelah was

grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage" (38:14).[50] Her own suspicions may

have already been confirmed by reports from the same informant, who later revealed Judah's

whereabouts (38:13).[51] Now she dismisses from her mind Shelah as a possible *levir*: since

reaching maturity he has signally failed to search her out to fulfil his duty to his dead

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[45] James Black, "Ruth in the Dark: Folktale, Law and Creative Ambiguity in the Old Testament," *Journal of Literature & Theology* 5 (1991): 24.

[46] It is not clear whether the Israelites applied the same norms that are reflected in Assyria where MAL §43 implies (*ANET*, 184) that a woman can be given to a son "who is at least ten years old". It is also unclear whether this is simply the age at which a marriage contract could be finalized, rather than when the union can be consummated.

[47] Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family*, xxiii.

[48] Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors*, 96.

[49] There is no agreement as to how long Tamar waits. Wenham (*Genesis 16-50*, 367) suggests "perhaps a year".

[50] The narrator does not reveal this information until she is sitting at the gate but the realisation must have occurred much earlier.

[51] Esler (*Sex, Wives, and Warriors,* 98n64) suggests that Tamar was informed of the news of Judah's journey to Timnah by the gossip characteristic of Middle Eastern villages. See also Philip F. Esler, "'All That You Have Done … Has Been Fully Told to Me': The Power of Gossip and the Story of Ruth," *JBL* 137 (2018): 645-66.

brothers.[52] She strongly suspects that Judah will actively prevent her from having access to

Shelah, as he has done during the previous months or years.

Her anger, fanned during the months when she brooded while she languished in her father's

house, now erupts and fuels a flurry of decisive actions (38:14), after she hears that Judah will

be in the locality. Her desire for a child is as strong, or perhaps even stronger, than ever,

intensified by the long wait in the unconducive surroundings of her father's house. Each day

she remains there she is reminded of the position that should be hers in her husband's family.

If she is to preserve her husband's lineage, Judah is now her only hope.

Tamar knows Judah is an unconventional choice. Israelite custom limited the pool of potential

levirs to the brothers of the deceased (38:8, 11; Deut 25:5).[53] Her Canaanite background allows

her a little leeway in drawing on customs in other cultures where in certain circumstances a

father-in-law could act as *levir*.[54] Tamar's deliberate seduction of Judah implies that she

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[52] Even if Shelah did search her out, Tamar may have feared that he would adopt Onan's methods to avoid fathering a child. This may be corroborated by Stahlberg's observation ("Sex and the Singular Girl," 198): "The narrative might also provide an earlier hint that Shelah will not provide the necessary seed for Tamar: whereas Bat-Shua is described as having conceived, borne and named both Er and Onan, she merely bears and names Shelah. Judah's third son is never associated with conception – not even his own."
1 Chronicles 4.21-22 record Shelah's sons as follows: "The sons of Shelah son of Judah: Er father of Lecah, Laadah father of Mareshah, and the families of the guild of linen workers at Beth-ashbea; and Jokim, and the men of Cozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who married into Moab but returned to Lehem (now the records are ancient)." No further details are supplied, so it is impossible to do more than speculate whether the name of his eldest son is a belated recognition of the duty he failed to fulfil. Numbers 26.20 records Shelah as ancestor of "the clan of the Shelanites" but lists no individual names. Cf. Genesis 46:12 where sons are named for Perez but none for Shelah. This may reflect a different tradition in which Shelah was childless.
[53] The belief that a *levir* could be drawn from a wider circle of male relatives stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of the Book of Ruth, which is a story of redemption whose elements are outlined in Leviticus 25:26, 47-49; Jeremiah 32:7; Numbers 5:8. Adele Berlin explains ("Legal Fiction: Levirate *cum* Land Redemption in Ruth," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 1 [2010]: 10) that "land redemption occurs not due to the death of the owner or the lack of an heir, but due to economic distress." Boaz marries Ruth not out of obligation as her *levir* but out of the esteem he holds for "a worthy woman" (Ruth 3:11). Confusion may have arisen, as Peter Lau identifies, because "the principle undergirding both institutions is the same: redemption restores to the family the property that is lost (or is at threat of being lost) by alienation; the levirate institution restores a family to its property from which it is separated by extinction of the male line" (*Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach*, BZAW 416 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010], 70).
[54] MAL §33: "If she has no son, her father-in-law shall marry her to the son of his choice; or if he wishes she may be given in marriage to her father-in-law" (*ANET,* 182); Hittite Law §193: "If a man has a wife, and the man dies, his brother shall take his widow as wife. (If the brother dies,) his father shall take

believes Judah could act as *levir*, but the circumstances in which she does so indicates that she knows he would refuse if he were requested openly. In her eyes "a levirate union with a kinsman other than a brother is preferable to no levirate union."[55] She also holds Judah responsible for withholding Shelah from her and therefore it is legitimate for her to expect him to make good his transgression by acting as Shelah's proxy or surrogate to remedy the damage he has done her.[56]

At this point Tamar's main aim is to conceive a child who will be acknowledged as being of Er's line. She therefore quickly sets her plan in motion, using her knowledge of the promiscuous behaviour associated with agricultural festivals and activities (1 Samuel 25:8, 18, 36; 2 Samuel 13:23, 27-28; Hos 4:13-14; 9:1-2), the needs of a recently-widowed Judah (38:12), and the possessions he usually carried which could confirm his identity. Gerhard von Rad admires Tamar's "keen presence of mind"[57] in acquiring the pledged items but his phrase suggests it was an opportunistic act taken on the spur of the moment when she was with Judah. Tamar knowingly placed herself in enormous danger. If her gamble paid off she knew she needed cast iron evidence of the paternity of her child. Tamar's "keen presence of mind" was evident in planning beforehand what she needed to do, although she also knew that the method she would use to acquire that evidence could only be contrived as the situation actually unfolded.

Tamar's choice of possible items to prove Judah's identity was very limited. The objects needed to be accessible, in that Judah would be carrying the items on his person or with him, portable, and utterly distinctive, so that Judah could not disown them as his, or claim they belonged to one of his brothers or another male relative or associate. Her decisions are based

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her." Note that in both instances the brother of the dead man has the prior duty. There is no evidence that the option of marriage to a father-in-law as outlined above ever applied in Israel. (Translation of Hittite Law by Harry Angier Hoffner Jr., *The Laws of the Hittites: A Critical Edition,* DMOA 23 [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 152).

[55] Weisberg, "Widow of Our Discontent," 415. In the same article Weisberg also comments, "Judah's role as surrogate for his deceased son Er is hardly portrayed by Genesis 38 as 'normative'" (415-16).

[56] It is doubtful that Tamar would have recognised the principle of "vicarious strict liability" as outlined in Zevit, "Dating Ruth," 577, but she would have recognized the fact that Judah was responsible for denying Shelah to her and therefore was also responsible for making good his transgression.

[57] von Rad, *Genesis*, 360.

on their suitability for the purposes of personal identification and not for their intrinsic value.[58]

Tamar wisely opts for Judah's seal[59] which was both small[60] and distinctively his[61] and she

copper fastened her plan by asking for his staff as well.[62] This combination of personal

belongings would be sufficient to confirm the identity of her child's father. She may also have

been aware of the practice by which individuals are identified by the enumeration of triple

insignia and therefore asked for three possessions.[63] As soon as Judah hands over the

requested items, she consents.[64]

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[58] E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 298; von Rad, *Genesis*, 360.

[59] It is possible that חוֹתָם (38:18) was a cylinder seal, not a signet seal. Each time the cord, פְּתִיל, is mentioned immediately after the seal, as if it formed one unit (38:18, 25), unlike Jeremiah 22:24 when there is no reference to a cord but there is an explicit reference to the signet seal being on the LORD's right hand. Alternatively the חוֹתָם may be an example of a pendant stamp seal with a loop-handle which the owner wore on a cord around the neck. See Marjo C.A. Korpel, "Seals of Jezebel and Other Women in Authority," *Journal for Semitics* 15 (2006): 356.

[60] Seals can vary in size but even the more remarkable are small and easily carried. The oval impression of King Hezekiah's seal is 9.7 X 8.6 mm (see note 61).

[61] A cylinder seal enabled the production of a long rectangular image which facilitated an elaborate unique design. Clemens Reichel ("Bureaucratic Backlashes: Bureaucrats as Agents of Socioeconomic Change in Proto-Historic Mesopotamia," in *Agency in Ancient Writing*, ed. Joshua Englehardt [Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2013], 54) has discussed how cylinder seals could be used in Mesopotamia to identify "individual administrative agents" within its increasingly complex bureaucratic system. The design on Judah's seal would be unique to him.
Stamp seals also bore distinctive designs and in many instances the name of its owner, as is evident from the bullae discovered during one excavation in Jerusalem in 1982: 30 of the 51 easily-read bullae record the name of the owner (Yigal Shiloh, "A Group of Hebrew Bullae from the City of David," *IEJ* 36 [1986]: 29). In 2015 Eilat Mazar announced the first discovery in a scientific archaeological excavation of a seal impression of an Israelite or Judean king. The seal bore the name of King Hezekiah. Some of the other bullae in the same find also bore Hebrew names ("Impression of King Hezekiah's Royal Seal Discovered in Ophel Excavations South of Temple Mount in Jerusalem," http://new.huji.ac.il/en/article/28173). Whether Judah's seal was cylinder or stamp, it would offer irrefutable proof of his identity. See also Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation/Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 268.

[62] It is possible that Israelites carried staffs with distinctive carved heads, such as the Babylonian ones described in Herodotus 1:195: "on every staff is some image, such as that of an apple or a rose or a lily or an eagle: no one carries a staff without an image."

[63] Triple insignia to designate various characters are found in some ancient literatures, including Ugaritic: Cyrus H. Gordon, "Indo-European and Hebrew Epic," *ErIsr* 5 (1958): 13. What is clear from the text is that the story's original hearers or readers find these three items acceptable proofs of identity. So much of the story hangs on the acknowledgement of the pledges as proof of Judah's identity, that the story will not work if this detail is rejected as improbable. The narrator needs to make no attempt as the narrator of Ruth 4:7 does to explain a "custom in former times in Israel." The validity of the pledges as ID is confirmed by the previous chapter, Genesis 37, where the plot turns on the recognition of Joseph's robe by Jacob. The act of recognition in both chapters on the basis of personal possessions is unquestioned.

[64] The narrator cleverly anticipates with the very last word of the verse (38:18) the future confirmation of paternity by means of the pledged items. This has been noted by Mary E. Shields, "'More Righteous than I': The Comeuppance of the Trickster in Genesis 38," in *Are We Amused? Humour about Women in*

Three months later the location of the action has changed. Tamar is in Judah's vicinity,[65] when the news of her pregnancy breaks. She knows that it is essential for the success of her "bold and dangerous plan,"[66] that she be near when Judah hears the news and she has carefully brought the incriminating pledges with her. She has two main motivations for her actions: to ensure that Judah acknowledges both his fault and his child and to exact her revenge.

For Tamar there is something deeply satisfying about bearing a child "by the agency of the man that has wronged her."[67] Her sense of injustice is assuaged when Judah publicly admits his wrong-doing (38:26), but Tamar exacts an even more telling revenge than that. When Er died and she suffered abuse at the hands of Judah's son, she was unable to avail of the public opportunity offered under the law to shame the *levir* who refused to perform his duty (Deut 25:7). Now in a telling move she contrives to shame Judah both in his own right and by proxy for Onan and Shelah.

The atmosphere created by Judah's summary trial of Tamar bears all the hallmarks of a scene before the elders at the city gate. There is a sense of a public occasion: Tamar's accusers are there, as are the people who will bring her out to be executed, perhaps some of "the men of the town" (Deut 21:21) who acted as executioners on other occasions. Judah stands in the centre, full of righteous indignation. The one absentee is Tamar herself, out of sight in the women's quarters but being kept fully up to date on all that is happening through both her own and Judah's intermediaries, while she and Judah carefully refer to each other in the third

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the Biblical Worlds, ed. Athalya Brenner, JSOTSup 383 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 44: "In the last word of the verse, the narrator makes it very clear that Judah is the father of the coming child." The subtle and intentional addition by the narrator of the word can be verified by comparing the statements which announce the first pregnancy of Jacob's wife and that of Tamar.

וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ: וַתַּהַר (38:2-3)
וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ וַתַּהַר לוֹ (38:18)

The two statements are identical except for the final word of verse 18: לוֹ, "by him," that is, by Judah. The narrator is at pains to make clear that just as there is no doubt about the paternity of Shua's daughter's offspring, there is equally no doubt about the paternity of Tamar's child.

[65] When Judah orders Tamar to be brought out and burnt there is scarcely a delay (38:24-25) and there is certainly no question of fetching Tamar from a different location. It is unclear whether the verb יצא here means to bring out from the interior of the house, as in Deuteronomy 22:1, or to bring out to the city gates, as in Deuteronomy 17:5. In either event Tamar is at hand.

[66] Bird, "Harlot as Heroine," 123.

[67] Bird, "Harlot as Heroine," 123.

person (38:25-26). As daring and courageous as her actions have been, even her heart must have failed and her terror increased when she heard, whether directly or indirectly, Judah's abrupt and brutal sentence: "Bring her out, and let her be burned" (38:24). Despite her rapidly increasing fears she gambles all on one last desperate endeavour.[68]

Deuteronomy stipulates a three-fold sequence: the widow's complaint about the *levir*'s failure to act (Deut 25:7); the *levir*'s admission that he is reluctant to marry her (Deut 25:8), and finally the act of shaming by the widow who removes his sandal and spits in his face (Deut 25:9-10). In a superb reversal of events Tamar triggers a similar sequence, but in reverse order.[69] First of all, she sends out the tell-tale pledges which declare not only the paternity of her child but publicly humiliate Judah.[70] The tables are turned with a vengeance on the self-righteous one who was so quick to condemn Tamar for having illicit sex (38:24). Not only does he stand there in full public gaze, looking extremely foolish, but Tamar has achieved this by using his own weapons against him: his *amour propre* and the symbols of his power and identity. Judah's concern that he be considered a laughing stock (38:23) for failing to find the prostitute is nothing compared with this public humiliation. What is worse he had freely handed over the items which now are used against him. The *levir* had his sandal removed; but Judah suffers greater humiliation when his possessions are not removed but rather returned, and returned in such a way that makes a mockery of the vaunted wealth and power which his staff and signet denote. This is spitting in his face with a vengeance. Then paralleling the *levir*'s admission in Deuteronomy that he was reluctant to marry the widow, Judah admits that he

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[68] Nobuko Morimura ("The Story of Tamar: A Feminist Interpretation of Genesis 38," *Japan Christian Review* 59 [1993]: 59, 66n38) believes that Tamar must have taken a deep breath (38:25) when she mustered her courage to speak. The Hebrew syntax indicates there was a pause before she uttered the final words: וַתֹּאמֶר הַכֶּר־נָא לְמִי הַחֹתֶמֶת וְהַפְּתִילִים וְהַמַּטֶּה הָאֵלֶּה - "And, she said, 'Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.'"

[69]   *Deuteronomy*   *Genesis*

25:7   Complaint about the *levir*'s failure to act   Judah accuses himself of failure to act 38:26

25:8   *Levir*'s admission   Judah's admission   38:26

25:9-10   Act of shaming   Act of shaming   38:25

[70] cf. Victor H. Matthews (*More than Meets the Ear: Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations* [Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008], 63) and Nguyen Chi ("La voix narrative," 125), who suggest that Tamar discreetly sent a private message to Judah. This suggestion ignores the fact that Tamar's only leverage is to shame him publicly.

was reluctant to give Tamar in marriage to Shelah. As he does so, Tamar achieves her ultimate victory. She does not need to stand in the public square to accuse Judah: she forces Judah to accuse himself. He becomes, in effect, her ventriloquist's dummy. Tamar has achieved far more than the widow in Deuteronomy who shames the *levir* but fails to honour her dead husband by bearing his son. Tamar has done both: she shames Judah, and through him his reluctant sons, and has also conceived a child. The birth of Tamar's child will both carry on her husband's line and will also give her all the material, emotional and social benefits of bearing a child.

Conclusion

Accompanying Tamar through Genesis 38:1-26 offers a unique perspective on the events of the story. It becomes clear how limited her choices were but it also illuminates some of the motivations which drove her. In this way she emerges from the shadows where her largely mute and apparently passive role has placed her. This mute passivity makes all the more extraordinary her seduction of Judah and especially the subtle revenge which she exacts in a clever parody of the *halitza* ceremony.

When discussing the role of the widow in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 Dvora Weisberg wonders, "Does her assigned role in this very public ceremony also acknowledge her pain and anger at being rejected?"[71] A similar question can be asked of Tamar in Genesis 38. How can we name the helter-skelter of emotions Tamar experienced during this amazing series of events: from her grief or relief on the death of Er, to the pain and bewilderment at Onan's treatment, the passion which fuelled her encounter with Judah, and the terror and anger as she fights for her own life and the life of her unborn child? Many people speak for Tamar – her parents, Judah, the intermediary who produces the pledged items – and perhaps it is right that the secrets of her heart remain her own.

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[71] Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family*, 26.

Chapter 3

Mise-en-abyme - Tamar: Joseph's *alter ego*

This chapter examines the evidence for the claim that Genesis 38:1-26 is a *mise-en-abyme* of

the Joseph Narrative and suggests that consequently Tamar parallels Joseph as the main

protagonists in their respective contexts. The evidence will be explored in three main steps.

First, building on the work of Bosworth the principal aspects of Genesis 38:1-26 as a *mise-en-*

abyme will be outlined.[1] Then the considerable similarities between Tamar and Joseph will be

noted. Finally, a new dimension to the application of the theory of *mise-en-abyme* will be

proposed. Hitherto scholars have concentrated on seeing a *mise-en-abyme* as a microcosm of

the larger text. A more dynamic understanding indicates that the process can be two-way and

that the larger text can also interact with the smaller one when the text is re-read. This throws

some new light on our perception of Tamar.

Seven Stages of the *Mise-en-abyme*

The *mise-en-abyme* may be divided into seven stages: the causes of the problem are outlined;

a wrong involving deception is committed; the victim deceives in turn; recognition of the

deception takes place; there is an admission of wrong-doing; a new relationship is established

between the parties; and future survival is guaranteed.

Causes of the problem

Both stories are rooted in fraternal discord. Tamar's deception would never have been

necessary if Onan had not been reluctant to "give offspring to his brother" (38:9). Joseph is

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[1] Bosworth, *Story within a Story*. It should be noted that Bosworth, unlike this dissertation, includes the coda in his application of the *mise-en-abyme* to Genesis 38.

disliked by his siblings for his tale-bearing (37:2), the preferential treatment he receives from their father ("Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children") and the gift of a special robe which underlines their father's favouritism (37:3). Both Jacob and Joseph seem oblivious of the resentment all this has caused,[2] just as Judah seems unaware of the rivalries between his elder sons. The brothers are jealous of Joseph's special position; Onan is jealous of his dead brother.[3]

In both instances their feelings may have been exacerbated by poor relationships with their fathers. Joseph's brothers resent Jacob's preference for Joseph and do not appear to have challenged Jacob on the issue. Jacob's uneasy relationships with his sons may have been worsened by his willingness to accept "a bad report" on the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (37:2) and the possibility that he is sending Joseph to spy on his brothers, when Jacob tells him, "bring word back to me." (37:14). Onan does not reveal to his father his reluctance to beget a child for his brother and may be too intimidated by him to defy him openly. The only time Judah is recorded speaking to Onan, he issues three orders to him, with the clear assumption that he will be obeyed: "go", "perform", "raise up" (38:8). The difficulties may be compounded by the absence of the mothers. Rachel is long dead although there is a cryptic reference to her in 37:10 and the only role Shua's daughter is given is to bear three sons in apparently rapid succession (38:3-5).

In Genesis 38 the immediate cause of the problem is Judah's fear that his surviving son Shelah will die if he marries him to Tamar: "he feared that he too would die, like his brothers" (38:11). Joseph's brothers' simmering feelings are brought to boiling point by Joseph's boastful telling of his dreams. They resent what they interpret as his future domination of them: "they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words" (37:8). When they see Joseph approaching them in Dothan one brother identifies him by saying, "Here comes this dreamer"

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[2] Barbara Green, "*What Profit for Us?": Remembering the Story of Joseph* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 44.
[3] Coincidentally both Onan and Joseph refuse to make love to a woman imposed on them. Nguyen Chi, "La voix narrative," 281.

(37:19), further evidence that Joseph's dreams were the last straw for them. The mere sight of him in the distance prompts their conspiracy to kill him.

Strong feelings are the key in both: Judah fears Shelah will die if Tamar marries him. Joseph's brothers deeply resent their father's preference for him and this seriously exacerbates their ill will towards Joseph: "But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (37:4); "his brothers were jealous of him" (37:11). Judah's fear for the safety of Shelah, his youngest son, is echoed later in the narrative when Jacob is reluctant to let his youngest son, Benjamin, go to Egypt with his brothers, "for he feared that harm might come to him" (42:4).[4]

Wrong is committed

Judah sends Tamar to live as a widow in her father's house and deceives Tamar by implying that he will marry her to Shelah when the latter grows up (38:11). Judah and Joseph's other brothers initially plan to kill him. Later they sell him into slavery, deceiving Jacob into believing that Joseph is dead (37:28, 33). Judah never plans to recall Tamar for Shelah; Joseph's brothers assume they will never see him again.[5]

Both wrongs result in a prolonged separation which removes Tamar and Joseph from their current home:[6] Tamar for a shorter time to her former family home, Joseph to Egypt for a lengthy period. Neither can resist their fate. Once Tamar has been instructed to leave, she obediently complies: "So Tamar went to live in her father's house" (38:11). Joseph is stripped, seized, thrown in a pit and then removed from the pit, sold and taken down to Egypt. All the verbs are plural and Joseph is the object of each: וַיִּמְכְּרוּ ,וַיַּעֲלוּ ,וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ ,וַיַּשְׁלִכוּ,וַיִּקָּחֻהוּ,וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ,

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[4] The notion of fear is implicit, rather than stated, in the Hebrew text of both 38:11: כִּי אָמַר פֶּן־יָמוּת גַּם־הוּא and 42:4: כִּי אָמַר פֶּן־יִקְרָאֶנּוּ אָסוֹן.
[5] Kruschwitz, "Type-Scene Connection," 394.
[6] Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 234.

וַיָּבִיאוּ (37:23, 24, 28).[7] His brothers perpetrate the first six actions and the Ishmaelites the last. Joseph has no option but to yield to superior forces.

Counter-Deception

When Tamar realises she has been deceived, she seizes the initiative and deceives Judah in turn, tricking Judah into fathering a child with her. Joseph also resorts to deception and tricks his brothers into bringing Benjamin to Egypt. Superficially very different, both deceptions reveal a remarkable number of similarities.

Judah is the primary target in both stories. Aaron Wildavsky believes that "Judah plays the part of a schemer who is taken in by a superior schemer, Tamar, who schemes more righteously than he."[8] Judah, the ringleader of the plot against Joseph, is the brother who facilitates Joseph's plot by persuading Jacob to allow Benjamin to travel to Egypt (43:8-11) and by subsequently pleading with Joseph for Benjamin's release (44:18-34). According to Alter, "Judah with Tamar after Judah with his brothers is an exemplary narrative instance of the deceiver deceived."[9]

Both deceptions are opportunistic and are predicated on a need to be met. Tamar astutely assumes that the recently-widowed Judah will look for sex, a need which Tamar fulfils when she seizes the opportunity to waylay him on his way to the sheep-shearing (38:13). Joseph's encounter with his brothers is more accidental but he also seizes the opportunity presented when his brothers journey to Egypt from famine-stricken Canaan (42:5) in search of food, a need Joseph can fulfil (42:7).[10]

As part of the counter-deception both Tamar and Joseph deliberately conceal their identity or choose not to reveal it. Tamar intentionally wears a veil so that her features are not visible (38:14), while Joseph's transformation is even more startling. Joseph does not conceal his

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[7] It is only in 42:21 that the brothers refer to Joseph's "anguish when he pleaded" with them.
[8] Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained through Sin," 45.
[9] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed., 10.
[10] Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 234.

features: he does not need to. When his brothers last saw him he was an immature נַעַר of 17

years (37:2). When they see him next, at least 22 years later, he is a mature man, surrounded

by the trappings of his new position, arrayed in "garments of fine linen," probably wearing

Pharaoh's signet ring on his hand and a gold chain around his neck (41:42), speaking to them

through an interpreter as a foreigner would (42:23). As Hayim Granot notes, "his matured face

and changed demeanor, his regal garments and his totally unanticipated status would no

doubt have been sufficient to disguise their brother's true identity."[11] Joseph takes advantage

of his brothers' failure to recognise him and deliberately rejects the opportunity to reveal his

identity. On both occasions Judah fails to recognise the person in question.[12] In 38:16 "he did

not know that she was his daughter-in-law"[13]; in 42:8 "Joseph had recognized his brothers,

they did not recognize him."

Garments figure largely in both deceptions.[14] In addition to the veil she dons Tamar sets aside

her "widow's garments," tell-tale signs of her status (38:14), and puts them on again after her

encounter with Judah (38:19). Garments play a significant role in Joseph's life: his father's gift

of a special robe alienates his brothers and he is unceremoniously stripped of his robe before

being thrown in the pit at Dothan. Potiphar's wife retains his tunic as purported evidence of his

attempted rape (39:16). Each change of apparel indicates his change of status:[15] favourite son

(37:3), despised brother (37:23), slave (39:12), prisoner (39:20)[16] and governor (41:42). The

phrase בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ, denoting Tamar's widow's garments (38:14,19), is echoed by the phrase

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[11] Hayim Granot, "Observations on the Character of Joseph in Egypt," *JBQ* 39 (2011): 263.
[12] The verbs are different – ידע (38:16), נכר (42:8) – but the concept is identical.
[13] Judah makes no attempt to hide his own identity. Clearly he feels no shame in openly soliciting a prostitute.
[14] Referring to Potiphar's wife's retention of Joseph's tunic, Eli Kohn ("Drunkenness, Prostitution and Immodest Appearances in Hebrew Biblical Narrative, Second Temple Writings and Early Rabbinic Literature: A Literary and Rhetorical Study," PhD diss. [University of the Free State, 2006], 148) highlights the importance of the clothes motif: "For the third time in three chapters a garment is used to lead others to draw false conclusions, and the repetition of this motif *helps cement Genesis 38 into its present position*." [My emphasis].
[15] Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *JSOT* 20 (1995): 29.
[16] Joseph's prison clothes are not mentioned explicitly but in 2 Kings 25:29 it is recorded that "Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes"- בִּגְדֵי כִלְאוֹ - so it is probable that Joseph also wore prison clothes.

בְּגְדֵי־שֵׁשׁ which describes the garments Pharaoh gives to Joseph (41:42) and which he may be wearing during his first encounter in Egypt with his brothers.

Location plays a key part in each encounter. Tamar deliberately waits for Judah at the city gate as she knows that Judah will assume she is a prostitute because of her position at the roadside. In case the reader misses the significance, the location is stressed by a double reference: "on the road to Timnah" (38:14) and "at the roadside" (38:16).[17] Joseph's brothers are similarly deceived by Joseph's location in Egypt. Even if their journey to Egypt had raised uncomfortable associations with Joseph, they would never have imagined that their brother who had been sold into slavery (if he were still alive) would rise to being "governor over the land" (42:6). In both cases the incongruity of the location ensures the success of the deception. Judah does not expect his daughter-in-law to be loitering at the side of the road like a common prostitute, no more than he and his brothers expect Joseph to be found in a state building controlling the Egyptian food supply.[18]

The bargaining at the city gate between Tamar and Judah over the nature and price of the transaction is brief and business-like (38:16-18). Nonetheless it foreshadows the more protracted negotiations between Joseph and his brothers in chapters 42-44 as they haggle over bringing Benjamin to Egypt and the subsequent threats to detain him there.[19]

Judah's promise of a "kid from the flock" in return for Tamar's services is a patent link with the Joseph narrative. In light of the sheep shearing at Timnah (38:13) the payment of a sheep might have been more probable but a kid is offered instead, immediately recalling Joseph's robe, dipped in the blood of a slaughtered goat (37:31), which was used to deceive Jacob

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[17] For the simple understanding of the sequence of events the second reference is redundant.
[18] The precise location of their initial encounter (42:6) is not named but it must have occurred in some public location linked to Joseph's official role.
[19] The negotiations take place during the brothers' first two visits to Egypt. The gap between the two visits is unclear: whatever time it took them to return to Canaan, consume all the food they had brought home (43:1) and then return to Egypt.

(37:32-33). In case the point is missed there are two further references to the kid when Hirah attempts to hand over the animal (38:20, 23) to the absent prostitute.[20]

Hirah's unsuccessful attempt to pay Tamar the promised kid is paralleled later in the narrative. When Judah attempts to pay the promised kid through the mediation of Hirah he is prevented from doing so by Tamar who has disappeared before the payment can be made.[21] Similarly when the brothers attempt to pay for the grain they have received they are prevented from doing so by Joseph himself, who through the mediation of his servants has their money returned to them: "return every man's money to his sack" (42:25).

Noble notes an additional complex twist on the non-payment motif. By disappearing before the kid can be paid Tamar retains Judah's seal, cord and staff. Later she uses these items (38:25) to provoke "*a final confrontation* with the man who originally wronged her."[22] When Judah's brothers attempt to pay for the grain on their second visit to Egypt, Joseph again frustrates them by having the money returned through the mediation of his steward (44:1) but this time his silver cup is also concealed. This provides a pretext for the brothers' arrest on the grounds of theft, which enables Joseph to provoke "a final confrontation with those who originally wronged him" (44:15).[23]

The sexual nature of Judah and Tamar's transaction has evoked numerous links with the episode of Potiphar's wife and these links are underscored by the proximity of the two chapters, which play subtly with a web of comparisons and contrasts. Two "sexually forward women,"[24] one named and one unnamed, plan seduction, one successfully (38:18) and the other unsuccessfully (39:8, 12). Tamar's deception of Judah is compared to Potiphar's wife's more wholesale deception of her servants and husband (39:14-15, 17-18), to whom she alleges

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[20] There are also echoes of the deception using goatskin practised by Jacob, father of Judah and Joseph, on his father Isaac (27:9, 16). The goat is "the symbol of deception in Jacob's contentious family" according to Wildavsky ("Survival Must Not Be Gained through Sin," 40).

[21] Paul R. Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," *Literature and Theology* 7 (1993): 139.

[22] Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches," 139. [Noble's emphasis].

[23] Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches," 139.

[24] Kohn, "Drunkenness, Prostitution and Immodest Appearances," 148.

Joseph's attempted rape. Tamar's fidelity to her obligations to her dead husband is contrasted with the infidelity of Potiphar's wife, who is presented as "a self-indulgent, libidinous, treacherous woman whose sexual concern was for pleasure and self-gratification."[25] Tamar's relationship with Judah is an isolated attempt to satisfy the levirate law by conceiving a child; Potiphar's wife's repeated attempts to seduce Joseph – "she spoke to Joseph day after day" (39:10) – are to satisfy her own lust, aroused by Joseph's good looks (39:6-7). Lindsay Wilson expresses the contrast in slightly different terms: "Tamar's sexual act was prompted by her desire to fulfil her responsibility to her (deceased) husband; Potiphar's wife sought to breach her responsibility to her (alive) husband."[26]

Revelation of the deception

Judah recognises he is responsible for Tamar's pregnancy. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers because he is moved by Judah's speech. A false accusation is the precursor to both revelations.[27] Tamar is accused of having illicit sex (38:24) while Benjamin is accused of stealing Joseph's silver cup (44:12). Judah is unconcerned for Tamar's plight[28] just as he and his brothers were indifferent to Joseph's predicament: "we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen" (42:21).

Both revelations are precipitated by threats of death. Tamar is sentenced to summary execution by Judah. Faced with the imminent threat to her own life - and that of her unborn child - she produces the personal items which prompt Judah to acknowledge his responsibility (38:26). Similarly the probability of Jacob's death, as outlined by Judah, prompts Joseph's revelation. Judah uses three different ways, incrementally more detailed, to emphasise that

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[25] Leonard Mars, "What Was Onan's Crime?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984): 438.
[26] Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 92.
Other parallels to note: Judah and Potiphar's wife initiate the actual encounters and in similarly blunt terms: "Come, let me come in to you" (38:16) and "Lie with me" (39:7, 12). Judah succumbs to temptation (38:15-16) while the God-fearing and righteous Joseph resisted (39:8-10, 12).
[27] These continue the theme of false accusations begun by Judah's misguided accusation against Tamar of being responsible for his sons' deaths (38:11) and Potiphar's wife's accusation of rape against Joseph (39:14,17).
[28] Kruschwitz, "Type-Scene Connection," 405.

Jacob will die if they return without Benjamin. First of all, Judah recalls their previous words to Joseph: "The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die" (44:22). Then he reports Jacob's response after they had asked him to let Benjamin go to Egypt: "If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to Sheol" (44:29). Finally he predicts what will happen if they go home without Benjamin: "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the grey hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol" (44:30-31). Faced with the prospect of causing his father's death, Joseph confesses, "'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?'"

In both cases the scales are lifted from the eyes of the deceived and the actual form of the revelation emphasises the key issue in each instance. In Genesis 38 it is not Tamar's identity that is at stake but Judah's implicit acknowledgment that he is the father of her child (38:26). For the brothers what matters is the startling realisation that their long-lost brother is alive and that he has used his prominent position to sustain them and their families.

Admission of wrong-doing

In the much shorter chapter 38 the admission of wrong doing follows on the heels of the revelation. "She is in the right; not I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." (38:26).[29] Jonathan Kruschwitz notes that unlike Genesis 38,

> The Joseph novella does not conflate the antagonist's confession of wrongdoing with the *anagnorisis*. Though both scenes exhibit similarities to the related scene in Genesis 38, they remain separate events: the confession constitutes a turning-point, and the moment of *anagnorisis* provides the resolution.

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[29] My translation.

The moments of recognition prompt reminders of former wrongdoing.[30] Tamar's indication of her identity prompts Judah to remember, and acknowledge, his wrongful deed (38:26). As Mieke Bal writes, "Judah looks into the mirror she holds up to him and he admits his fault."[31] When Joseph's brothers do not respond to his initial declaration of identity (45:3), Joseph repeats his declaration and reminds them of the unjust act they had committed against him: "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt" (45:4). One way or another the two faults (Judah's refusal to marry Tamar to Shelah and the brothers' sale of Joseph into slavery) are named openly and the perpetrators are identified: "I did not give her" (38:26); "you sold" (45:4).[32]

The brothers' admission of wrong doing deserves close scrutiny. On three occasions the brothers refer to the wrong they did Joseph. On the first occasion (42:21-22) they believe they are paying the penalty for "what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen." Reuben reminds them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." Later when speaking to Joseph, Judah claims: "God has found out the guilt of your servants" (44:16). After their father's death the brothers are concerned: "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him? (50:15). They then approach Joseph saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father" (50:16-17). These references to their wrong doing raise a number of important issues. At no time do the brothers spell out the actual crime they committed. It is Joseph, not they, who names the deed (45:4).[33] All the references except the very last (50:16-17) are made either in Joseph's absence (50:15) or when he is present but they are unaware of his identity (42:21-22; 44:16). In the first of the

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[30] Kruschwitz, "Type-Scene Connection," 394-95.
[31] Bal, *Lethal Love*, 102.
[32] There may be a psychological need on the part of the wrong-doer and the wronged to name the deed.
[33] In this regard they get off lightly because Joseph does not refer to their original plan to murder him (37:19).

two incidents which take place in Joseph's presence, immediately after their admission (42: 21-22), the narrator emphasises their ignorance of Joseph's identity and their assumption that he is an unknown foreigner: "They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter" (42:23). Moreover in the second incident Judah's comment (44:16) is obscure: it is not certain that he is referring to their past misdeeds. On the final occasion they broach the subject by alleging it was Jacob's dying wish that they beg Joseph's forgiveness. At all times their main concern is their fear of retribution, both divine and at the hands of Joseph. Their admission of wrong is not only self-serving and half-hearted (there is no explicit expression of remorse) but it is also far too late. Jacob died after living for 17 years in Egypt (47:28) and it is only after his death, over 39 years since the deed, that the brothers make any admission of wrong-doing face to face with Joseph.

Establishment of a new relationship

Bosworth entitles this phase "Reconciliation." Other scholars also believe a "satisfactory reconciliation has been effected"[34] and speak warmly of how Tamar's deception of Judah concludes with her conceiving his child, "thus reconciling (instead of destroying) the bond between her and his family."[35] It is suggested that in both the Joseph and Tamar stories *anagnorisis* has helped "bind together the familial ties that had come undone."[36]

This picture of happy families needs to be examined more closely and again chapter 38 sets the scene for the larger narrative. Any explicit word of reconciliation is conspicuous by its absence. It is unclear whether Judah's acknowledgement of Tamar's righteousness is uttered in her presence. As she is being brought out for execution she "sent word to her father-in-law," שָׁלְחָה אֶל־חָמִיהָ, and speaks of him in the third person: "It was the owner of these who

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[34] Noble,"Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 238-39. See also: Jae Gu Kim, "The Literary Function of the Judah-Tamar Story (Gen. 38) in the Joseph Story," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 75 (2011): 56; Mark A. O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44: 18-34, to the Characterization of Joseph," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 438; Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2014), 213; Lambe, "Judah's Development," 67-68.
[35] Kruschwitz, "Type-Scene Connection," 394.
[36] Kruschwitz, "Type-Scene Connection," 407. But see Aristotle, *Poetics,* 1452a, where *anagnorisis* can lead "to friendship or to enmity".

made me pregnant" - אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֵלֶּה לּוֹ אָנֹכִי הָרָה (38:25). This may reflect a tactful and tactical attempt on her part not to accuse Judah directly but the act of sending and the oblique reference may also reflect the fact that she is physically removed from him. This may be corroborated by Judah's admission of guilt when he also refers to her in the third person, using the third person feminine suffix: לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ (38:26). If they are present in the one place, neither appears to address the other directly. If they are not, any communication is through intermediaries. Neither scenario depicts a family reconciliation or bodes well for it as a possibility.

Any prospect of real reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers is also unlikely. During the years of separation Joseph's continuing ill will towards his brothers is evident in the name he gives his elder son: "Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, 'For', he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house'" (41:51). Far from indicating that he has forgotten the past, his son's name is a daily reminder of what he endured. If he had truly forgotten, he would not have mentioned "all my hardship". His initial reaction to his brothers and the tests he puts them through indicate that he still mistrusts his brothers and real reconciliation will be difficult. When finally he reveals his identity, he instructs them "do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here" (45:5). These are clearly the emotions he expects them to feel. In two consecutive verses he reminds them that they have sold him into slavery (45:4-5). In chapter 50 when the brothers finally ask for forgiveness, they use the word "forgive" twice, once quoting Jacob, the other on their own behalf (50:17), but Joseph never uses it. He tells them, "have no fear" (50:21), but he never says he forgives them. As Peter Miscall notes, "Joseph's response is reassuring but carefully avoids any hint of forgiveness of or atonement for the brothers' past crimes."[37] Can reconciliation occur without forgiveness?

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[37] Peter D. Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies," *JSOT* 3 (1978): 38.

Similarly can reconciliation happen without repentance? As was noted above, the brothers' admission of wrong-doing stems from self-preservation rather than penitence. Although the brothers have been in Egypt for 17 years (47:28), they never made a clear confession.[38]After Jacob dies, in the absence of their father's restraining influence, they wonder, "'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?'" (50:15). After all the years of superficial reconciliation they still suspect Joseph's motives. That they relied on their father's presence to keep the peace in the intervening years is evident from the way they suggest that it was Jacob's dying wish, the only argument they think will prevail with Joseph. George Savran correctly observes, "Such words do not appear on Jacob's lips anywhere in Genesis, rendering their story highly doubtful."[39] Even now their relationship may be based on lies. Their final offer in the same encounter – "'We are here as your slaves'" (50:18) – implies that they do not envisage any possibility of a future relationship based on equality.[40]

Two particular events indicate that any prospect of real reconciliation between the brothers was doomed from the beginning. When Joseph reveals his identity, their initial reaction is stunned silence: "his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence" (45:3). Joseph had to urge them to come closer (45:4) and it is much later after Joseph has made the first move by speaking to them, kissing and weeping upon them that they finally respond: "after that his brothers talked with him" (45:15). Clearly their first reaction was not joy that their long-lost brother was alive, but rather dismay at what retribution might follow.

In that initial speech to his brothers Joseph reassures them: "You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me" (45:10). Granot suggests that Goshen is, in fact, an area "conveniently out of the way" and he further notes "there is no biblical evidence that Joseph

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[38] Noble,"Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 239.
[39] George Savran, "The Character as Narrator in Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 2.
[40] The brothers' behaviour does not offer any reliable support for Kaminsky's more optimistic view of reconciliation: "Reconciliation does not necessarily entail full erasure of the past or newly perfected characters. Rather, it involves a commitment to live the relationship differently than one did in the past" ("Reclaiming a Theology of Election," 146-47). As indicated above, no such commitment seems evident.

actually maintained any regular contact with his family or even his father once they were settled in Goshen."[41] This is confirmed by the fact that immediately following the settlement of the family in Goshen Joseph is shown busily engaged for several years in organising and overseeing numerous measures to cope with the country-wide famine (47:13-26), doubtless leaving him little opportunity to spend time with his father and brothers.[42] There may even be a suggestion that Jacob's failure to recognise Joseph's sons was not only because of his failing eyesight (48:10) but because he had had minimal contact with them.

In the absence of any real reconciliation either between Tamar and Judah or Joseph and his brothers what emerges is a *modus vivendi* which guarantees the survival of all, as the final phase of the *mise-en-abyme* will illustrate. The meal served in Joseph's house after Benjamin's arrival is a telling symbol of how the relationships will work. Joseph's servants "served him by himself, and them by themselves" (43:32). The reality that they are eating at separate tables is confirmed by the reference to portions being taken to the brothers from Joseph's table (43:34). According to Mark O'Brien, the meal "juxtaposes intimacy and separation in a masterly way."[43] They are sharing the same space but remain estranged and yet Joseph is ensuring that his brothers are fed. In the same way Judah will ensure that Tamar and her children do not starve although any form of closer relationship is ruled out.[44]

Family survival

At the conclusion of both narratives the future is secure. The family, from its narrowest to its widest sense, will survive. This survival will operate on two levels: the physical survival of the individuals and the survival of the clan and its different families. Those who had been banished or rejected, Tamar and Joseph, have become the source of their survival.

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[41] Granot, "Observations on the Character of Joseph in Egypt," 266.
[42] See Jeffrey M. Cohen, "Joseph's Self-imposed Estrangement," *JBQ* 46 (2018): 27-28.
[43] O'Brien, "Contribution of Judah's Speech," 438.
[44] 38:26b, "he did not lie with her again," hints at that. For other reasons for this statement see page 182.

At a material level the protagonists of both stories will survive. As a *de facto* levirate wife Tamar will be entitled to all the supports that status implies. In Egypt her offspring will share the benefits Joseph has offered his siblings and their descendants.

Joseph spells out the two-fold aspect of the future when he outlines his God-given mission to his brothers:

> "God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors." (45:5-7)

A stark quest for food – and life - had brought the brothers from famine-stricken Canaan (41:57) on the instructions of Jacob: "go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die" (42:2). During their trips to Egypt Joseph looked after the material well-being of his brothers by arranging the provision of meals (43:31-32; 34), grain to take back with them for which they paid (42:25; 44:1), food for their journey home (42:25; 45:21) and fodder for their donkeys (43:24). On their last journey back to Canaan he adds supplies for Jacob: "To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey" (45:23). André Wénin sees Joseph's role in nourishing his family as a strange fulfilment of Joseph's dream, where he stands in the cornfield surrounded by his family (37:6-8).[45]

Once Jacob and his family settle in Egypt their physical existence will be looked after in three different ways. Joseph will continue to support them, especially during the remaining five years of famine: "I will provide for you there … so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty" (45:11). The text confirms that Joseph kept this promise: "Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to

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[45] André Wénin, "Le temps dans l'histoire de Joseph (Gn 37-50): Repères temporels pour une analyse narrative," *Bib* 83 (2002): 40.

the number of their dependants" (47:12). Pharaoh offers them fertile land and opportunities to work for him when he instructs Joseph to "settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock" (47:6). Lastly the brothers use their skills and capacity for work to provide for themselves as Tamar did. Not only will they work the land they have been given to use but they will also pasture the flocks and herds which they have brought with them (45:10, 46:32, 47:1) and which they had been unable to feed in famine-stricken Canaan (47:4).

At a more profound level both stories are about the survival of the clan and the fulfilment of God's promise of "a numerous people" (50:20). In both situations there are threats to its survival. Judah had real fears his line will die out. He had instructed Onan to guarantee the next generation but that attempt ended in Onan's death and caused Judah to protect his surviving son Shelah by banishing Tamar, the 'killer wife'.[46] Ironically Judah later put his own child and the next generation at risk when he ordered the execution of the pregnant Tamar. Jacob's family are doomed to death by starvation during the severe famine. The entire family is at risk.

By the end both families have been saved and in each instance saved by the rejected and banished one. The banished Tamar's actions, which were undertaken to perpetuate her husband's line, have guaranteed the continuity of the line of Judah. Joseph's actions in turn have ensured the "line of promise is secured in twelve sons."[47] God's intention for the future of the twelve tribes has been achieved. This is the final link in the parallel chain of events which mark out Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme* of the Joseph narrative.[48]

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[46] See Friedman, "Tamar, a Symbol of Life," 23-61.

[47] Robert B. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 607.

[48] Scholars who include the whole of Genesis 38 as the *mise-en-abyme* acknowledge additional parallels: the survival of the clan epitomized by the birth of two sons to Tamar (38:27-30) and the parallel birth of two sons to Joseph (41:50). It is argued that this parallel is reinforced by the etymologies provided for the children's names (38: 29-30; 41:51-52). Some scholars also perceive an "unexpected reversal of priority between them" (Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 234). See also Dohyung Kim, "A Literary-

Thematic and Linguistic Links

These striking similarities between the two narratives are further reinforced in two other ways: by a web of linguistic and thematic links and by three narrative devices which alert the reader to the operation of a *mise-en-abyme.*

In addition to the numerous parallels in the two plots the stories are woven together by a number of thematic and linguistic links. The thematic links include (not necessarily in order of importance and in varying degrees) the use of anonymous informants and third parties,[49] the cuckoo in the nest/outsider syndrome,[50] male dominance and issues of fatherhood,[51] preference for younger sons,[52] issues of control and of changes in the balance of power in relationships and situations,[53] risk and danger,[54] poetic justice[55] and the potential transformation of characters.[56] The linguistic links, some of which are also thematic, include words and images associated with evil, family relationships, giving and gifts,[57] sight, insight and recognition,[58] hands,[59] use of garments[60] and personal items,[61] and pledges.[62]

The theme of evil (רע) can serve as an example to illustrate the pervasiveness of one of the links that is both linguistic and thematic. There is only one explicit use of רע in chapter 38 but

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Critical Analysis of the Role of Genesis 38 within Genesis 37-50 as Part of the Primary Narrative (Genesis-2 Kings) of the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2010), 32.

[49] Nguyen Chi, "La voix narrative," 125.

[50] Wénin, "Personnages humains," 65.

[51] Nelly Furman, "His Story versus Her Story: Male Genealogy and Female Strategy in the Jacob Cycle," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 146.

[52] Bill T. Arnold, "*bkr,*" *NIDOTTE* 1:658-59.

[53] Wénin, "Personnages humains," 63; Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar," 277.

[54] Adelman, "Ethical Epiphany," 56.

[55] Wénin, "Personnages humains," 59.

[56] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 364; Jae Gu Kim, "Literary Function of the Judah-Tamar Story," 55.

[57] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 586.

[58] Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location," 20.8; David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39; Furman, "His Story versus Her Story," 148.

[59] P.R. Ackroyd, "*yad,*" *TDOT* 5:393-426.

[60] Matthews, "Anthropology of Clothing," 25-36; F.V. Greifenhagen, "Clothes Encounters: Yūsuf's Shirt in Qur'ān 12," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39 (2010): 52-3; Alicia J. Batten, "Clothing and Adornment," *BTB* 40 (2010): 152.

[61] Furman, "His Story versus Her Story," 145, 147.

[62] Adelman, "Ethical Epiphany," 65.

its consequences are enormous: Er's death results directly from the evil he had committed in the eyes of the Lord (38:7): וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיְמִתֵהוּ יְהוָה. His death in turn sets in motion all the subsequent sequence of events of the chapter. The effects of Er's evil will ultimately both imperil Tamar and incite her to action. The association between Er's very name and the concept of evil has long been noted: "The biblical wording of this verse cleverly juxtaposes two words of reversed spelling. "The name Er spelled *ayin reish*, indicates his character, ra, 'evil,' which is the reverse, *reish ayin*."[63]

The centrality of the role of evil in chapter 38 is mirrored by the extensive references in the Joseph narrative. Starting from the second verse of the Joseph narrative the word רע is very prevalent, achieving the same impact as in chapter 38, but this time by the cumulative effect of its repeated use. Joseph is the first person associated with evil, when he is recorded bringing evil stories about his brothers (37:2). Then the animal which allegedly killed Joseph is described as evil (37:20; 33). Evil follows Joseph to Egypt where he believes sex with Potiphar's wife would be רע (39:9). Joseph's climb to a successful position with Pharaoh begins when he saw רע in his fellow-prisoners' face and interpreted their dreams (40:7) and later "evil cows" figure in Pharaoh's dreams (41:19-21). Joseph instructs his steward to pursue the brothers and accuse them of returning evil for good (44:4). Judah reports to Joseph that Jacob had said that if Benjamin were harmed "you will bring down my great hairs in sorrow (רע) to Sheol" (44:29) and Judah fears to see the evil that would come on his father if he returned without Benjamin (Gen 44:34). In his conversation with Pharaoh Jacob describes the years of his life as evil (47:9). Later when Jacob blesses Joseph's sons he refers to the angel who has redeemed him from evil (48:16). In Genesis 50 the brothers are worried that Joseph will pay them back for the evil they did him and claim that Jacob said to them "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong (רע) they did in harming you." Finally Joseph declares, "Even though

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[63] Israel Drazin and Stanley M. Wagner, *Onkelos on the Torah: Understanding the Bible Text: Genesis* (Jerusalem; New York: Gefen, 2006), 255.

you intended to do harm (רע) to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (50:20). Joseph therefore does evil, rejects evil (Gen 39:9); interprets evil in the Pharaoh's dream, and is willing to spare his father the evil of grief. Finally he acknowledges that although his brothers had intended to do him evil, God intended it for good. Thus all the significant themes of the story are connected by the theme: the threats to Joseph's life and status, his rise to power in Egypt thanks to his interpretation of dreams, and his evolving relationship with his brothers and his father.

Narrative Devices

Three other features of the narrative style – doubling, reduplication of the plot and the foreshadowing properties of the dream episodes – support the understanding of Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme*. The first two work in a similar way by establishing a pattern of echoes which forewarn the reader to expect repeated events and motifs in the text. These examples, superficially minor, shape a context in which the perceptive reader becomes attentive to the larger framework the narrator is creating by these echoes.

James Ackerman highlights the frequency of doubling in the Joseph story.[64] His examples include the following: Joseph is confined twice (in the pit and prison, 37:24; 39:20), interprets two dreams twice (40:12-13, 18-19; 41:25-31), accuses his brothers twice of spying (42:9, 12), and puts money in their sacks twice (42:25; 44:1). The brothers make two trips to Egypt (42:3; 43:15), have two audiences with Joseph on each occasion (42:6, 18; 43: 15, 26), find money in their bags twice (42:27, 35), make two attempts to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin go to Egypt (42:37; 43:5) and are invited twice to settle in Egypt (45:10, 18). Potiphar's wife makes two attempts to seduce Joseph (39:7, 12) and accuses him twice (37:14, 17). Gum, balm, and resin are brought twice from Canaan to Egypt, first with the Ishmaelites (37:25) and secondly with Benjamin (43:11). In addition to Ackerman's suggestions the following examples of doubling can also be noted: the birth of two sons to Joseph (41:50), the two seven-year cycles of plenty

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[64] Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 85. The references to chapter and verse are mine.

and want in Egypt (41:47, 53), the detention or attempted detention of two of Judah's sons in

Egypt (Simeon and Benjamin, 42:24; 44:17) and Reuben's offer to sacrifice his two sons if

Benjamin fails to return (42:37). This list is not exhaustive. Doubling is also found in chapter 38:

the death of Judah's two sons (38:7, 10) (in both instances attributed to the action of the

LORD), and the double references to Judah's firstborn (38: 6-7), the signet, cord and staff

(38:18, 25), Tamar's father's house (38: 11), a kid (עז - 38:17, 20) and to Tamar's veil (38:14,

19) and widow's weeds.[65] These examples in 38 contribute to the cumulative effect of the

doubling pattern.

Ackerman also draws attention to an unusual reduplication of the plot, when Joseph imprisons

his brothers (42:17), forcing them "to relive two separate experiences from the past: his

imprisonment by Potiphar, and his being cast into the pit by his brothers." Like him they are

falsely accused and face death or slavery. Then the brothers undergo a virtual re-enactment of

their crime: "As they return to their father minus a brother and with silver in their sack, hear

their father's renewed anguish, and bring the second son of Rachel into Egypt, they are forced

to relive painful scenes from the past that bring their guilt to the surface." Ackerman also

notices that "the brothers' experience is the chronological reverse of the earlier plot: first they

suffer what had happened to Joseph during and after the crime; then they relive the crime."

Finally the brothers have an opportunity to reduplicate their crime in a different way. When

the brothers return after the silver cup has been found in Benjamin's sack, rather than reliving

their old crime, they have an opportunity to commit a new one: "The plot doubling has

structured events so that history can repeat itself and they can again be rid of the favoured

son," if they seize the opportunity to abandon Benjamin (44:17).[66] Together the instances of

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[65] *NRSV* weakens the impact by varying the translation of בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ: "her widow's garments" (v.14) and "the garments of her widowhood" (v.19).
[66] Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," 90, 93, 94.

doubling and plot duplication are shaping the reader's attitude to the text which is being read or re-read.[67]

Although considerable attention has been given to the role of dreams in the Joseph narrative hitherto their contribution to our understanding of Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme* has been ignored. This neglect may seem strange considering the fact that most scholars agree with the general conception of symbolic dreams in ancient Near Eastern and biblical thought, "as forms of predication [*sic*] hinting at the dreamer's future or destiny,"[68] and have largely taken for granted that Joseph's dreams and those of the baker, cupbearer and Pharaoh are proleptic and in various ways anticipate the future.[69] An examination of Genesis 37-50 confirms that the narrative has carefully and deliberately been constructed to confirm that all the dreams which are described in detail refer to the future. Jacob and Joseph's brothers appear to assume automatically that Joseph's dreams refer to some future position of power: "Are you indeed to reign over us?" (37:8), "Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" (37:10). To corroborate this emphasis on the future the four dreams Joseph interprets are given a precise future time frame. The dreams of the cupbearer and the baker will come to pass in three days (40:12-13, 18-19) while Pharaoh's dreams are given a time frame of seven years each (41:29-30). Joseph assures Pharaoh: "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do" (41:25). In case the message is overlooked, Joseph repeats it: "God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do" (41:28); and he adds, "the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about" (41:32). Here Joseph emphasizes not only God's role but the fact that the events recorded in the dreams will happen in the future. As further confirmation the events come swiftly to pass in the stated time (40:20-22; 41:47, 53-54). The location of the dream sequences in relation to

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[67] The three uses of שׁחה in chapter 37 (7, 9, 10) are duplicated by the three later uses when his brothers bow to Joseph in Egypt (42:6; 43:26, 28).

[68] Meira Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma: Memory and Resolution," in *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 95. See also Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis,* JSOTSup 288 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

[69] Wénin, "Le temps dans l'histoire de Joseph," 37-38.

chapter 38 is also worth noting. The first dreams are described in chapter 37, the chapter immediately preceding chapter 38, while (after the requisite account of the events leading to Joseph's imprisonment in chapter 39) the other dreams follow directly in chapters 40-41. Chapter 38 is therefore surrounded by chapters which emphasise the present anticipation of future events. The readers of chapter 38 are being skilfully sensitized to the possibility that current stories foreshadow the future. It offers further confirmation that the narrator wished the reader to view chapter 38 as "the Joseph story in a nutshell."[70]

Tamar and Joseph Compared

Understanding Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme* of the Joseph narrative highlights the startling fact that it is Tamar, not Judah, who is clearly Joseph's *alter ego*. This comparison can be viewed at two levels: the elements of the plot and the characteristics Tamar and Joseph exhibit.

As the outline of the *mise-en-abyme* has already demonstrated both Tamar and Joseph are members of discordant families and they are surrounded by duplicitous people.[71] A wrong involving deceit is committed against them which endangers their position and even their life and results in their separation from home. They are subject to false accusations concerning sexual impropriety (38:24; 39:14, 17). Both are imprisoned in different ways: Joseph is confined to a pit at Dothan and spends at least two years (40:4; 41:1) in prison in Egypt; Tamar is imprisoned in her widowhood for an indefinite period of time, וַיִּרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים (38:12).[72] It is no coincidence that Tamar has been described as the first 'agunah (literally: chained woman) in Israelite history.[73] The link between levirate marriage and being chained or locked up is emphasised when Naomi uses the verb עגן in a similar context: she asks her widowed

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[70] Peter F. Lockwood, "Tamar's Place in the Joseph Cycle," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 26 (1992): 37.

[71] In Joseph's case his brothers and Potiphar's wife; in Tamar's case Onan and Judah.

[72] Referring to Judah, Wénin notes ("La ruse de Tamar," 277) "il l'enferme dans son veuvage": "he locks her up in her widowhood."

[73] Rachel E. Adelman, *The Female Ruse: Women's Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 73. An 'agunah is a woman who is not free to remarry because her husband is missing or unwilling to give her a divorce. The term also applies to a levirate widow. The topic is treated at length in halakhic literature. The woman is considered to be chained to her marriage.

daughters-in-law would they shut themselves up (תֵּעָגֵנָה) while they waited for Naomi's potential sons to grow up to marry them (Ruth 1:13).

Both are condemned to death, apparently without due process, and in each case their sentence is commuted or cancelled. They both suffer three major setbacks: Tamar's first husband dies; her second husband avoids fathering a child with her and subsequently dies, and later she is sentenced to death by Judah. After initially being condemned to death, Joseph is sold into slavery and finally is imprisoned on a trumped-up charge.[74] Both seize opportunities to turn the tables on their oppressors by deceiving those who deceived them. Eventually their identity is revealed and their wrong-doers are compelled to admit their misconduct towards them. They are restored to their families in a new relationship. Ultimately both Tamar and Joseph are responsible for the survival of their family and clan. Bosworth summarises their role: "Tamar and Joseph appear, therefore, as parallel characters in their response to the wrongs they suffer and the successful outcome of their machinations."[75]

Tamar and Joseph are not only similar in what they do but also in how they act and the characteristics they exhibit. These traits can be divided into three: their *modus operandi*, their moral qualities, and their ability to grow and adapt which facilitates their survival and the survival of others.

Both Tamar and Joseph are noted for their swift, decisive action and their ability to read and control situations. Once Tamar realises she is being duped by Judah, her rapid response to her situation is revealed in a flurry of verbs, five in verse 14 and four in verse 19. Coats notes a similar speed in Joseph's reaction when he appears before Pharaoh having languished in prison for two years after the cupbearer had failed to intercede on his behalf: "He makes no recrimination against the man who forgot his request. Rather he moves directly to the task at

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[74] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 483.
[75] Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 47.

hand, interprets the Pharaoh's dreams, advises him about procedure, and rises to an office of power."[76]

Through bitter experience they have learned not to trust people and use their knowledge of those who have betrayed them to further their plans. Tamar correctly assumes that given a suitable opportunity Judah will look for sex while Joseph uses his knowledge of his brothers and their family background to structure his plot. Tamar's knowledge of Judah extends to more than the initial encounter. She knows his promise to pay for her services is worthless; he has already reneged on his promise to give her to his son Shelah.[77] She therefore requires material proof of his pledge, which she will use later to such good effect (38:25).

The actions of both may not be entirely free from self-interest. By bearing a son Tamar has gained financial security and the status of a *materfamilias*, while Joseph has amassed a considerable fortune, is second only to the Pharaoh (41:40) and sees his dream of his brothers bowing before him become a reality (42:6). Bosworth agrees that, like Tamar's deception, Joseph's actions may not be a matter of "selfless charity."[78]

Meir Sternberg's apt description of Joseph as a stage-manager who implements a "covert and well-planned scenario" applies to both.[79] With consummate skill Tamar plans her encounter with Judah, choosing the location, the time and her dress.[80] She then negotiates cleverly and carefully until she has achieved both her ends: a sexual encounter with Judah and evidence of his identity. Similarly Joseph carefully master-minds the conditions under which he and his

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[76] George W. Coats, "The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," *CBQ* 35 (1973): 289.

[77] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible,* 39.

[78] Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 66-67.

[79] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading,* ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 294.

[80] If Tamar is a stage-manager she is also an actress, choosing her role, costume and manner of speaking. Joseph also acts when he pretends to be a stranger during his initial encounters in Egypt with his brothers.

brothers meet in Egypt and the events which follow.[81] Both use objects to bring their plans to

fruition: Tamar the pledge items (38:25) and Joseph his silver goblet (44:2).[82]

Tamar and Joseph are depicted as people of principle who resort to justified trickery to right

the wrongs they suffer.[83] Any misgivings which may be raised about the deceptions they

perpetrated can be dismissed. Tamar's behaviour was necessitated by Judah's actions towards

her.[84] Her deception is explicitly approved by the narrator, who makes his approbation

apparent through the careful explanation of the background to Tamar's deception, Judah's

declaration of her righteousness (38:26) and the divine blessing implicit in the birth of two

sons.[85] Likewise Joseph's behaviour may have been imperfect or unworthy but his trials are

wholly disproportionate to his misdeeds and he does not deserve the ordeals he suffered. [86]

His unwillingness to compromise his moral standards and his sense of duty to his superiors,[87]

which are evident in chapter 39, are commended by the narrator. No sooner is Joseph

committed to prison (39:20) than in the immediately following verse (39:21) the LORD'S

approval is manifest: "But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave

him favour in the sight of the chief jailer." Tamar and Joseph exhibit the same thirst for truth

and justice. Tamar is not motivated primarily by a craving for vengeance but by her desire to

open Judah's eyes to the truth and to force him to recognise openly what he had hidden by

flouting the rights of the widow and her late husband.[88] Similarly Joseph plays skilfully with

dissimulation and lies to achieve "truth and life."[89] Their sexual integrity is also implicitly

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[81] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 178.
[82] Furman, "His Story versus Her Story," 147.
[83] Bosworth, *Story within a Story,* 47.
[84] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation*, 56n57.
[85] Bekins, "Tamar and Joseph in Genesis 38 and 39," 394.
[86] Meira Polliack, "Joseph and his Dreamscapes: From Trauma to Discovery," in *Discourse, Dialogue, and Debate in the Bible: Essays in Honour of Frank H. Polak,* ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 146n16.
[87] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 483.
[88] Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar," 275: "Bref, avec sa ruse, Tamar ne cherchait pas à duper Juda pour se venger de lui. Elle voulait l'amener à ouvrir les yeux sur sa vérité et à reconnaître au grand jour ce qu'il avait caché en bafouant le droit de la veuve et de son défunt mari."
[89] André Wénin, "L'aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l'histoire de Joseph," *RB* 111 (2004): 20: "La stratégie de dissimulation de Joseph pourrait bien être de la même nature que celle de Tamar: il prend

contrasted to the lax ways of Judah and Potiphar's wife, when Tamar and Joseph are paralleled as the faithful spouses: Tamar in her steadfast determination to bear a child for her dead husband while Joseph's name is linked to that of no woman other than his wife Asenath (41:45, 50; 46:20).

The final area of comparison between Tamar and Joseph is their ability to grow and adapt in a way which facilitates their survival and the survival of others. At the beginning of their respective stories Tamar is a compliant wife submissive to her father-in-law's dictates while Joseph is a "bratty talebearer."[90] As a result of the trials imposed upon them and by the use of their innate intelligence, tenacity and resilience in the face of adversity, Tamar eventually assumes a matriarchal role in the family and Joseph becomes a skilled administrator (41:53-57; 47:20-26) and an enigmatic collaborator with God (41:16; 45:5).

In the process of their development the balance of power shifts in their relationships with their families. Tamar, once the underdog,[91] now appears to have won a new independence and the respect of her father-in-law (38:26). An indication of that change may be seen in the statement that "he did not lie with her again." It is unclear whether that is Judah's decision or Tamar's but if it is Judah's it may be significant that the only means at Judah's disposal is now one of omission rather than commission. He can no longer bend her to his will. In Joseph's case his father and brothers are now dependent on him and they will behave accordingly, lest they jeopardise the well-being of themselves or their families. Their concern that Joseph might still bear a grudge against them (50:15) indicates this new reality. Other indications of the changed relationship are evident in 45:22. Joseph now clothes the brothers who once stripped him. Previously Joseph had secretly arranged for money to be placed in his brothers' sacks; now he openly gives three hundred pieces of silver to Benjamin.[92] A final interesting indication of a

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le risque de jouer habilement avec la dissimulation et le mensonge pour rendre ses chances à la vérité et à la vie."
[90] Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 496.
[91] Bekins, "Tamar and Joseph in Genesis 38 and 39*,"* 392.
[92] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 586.

change in the balance of power is the Hebrew verb which Joseph uses in 45:11 and 50:21. In both instances he assures his brothers he will provide for them and their families, using the verb כול in the pilpel.[93] The derivation of the verb is connected with 'taking in' or 'holding' and is properly used of a pot. There may be a subtle suggestion that Joseph is simultaneously both nourishing and controlling his family.

Tamar and Joseph are survivors themselves - they have survived domestic abuse (38:9), sale into slavery (37:28), exile (37:28, 36), imprisonment (39:20), threat of murder (37:20) and a sentence of quasi-judicial execution (38:24) – and they ensure the survival of their families. They are the ones who take the necessary steps to preserve the line. Explicitly or implicitly they function as "the links between the promise of God and the fulfilment of God's promise."[94] Tamar does all in her power to ensure the continuity of the patriarchal family in accordance with the requirements of the levirate law[95] and in doing so she proves a true תמר, a date-palm,[96] a harbinger of fertility and prosperity sustaining and securing the next generation. Joseph has equally done all he can "to preserve life" (45:5), by making possible his family's survival of the famine through relocating them in Egypt, where they "were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" (Gen 47:27).

Implications

The realisation that Tamar and Joseph have been deliberately juxtaposed as parallel characters[97] has significant implications for our understanding of chapter 38 and for our approach to the character of Tamar. Chapter 38 is now confirmed as a text which has been deliberately, not accidentally, inserted into the Joseph narrative, to serve as a *mise-en-abyme*

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[93] N. Avigad, "The Contribution of Hebrew Seals to an Understanding of Israelite Religion and Society," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 196.

[94] Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location," 20.8.

[95] Nguyen Chi, "La voix narrative," 126: "Quant à Tamar, elle est vue comme un personnage positif cherchant par tous les moyens à assurer la continuité de la famille patriarcale selon l'exigence même de la loi du lévirat."

[96] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 434; Bird, "Harlot as Heroine," 134n11. The botanical name is *Phoenix dactylifera.*

[97] Bosworth, *Story within a Story,* 47.

which focuses and clarifies the action of the main narrative. Secondly, it changes readers'

attitude to Tamar. She now emerges from under Judah's shadow as a significant, rather than a

peripheral, character in her own right. In spite of the tensions between Judah and Joseph

which may prefigure later inter-tribal rivalries the fact remains that Joseph is the pre-eminent

character and primary focus of a narrative which occupies 14 of the 50 chapters of Genesis. No

other character, including even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the subject of such a sustained

treatment. As Joseph's *alter ego* Tamar occupies a very changed position in the pantheon of

female figures in Genesis and indeed in the Hebrew Bible. The sheer weight of the parallels

already outlined in this chapter cannot be gainsaid. In a subtle and sophisticated manner the

narrator dares to elevate a female character to the same height as a male hero and implicitly

approves her role in the safeguarding of the future of Israel.

Reciprocity

The Mirror in the Text is a classic study in which Dällenbach provides the first systematic

analysis of the *mise-en-abyme* and its literary and artistic applications from Van Eyck and

Velázquez to Gide, Beckett and the *nouveau roman*. Dällenbach comments on Velázquez'

painting *Las Meninas*, which is a well-known example of "a painting within a painting." It

depicts the Infanta Margarita of Spain, accompanied by her maids of honour (las meninas)

visiting the artist's studio, while, reflected in a mirror on the back wall of the studio, the king

and queen are looking on. By using the device of the painting (or mirror) within a painting the

infanta and the artist are shown looking out, while the royal couple look in. Dällenbach

observes that *"*by showing the people the painter is looking at, and also, by the use of the

mirror, the people who are looking at him, Velasquez's painting achieves a reciprocity of

contemplation that creates an oscillation between the interior and the exterior, making the

image 'come out of the frame', while inviting the visitors to enter the picture."[98] The aspect of

Dällenbach's comments which is relevant to this study is the notion of reciprocity, which

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[98] Dällenbach, *Mirror in the Text,* 11.

implies that something is given by each party to the other. Hitherto when the concept of *mise-en-abyme* has been applied to biblical texts the main focus has been on how the smaller text mirrors and prefigures the larger one, as Genesis 38:1-26 does the Joseph narrative as a whole. I now propose that this can be a two-way process. While the smaller text illuminates the key themes and characters of the larger one, the larger text can also cast light on the key themes and characters of the smaller one.

Implicit in this understanding of the process is the assumption that biblical texts were written to be read and to be re-read. For ritual or legal purposes it is probable that texts were read or heard not just once but repeatedly and that many texts were learned by heart. Under those circumstances it can be taken for granted that readers or hearers, who had already discovered during an initial reading or hearing how Genesis 38 prefigured 37-50, would bring that understanding to subsequent readings of the text. A comparable example can be taken from seeing again a film one has already seen. A second viewing of a good film gives the viewer the opportunity to discover new and subtle facets of the film which may have been ignored or not noticed the first time when the primary focus was on following the main events of the plot.

The perceptive reader, having observed on the first reading the parallels between Tamar and Joseph and having noted the additional information the longer text provides about Joseph, can now speculate whether some of those additional aspects are also true of Tamar. The lens of the larger text can now be brought to bear on the shorter, revealing those details which are implicit or latent in the text and which provoke new questions and produce fresh insights into Tamar and her situation. This may involve what David Carr terms the risky enterprise of "reading into the gap." It is risky because it involves "suppositions about what might be in a biblical text, but is not."[99] Inevitably in the much shorter text of Genesis 38:1-26 there are many gaps but these can be partially filled when Tamar's life is examined in the light of the

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[99] David M. Carr, "Reading into the Gap: Refractions of Trauma in Israelite Prophecy," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts,* ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, AIL (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 296.

four main roles her *alter ego* Joseph assumes: family man, worker and administrator, victim of trauma, and man of God.[100] In some instances there will be tangible information to build on; in others it will involve "reading into the gap."

The Family Woman

As has already been noted the story of both Tamar and Joseph begins against the backdrop of family relationships. Joseph's relationships form the frame in which to view Tamar's. Joseph's relationships vary both in kind and quality. The special relationship Joseph enjoys with his father Jacob is the starting point of the story and when he encounters his brothers in Egypt his primary concern is to ascertain the well-being of Jacob (43:7). When he finally reveals himself to his brothers, his first words are: "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" (45:3). After Jacob, the next person in his affections is his brother Benjamin, on whom he lavishes particular fondness and largesse (45:14, 22). It may be speculated that Joseph's efforts to ensure Benjamin's arrival in Egypt are not only to confirm his brothers' change of heart but to secure Benjamin's safety lest his life also be in danger. Joseph's sons are dear to him in their own right but their names also reflect the special role they play in Joseph's desire to exorcise the past and to celebrate his current success (41:51-52). Joseph's troubled relationships with his older brothers bookend the narrative (37:4; 50:15-21) and provide the narrative thread linking much of the story.

Tamar plays even more roles in her family than Joseph does in his. In order of reference they are daughter-in-law (38:6), wife (38:6), widow (38:7), sister-in-law (38:8), levirate wife (38:9), daughter (38:11) and expectant mother (38:24-25).[101] It is noteworthy that of these roles the only ones mentioned explicitly are wife (38:6, 8, 9, 14), daughter-in-law (38:11, 16, 24) and widow (38:11),[102] but even these are not all that they seem.

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[100] Tamar's role as "woman of God" will be discussed in Chapter 5: pages 153-57.
[101] Tamar's identity as a widow and sister-in-law has been discussed in chapter 2.
[102] There are two other references to the garments of her widowhood (38:14, 19).

Verse 6 describes how Judah chose Tamar as a wife for his son. In verses 8 and 9 Judah

instructs Onan to act as *levir* to his brother's wife and in verse 14 Tamar realises that "Shelah

was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage" (לְאִשָּׁה). At no time is there a

clear indication of the relationship between Er and Tamar. She is Judah's choice, not Er's. It is

unclear whether Tamar – or Er - had any say in the matter. There is an interesting parallel with

Joseph's marriage (41:45): Pharaoh, who seems to be acting almost *in loco parentis,* gives

Joseph "Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife" (לְאִשָּׁה). As far as agency is

concerned, in respect to her marriage Tamar appears to take no initiative and is always the

object of the actions of others: it is Judah who takes her as a wife for his son (38:6). She is

equally the object of Onan's levirate duty: וְיַבֵּם אֹתָהּ (38:8). When she is not the object, both

grammatically and narratively, of a man's attentions, Tamar is the subject of a niphal verb: נִתְּנָה

(38:14). This passivity in the light of male demands throws into relief her decisive action when

she wishes to conceive a child. It is equally unclear whether she has found marriage (or its

substitutes) in any way sexually fulfilling. The text is silent about her relationship with Er and

her experiences with Onan and Judah were probably both unsatisfactory and unsatisfying.[103]

One may suspect that in neither instance is there any concern for her pleasure. The priority

for both Onan and Judah is their own agenda: Onan to avoid begetting a son for his brother

and Judah to enjoy a brief encounter with a prostitute.

Tamar's second important relationship is that of daughter-in-law. The terms for כלה (daughter-

in-law) and חם (father-in-law) are rarely used in Genesis. חם occurs only in chapter 38 (verses

13 and 25)[104] while כלה appears only four times: three times with reference to Tamar (38:11,

16, 24) and once with reference to Sarai, wife of Abram (11:31). The references to Tamar's

father-in-law form an *inclusio* bracketing the main encounter between Tamar and Judah and

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[103] Thomas Hieke suggests Er exploited Tamar's sexuality ("Genealogy as a Means of Historical
Representation in the Torah and the Role of Women in the Genealogical System," in *Torah*, ed. Irmtraud
Fischer and Mercedes Navarro Puerto with Andrea Taschl-Erber, BW 1.1 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical
Literature, 2011], 185).
[104] The only other references in the HB are to the priest Eli (1 Sam 4:19, 21).

the consequences of that encounter (38:13, 25). On both occasions the references occur when

Tamar is on the point of embarking on a decisive move: waylaying Judah at the city gate and

identifying the father of her unborn child.[105] The first time Tamar is described as daughter-in-

law is when Judah instructs her to return to her father's house (38:11). The second reference

makes clear that Judah did not recognise that Tamar was his daughter-in-law when he

propositions her at the road side (38:16). The final reference is put in the mouth of the

anonymous informant who reveals Tamar's pregnancy to Judah: "Your daughter-in-law Tamar

has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom" (38:24).

The name of Joseph's father-in-law - Potiphera, priest of On (41:45, 50; 46:20) – is known but

nothing is revealed of their relationship, if any. This prompts questions about Tamar's

relationship with Judah. In Judah's eyes, Tamar is both a failure and a threat. The pattern of

behaviour Judah expects from a wife is based on his own wife's response to him, as described

by Johanna Bos: "He sees, he takes, he impregnates. His wife, in proper response, conceives,

gives birth, and names."[106] Tamar has conspicuously failed to conceive by either husband and

he blames her for their deaths as well. It is not necessarily suggested that Judah thinks Tamar

has murdered Er and Onan but he certainly believes she has brought them bad luck. Judah has

no compunction about sending her back to her father's house. Later in the chapter he has

even less compunction about sentencing her to death without due process.

The coolness of the relationship between Judah and Tamar is reflected in the fact that only

three conversations are recorded between them and even the word conversation is a

misnomer. In the first (38:11) Judah instructs Tamar to return to her father's house but her

reply, if any, is not recorded. The second conversation is the only real one in the sense that

Tamar and Judah speak to each other but as it is a conversation between a prostitute and her

client it casts no light on their daughter-in-law/father-in-law relationship. On the final

occasion, as has been noted already, when Tamar (38:25) and Judah speak (38:26) it is unclear

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[105] Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 47.
[106] Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 44.

whether they are in each other's presence. Equally it is unclear what daily contact a father-in-law and daughter-in-law would have and whether Tamar's correct assumptions about how Judah would react when he meets a prostitute is based on her observation of Judah's character or on her general knowledge of the ways of men or both.

Tamar has two parents-in-law but Tamar's relationship with her colourless mother-in-law appears non-existent. Judah's wife does not have a name although Jubilees and the Testament of Judah take Bat-Shua to be her name on the basis of comparison with the name of Bathsheba.[107] She is defined by her male relationships: "wife of Judah, Shua's daughter" (38:12). Later rabbinic works, for example, Bereshit Rabbati, suggest that it was Shua's daughter, rather than Judah, who was reluctant to marry Shelah to Tamar.[108] This could be a reasonable response by a mother anxious to protect her youngest and only surviving son but 38:11 implies that it was Judah's idea. If it were his wife's idea originally, Judah certainly endorses it. His actions after his wife's death suggest that it was he rather than she who was the driving force in their marriage and on balance it seems probable that it was Judah, rather than his wife, who wished to banish Tamar.

Nothing is known of Tamar's relationship with her birth family. It is possible that they were not enthusiastic about her return home, especially as she returns under a cloud, and, as mentioned in Chapter 2, she does not fit into either of the roles traditionally allowed to Israelite women: "She is either an unmarried virgin in her father's home or she is a faithful, child-producing wife in her husband's or husband's family's home."[109] Tamar's life seems remarkable for its loneliness. None of her relationships seem characterized by love or affection and the situation with her birth family is unclear. Nehama Aschkenasy observes that "We do not hear her father pleading on her behalf either when she is denied Shelah, or when she is

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[107] Martha Himmelfarb, "R. Moses the Preacher and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *AJSR* 9 (1984): 66n24.
[108] Himmelfarb, "R. Moses the Preacher," 67.
[109] Niditch, "Wronged Woman Righted," 145.

sentenced to die."[110] Tamar's willingness to undertake such a desperate measure to conceive a child may not only reflect Tamar's fidelity to the levirate code but her desperation to leave her family home where a brother's wife may now be ruling the roost or where her ambivalent status means she is no longer welcome. The extraordinary measures she took to have a child "strongly indicate her bleak future."[111]

Friends or other relations are also conspicuous by their absence.[112] Unlike Joseph, Tamar doesn't have the opportunity to enjoy the approval of employers or superiors (39:4, 22-23; 41:39, 55). The only evidence for any personal friend or ally is the anonymous source who tips her off about Judah's departure for Timnah but anonymous sources can be double-edged swords. Another anonymous source informs Judah of Tamar's pregnancy and nearly precipitates Tamar's death. The grammatical pattern and the hophal imperfect of נגד is the same in both instances: וַיֻּגַּד לְתָמָר (38:13) and וַיֻּגַּד לִיהוּדָה (38:24). There is no clue as to the identity of the friend (or foe), whether they are male or female, relative, friend, servant or neighbour, acquaintance or even stranger. It is not even definite that the person who informed Tamar of Judah's whereabouts did so out of kindness. The information rouses Tamar to take action which is ultimately fruitful for her, but the initial information could also have taken the form of malicious tittle-tattle contrasting the freedom the widowed Judah enjoys in comparison to Tamar's restricted circumstances.

This survey of Tamar's family relationships paints a bleak picture. While the brevity of chapter 38 may be a factor and allowance may be made for the different expectations of Tamar's time and place, nonetheless any note of warmth or affection is conspicuous by its absence. Despite the vicissitudes of Joseph's relationship with his family, his meeting with Benjamin is described

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[110] Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 91.

[111] Elizabeth Ellen Ostring, *Be a Blessing: The Theology of Work in the Narrative of Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 219.

[112] Aschkenasy (*Woman at the Window,* 91) believes Tamar does not confide in women friends as "they cannot be trusted because they are so powerless." The reverse may, in fact, be true. Because they are powerless they may have fellow-feeling for Tamar, but in any event they are conspicuous by their absence from the text.

briefly but in affecting terms: "Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck" (45:14). There is nothing to parallel this affectionate scene for Tamar. It will be in her role as mother, which will be examined in Chapter 4, that Tamar may ultimately find her greatest fulfilment.

The Business Woman

When viewed through the lens of Joseph's success as a manager and administrator in Egypt it can be seen that Tamar is a business woman *manquée.* She displays many of the qualities necessary for success in public or business life: foresight, decisiveness, quick thinking, courage, and the ability to plan, to negotiate, and to assess one's opponents and competitors.

Like Tamar, initially Joseph seemed an unlikely subject to become a success at his profession. He was an indulged, immature boy, whose main work experience was shepherding flocks in a subordinate role to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (37:2). He alienated his colleagues, who were also his brothers, by his insensitive boasting of his dreams (37: 6, 9) and by ostentatiously wearing a contentious gift in an inappropriate location (37:3-4, 23). Ironically his success begins after he is sold into slavery. The narrator attributes to God the favour Joseph found with his Egyptian master, the chief jailer and Pharaoh (39:2, 21; 41:39). Whatever the role God played in Joseph's transformation it enabled him to earn the confidence of his superiors who quickly placed him in positions of trust (39:4, 22; 41:41). Joseph's skills and qualities are shown to the full as Pharaoh's administrator. His quick thinking and planning abilities are demonstrated in his scheme to tackle the impending famine (41:34-35), his foresight in buying up the food in times of plenty (41:48-49), and his organisational powers in establishing a network of overseers (41:34) and in gathering, storing and later selling the stored grain to national and international buyers (41:56-57). His negotiation skills and his knowledge of his opponents have already been noted in regard to his brothers.[113] The message he sends his

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[113] Joseph's ruthlessness or prescience, depending on one's viewpoint, which is displayed in his purchase of the land for Pharaoh and the enslavement of the majority of the people (47:20-21) may be ignored as

father reveals the measure of his success: "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt" (45:9).

Given different circumstances and a different culture there is no reason to believe that Tamar could not be equally successful. Like Joseph Tamar seems initially an unlikely candidate to have a successful career. She appears timid and compliant, content or at least resigned to have others make decisions for her: her father's agreement to her marriage and Judah's insistence that she become Onan's levirate wife and after his death return to her father's house. If being sold into slavery triggered Joseph's metamorphosis the realisation that Judah had no intention of giving her to Shelah in marriage triggered Tamar's (38:14). Her energy and decision as she springs into action are carefully noted by the narrator even before her motivation is revealed (38:14). Her acumen is evident in the speed with which she conceives her plan and quickly implements the details. The remarkable change is underlined by the pointed repetition of the verb ישב. The verb is used first by Judah when he tells Tamar to remain, sit, as a widow in her father's house (38:11); on the second occasion, a mere four verses later, it describes Tamar sitting at the entrance to Enaim waiting for Judah's appearance so that she can put her plan into action (38:14).

Joseph's self-belief as a successful administrator is surely reflected in the confidence Pharaoh places in him. When the years of famine begin, Joseph does not consult Pharaoh for advice; rather the reverse happens: Pharaoh cedes pre-eminence to him, when he instructs all the Egyptians, "'Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.'" (41:55). Similarly Tamar's new found self-belief as she waits at the gate is striking. She appears to have devised the plan unaided. Apart from the reference to the anonymous source she acts alone and on her own initiative. While she has conceived a plan, she cannot predict the details of the encounter, but she clearly believes that she can handle any development. Her exchanges with Judah confirm that she was right. She is resolved to take on the formidable figure of her father-in-law whose actions and

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47:13-26 is probably a secondary unit which preserves an independent aetiology. See Friedemann W. Golka, "The Aetiologies in the Old Testament: Part 1," *VT* 26 (1976): 416.

decisions have hitherto controlled all around him. Judah has chosen his own wife and that of his son, compelled his second son to be a *levir*, has apparently taken decisions on behalf of his third son by denying Shelah the opportunity to be a *levir*, and has forced Tamar to return to her father's house. In all instances Judah brooks no opposition. Judah is reported speaking on six different occasions in the chapter. In all but the last, when he has been defeated by Tamar, he begins with an imperative. His sole recorded conversation with Onan consists of three imperatives: בֹּא, וְיַבֵּם, וְהָקֵם. He instructs Tamar to remain a widow, שְׁבִי (38:11) and his opening gambit at the city gate is an abrupt command: הָבָה (38:16). Judah's response to Hirah's failure to find the prostitute begins with a reported command ("Let her keep") and finally he orders Tamar's death in two brusque imperatives: הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשָּׂרֵף. Tamar takes on this intimidating man as an equal and ends, by his own admission, as his moral superior (38:26).[114]

The risks Joseph or indeed any administrator or business person takes pale into insignificance beside those tackled by Tamar. She has rightly been recognised as a model of courage in the face of enormous odds,[115] a person who risked death and dishonour.[116] The multiple risks she ran varied from the physical risks facing an unaccompanied woman who frequented an area which was potentially dangerous at night[117] and the penalties facing those convicted of adultery (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22),[118] or incest (Lev 18:10; 20:12), to the response of an irate Judah, already noted for his disproportionate reactions (38:11). In the face of the death

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[114] Many have interpreted Tamar's receipt of the pledged items, signet, cord and staff, as "a symbolic transfer of personal power" from Judah to her. See Nathan E. Rutenbeck, "A Liberating Look at Tamar in Genesis 38," in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives: Volume 2,* ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 4.

[115] Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 106. See also Jan William Tarlin, "Tamar's Veil: Ideology at the Entrance to Enaim," in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*. ed. George Aichele, JSOTSup 309 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 176.

[116] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 53.

[117] The text does not specify the time of day, but given the frequent association of prostitution with night time and in particular given the busy nature of a town entrance during the daytime, when Judah might be reluctant to be seen conversing with a prostitute and when it would be more difficult for Tamar to stand out amidst the moving crowd, it is highly probable that the encounter took place at night. See also Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, 107.

[118] Tamar is still considered a married woman as she waits for her *levir* to perform his duty.

penalty she takes the final risk of showing the pledged items, knowing that their presentation could have sealed her fate irrevocably. It was the courageous gamble of a desperate but astute woman.

Tamar's potential is plain to see. If circumstances were different Tamar could also have excelled like Joseph in a professional sphere. There may even be tacit hints of this in the narration. It is striking that where Tamar enjoys the greatest freedom and shows her true colours is at the city gate, the location of the pivotal meeting between Tamar and Judah. Tamar sees the reverse side of the city gate with its more secretive night time activities. The obverse side is the city gate by day when it is the focus not only of people in transit but is the hub of commercial and legal activity. The role of Israelite women in the commercial life of the city gate has been much debated. Moshe Aberbach believes that Israelite women were primary producers of goods such as textiles but that these products would have been marketed by male merchants, as women would not dream of engaging in "the hurlyburly business of the marketplace."[119] On the contrary there is evidence that אשת־חיל (Prov 31:10), for instance, was personally involved in selling her goods at the gate (31:24).[120] Her involvement may be implicitly acknowledged by the possibly unconscious link made by the redactor of Proverbs, when the reference to the woman's selling comes immediately after the allusion to her husband's presence at the city gate (Prov 31:23). Tamar, who is another woman of valour and worth, could also have established a successful career if circumstances had been different, but in light of her commitment to rearing her children, probably without a husband's support, and of the clan's departure to Egypt (46:12), this seems improbable.

Survivor of Trauma

As far back as 1987 Sternberg listed the series of traumatic experiences which Joseph had undergone: "attempted murder, enslavement, seduction followed by the charge of attempted

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[119] Moshe Aberbach, *Labor, Crafts and Commerce in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 23.
[120] Rosalie Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh, "Women at the City Gate" (MPhil thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013), 13-14.

rape and three years in jail."[121] In recent times there has been increased interest in using trauma theory to explore disturbing stories in the Bible, including aspects of the Joseph narrative.[122] The work of Meira Polliack, in particular, is useful in explaining how Joseph's behaviour in chapters 42-45 reflects the symptoms of distress and patterns of behaviour typical of traumatized people.[123]

The symptoms experienced by sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) include flashbacks and nightmares. Polliack has been struck, as I have, by the ambiguity of the phrase used when Joseph first encounters his brothers in Egypt: "Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them" וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֵת הַחֲלֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם (42:9). It is unclear whether the dreams are the dreams recorded in chapter 37 or whether they allude to other dreams, or rather nightmares, he may have had about his brothers in which his traumatic experiences find their "primary unconscious outlet."[124]

According to Judith Herman, a seminal figure in the theory and treatment of trauma, "Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central focus of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life."[125]All three aspects are evident in Joseph's story. After the initial difficulties in Egypt Joseph experiences nine years of safety and stability in his new role with Pharaoh. The names he gives his sons reflect simultaneously his memories of his "hardship" (41:51) and "misfortunes" (41:52) and his desire to forget the trauma he has suffered: "God has made me forget." He has not totally forgotten however and his trauma

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[121] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical* Narrative, 288.

[122] Carr, "Reading into the Gap," 295-308; David G. Garber Jr.,"Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies," *CurBR* 14 (2015): 24-44; Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 72-105; Polliack, "Joseph and His Dreamscapes," 136-59. It is worth noting the "provisional diagnosis" made by psychologist Aiton Birnbaum that Joseph's father suffered from chronic PTSD following Joseph's disappearance and apparent death. See "Jacob and Joseph: A Biblical Case Study of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 14 (2007): 77.

[123] Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 74.

[124] Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 69. Polliack (69n11) also speculates that the unique usage of לְ after חלם may accentuate the ambiguity of Joseph's references to these dreams.

[125] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 155.

resurfaces when he meets his brothers again.[126] The task of remembrance and mourning is reflected in Joseph's pointed reminders of what his brothers had done to him (45:4-5) and in his weeping (42:24; 43:30; 45:2) prior to revealing himself to his brothers, which at times is so uncontrollable that "the household of Pharaoh heard it." Joseph's tears are both an essential component of the process of remembrance[127] and also an expression of his long-postponed mourning for what had happened to him.[128] The unremarkable normality of his family life with Asenath and his sons (41:45, 50; 46:20) reflects the third stage of his recovery as he reconnects with ordinary life.

Two further insights gleaned from Herman's work illuminate two other aspects of Joseph's behaviour. She comments on how adults as well as children "feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form."[129] Joseph's insistence that his brothers relive his experience, as noted earlier by Ackerman, may well reflect that.[130] The second insight may give a new perspective on Joseph's attitude to God. Herman stresses that "In order to develop a full understanding of the trauma story, the survivor must … reconstruct a system of belief that makes sense of her undeserved suffering."[131] On two separate occasions immediately after Joseph refers to the harm he has experienced at the hands of his brothers (45:4; 50:20) he claims his sufferings were part of God's plan to preserve his people. Joseph's need to find an explanation for what he has suffered may be a contributory factor in his understanding of how God works.

Joseph's afflictions alert us to the need to examine Tamar's experience as a victim of trauma. Tamar's situation differs from Joseph in that the trauma she suffers occurs in two distinct

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[126] Polliack, "Joseph and his Dreamscapes," 143-44.

[127] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

[128] Polliack, "Joseph's Trauma," 88.

[129] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 39.

[130] In this regard it is striking how often commentators pass over almost in silence the full implication of Simeon's binding (42:24). The verb אסר is often used in these contexts with words for fetters or chains (e.g. Ps 149:8; Jer 40:1; 2 Kgs 25:7). Under the circumstances the chains are unnecessary as it seems unlikely that Simeon will run away. It is possible that Joseph is deliberately inflicting on Simeon the same feelings of being helpless and restrained that he himself experienced.

[131] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 178.

phases: first, the unexpected death of Er followed by abuse at the hands of Onan and his

sudden death, and second, being sentenced to death by burning. For Herman the significant

characteristic of a traumatic event is its power to inspire "helplessness and terror."[132] In

Tamar's world death including the death of young people would have been a familiar

occurrence but the deaths of Er and Onan appear of an entirely different order. The text does

not elaborate but the terseness of the two-word statements in each case hints at something of

the horror created: וַיְמִתֵהוּ יְהוָה (38:7) and וַיָּמֶת גַּם־אֹתוֹ (38:10). The unprecedented aspect of

these deaths is emphasised by the fact that Er and Onan are the first individuals in the Bible

killed by the LORD.[133] The horror is compounded because the deaths occur in quick succession.

Judah appears to allow little time to pass after Er's death before he instructs Onan to act as a

levir. In between the double deaths Tamar has been living in what has been termed "a climate

of domestic abuse."[134] One of the factors which increases the risk of PTSD is having little or no

social support after the event.[135] We have already seen that any support for Tamar is

conspicuous by its absence. There is no reference to Judah or her mother-in-law offering her

any word or sign of sympathy. This is in pointed contrast to the scene in the previous chapter

when Jacob's family are united in their efforts to console him on the death of Joseph: "All his

sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him" (37:35). Even Judah went through the ritual

period of mourning when his wife died (38:12). Instead it is probable that Tamar was living in

an atmosphere of silent suspicion and cold mistrust. In such circumstances Tamar's plight is

highly reminiscent of Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart's description of trauma as

"speechless terror."[136]

Despite a stable and successful background in Egypt we have seen how Joseph struggled to

come to terms with the trauma he endured. It may seem that it is impossible to pierce the

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[132] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.
[133] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 434.
[134] Rutenbeck, "Liberating Look at Tamar," 7.
[135] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, "Guidelines on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," NICE Clinical Guidelines 26*, 2005.
[136] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," *American Imago* 48 (1991): 442.

silence surrounding Tamar and read into the gaps to discover how she coped with her trauma. Again Herman offers two valuable opinions. The first principle of recovery, she believes, is the empowerment of the survivor. "She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery." It can be expected that the qualities Tamar subsequently showed in her encounter at Enaim and her fight for her life enabled Tamar to be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Secondly Herman contends, "Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation."[137] This second insight may be fruitfully explored in Tamar's case. Ironically Judah may have done Tamar a favour by sending her home to her father's house. In the picture painted earlier it has been assumed that Tamar may not have been welcomed back to her father's house, particularly when she no longer fits the expected categories of virgin or mother and wife. In considering her recovery from the trauma she suffered, it may well be that her father's house provided the beneficial opportunities for disclosure and supportive relationships which were necessary for her recuperation. Just as the benefits Joseph received from his quiet happiness with his wife and children are not described explicitly, so it may be that the loving care Tamar received in her family home is equally not portrayed, even though there is evidence for many shades of parental love in Genesis (22; 27). Great attention has been paid by scholars to the realisation concerning Shelah which triggers Tamar's leap into decisive action. Little or no attention has been paid to the family context which may have enabled Tamar to throw off the shackles of her compliant behaviour and of her traumatic experience, in order to take that leap.

There remains the issue of the second trauma Tamar suffered: her summary sentencing to a painful death. Tikva Frymer-Kensky notes how the power dynamics in the episode are accentuated by the very grammar of the verses which describe Tamar's sentencing and the initial stages of its execution; Judah speaks in imperatives, הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשָּׂרֵף (38:24), while Tamar's action is described with "a rare form in Hebrew grammar, the passive participle" –

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[137] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133.

מוּצֵאת, "she was being brought out" (38:25).[138] Are we to imagine her walking mutely to her execution in the grasp of her captors or is she being dragged out with force? The facile response to her situation might be to suggest that caring for her sons would diminish the effect of the second trauma and this may certainly be acknowledged as a factor, but again modern studies of trauma can provide wider answers. Some of the resilience factors that may reduce the risk of PTSD include: "learning to feel good about one's own actions in the face of danger; having a positive coping strategy or a way of getting through the bad event and learning from it; being able to act and respond effectively despite feeling fear."[139] These factors surely correlate with Tamar's courageous and well-planned actions in the face of danger and fear at both the city gate and at her trial by Judah. These factors together with the new hope offered by the birth of her sons must reduce the risk of a recurrence for Tamar. She can be truly described as a survivor, rather than a victim, of trauma and abuse.

Conclusion

The confirmation of Genesis 38:1-26 as a *mise-en-abyme* of the larger Joseph narrative reveals remarkable similarities between Tamar and Joseph as the leading characters in their respective stories. These similarities confer a new status on Tamar, which is unusually high for a female biblical character. A reciprocal understanding of the operation of a *mise-en-abyme* opens up new insights on Tamar as family woman, professional woman and survivor of trauma.

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[138] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 273.
[139] National Institute of Mental Health, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 2016.

Chapter 4

Coda (38:27-30) - Tamar: Dynastic Matriarch

Genesis 38:27-30 has frequently been viewed as an integral part of chapter 38, bringing the events of the story to a suitable conclusion with the births of Perez and Zerah. This chapter challenges that viewpoint. It will argue that the coda was added by other hands to support the claim that David and the Davidic line were descended from the patriarchs. It will do so by examining the evidence for separate authorship and then explain how the Davidic links are established, with the time of the Chronicler as a probable context for the connection. Finally it will evaluate the implications for our understanding of Tamar when she is viewed in her new role as a dynastic matriarch.

Evidence for an Independent Epilogue

Conventional scholarly wisdom tends to agrees with Van Seters' assertion that chapter 38 is "a closely integrated whole, and the genealogical and ethnological aspect cannot be viewed as in any way secondary." He goes so far as to claim that "it is in fact the ethnographic and genealogical concern that is primary, and the story is made to serve that purpose."[1] Arnold concurs with this viewpoint, when he states that the naming of the twins in the coda makes "the entire episode an etiological account of Perez and Zerah."[2]

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[1] Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 208.
[2] Arnold, *Genesis,* 329. See also Jürgen Ebach, *Genesis 37-50,* HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 150. Ebach believes that the genealogical note in the final section of the chapter is the goal of the entire narrative: "der nun folgende Schlussabschnitt nicht lediglich eine genealogische Notiz darstellt, sondern in gewisser Weise Ziel der Erzählung ist". *Contra* Ebach, see Ingeborg Löwisch, *Trauma Begets Genealogy: Gender and Memory in Chronicles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 94.

Van Seters and Arnold and those who agree with them appear to have right on their side.

Initially it is easy to understand why many have accepted these verses as an integral part of the

original story. The whole story has revolved around the theme of conceiving a child. Judah

instructs Onan to "raise up offspring for your brother" (v.8). Onan avoids doing so (v.9). Judah

prevents Tamar from conceiving by sending her back to her father's house (v.11). Verses 14-19

detail the steps Tamar takes to conceive a child and to ensure the child's acknowledgement by

its father. By verse 24 Tamar's pregnancy is revealed and in verse 26 Judah acknowledges his

paternity. The account of the births of Perez and Zerah appears a logical ending to the thrust of

the chapter. The fact that Tamar bears not one, but two sons, has been seen as a very

appropriate conclusion: the birth of two male children nicely balancing the two sons Judah

lost. The double birth has been interpreted as a suitable double blessing on Tamar from God as

recompense for her courageous fidelity to the levirate law and to her husband's family and

line.

It has also been argued that to have ended the account at verse 26 would not have been a

satisfactory conclusion.[3] The birth narrative is needed to complete the story and to reassure

the listener/reader that Tamar's pregnancy has come safely to term. Moreover וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד

לְדַעְתָּהּ (v. 26b) seems abrupt and unclear. Is the subject of the verb יָסַף Judah or Shelah? What

future relationship is envisaged for Tamar with either of them? These questions seem to be

partially answered by the last four verses, in that as mother of Perez and Zerah she now has a

place in Judah's family. A birth announcement is therefore indeed a natural conclusion to a

story which focuses on the necessity to observe the laws of levirate marriage and which traces

a brave woman's attempt to conceive a child by adhering to the tenets of that custom. The

last four verses appear to bring the story to an appropriate end. There is little doubt that the

story was originally completed by a birth account but this account, I believe, may have been

irretrievably lost when it was replaced by the current ending.

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[3] Van Seters, *Prologue to History,* 208.

Initial concerns are raised about the integrity of the coda when it is examined in conjunction

with 38:1-26, whose hallmarks include a subtle and painstaking selection and ordering of

detail, and a careful orchestration of the high points of the story, namely Tamar's encounter

with Judah at the city gate and her last-minute reprieve when Judah acknowledges his guilt.

By contrast the coda is a manifest anti-climax, diminishing the dramatic power of the earlier

story and straying from the central theme of levirate marriage. The thematic and stylistic

disjunction and poorly executed detail immediately raise suspicions that the coda in its final

form is from a different, subsequent, hand.[4] The reader is prepared for, and indeed expects, a

birth announcement, but the coda clearly lacks the careful precision of the first 26 verses,

where the narrator may not provide all the details we might like, but where the details that are

provided are meticulously plotted and placed. See, for example, verse 9, where it is carefully

established that Onan spills his seed before the reference to his intercourse with Tamar, so

that the reader knows the levirate relationship is doomed from the beginning. Clifford

commends the economy and skill used in the narrative of chapter 38, with "every part

contributing to the stunning conclusion."[5] The same cannot be said for the coda, which has

rightly been described as an epilogue.[6]

In the coda the attention is switched without warning or preparation to the midwife who

names the children[7] and gives the aetiological explanations. She is clearly a stock character

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[4] The passage of time implied by the fact that Tamar is now giving birth (38:27) is not in itself an
indication of different authorship. Tamar was three months pregnant when the news of her pregnancy
was revealed (38:24). Six months have therefore elapsed since the revelation of Judah's paternity
(38:24-26). כְּמִשְׁלֹשׁ חֳדָשִׁים (38:24) is the only explicit reference to time in a chapter which is conspicuous
by the vagueness or absence of any indications of time, e.g. 38:12. At least 20 years may be understood
to have passed since Judah departed from his brothers (38:1).
[5] Clifford, "Genesis 38," 523.
[6] Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar," 269.
[7] Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 18-50,* 453.
The manuscripts disagree about the gender – and therefore the identity - of the person who named the
children in verses 29 and 30. MT has וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ, "he called his name," presumably Judah. This has been
interpreted as a way for Judah to recognise them legally as his sons (Ebach, *Genesis 37-50*, 152-53)
although if that were the case one would have thought it would have been made clearer by the explicit
addition of Judah's name. SP and some Hebrew manuscripts have the feminine form of the verb, ותקרא
את שמו, "she called his name." Syr. and Tg. Ps.-J. also use the feminine form. LXX and V are theoretically
indeterminate as ἐκάλεσεν and *vocavit/appellavit*, can be either masculine or feminine. In practice LXX
makes it clear that the translator believes the subject of ἐκάλεσεν is the midwife by using the feminine

who has been clumsily introduced to provide specific information. In the event the aetiologies

are poorly devised.[8] In Genesis aetiologies for the name of a new-born child follow three

distinct patterns: the aetiologies are given by a parent (e.g. 35:18) or surrogate parent (30:6;

30:11), by God (17:19) or God's messenger (16:11), or are recorded by the narrator (10:25). It

is atypical for a midwife to provide an aetiology: this is the only occasion in the Bible where a

midwife interprets a child's name. As will be explained later the account of Perez's and Zerah's

births is loosely modelled on those of Jacob and Esau but the aetiologies in Genesis 38 are

feebly executed. There is an evident discrepancy between the spoken words and the narrative:

the implication that Perez had "burst" out of the womb is based purely on the midwife's words

and relates in no way to the manner of his birth as described in the passage. The same verb

יצא, which is used for the birth of both brothers (38:28-30), not just Perez's, has no inherent

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form of the two participles λαβοῦσα and λέγουσα in the preceding verse (38:28): ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ
τίκτειν αὐτὴν ὁ εἷς προεξήνεγκεν τὴν χεῖρα <u>λαβοῦσα</u> δὲ ἡ μαῖα ἔδησεν ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ κόκκινον
<u>λέγουσα</u> οὗτος ἐξελεύσεται πρότερος.

λαβοῦσα is merely translating the feminine verb,וַתִּקְשֹׁר, and the subject of λέγουσα, as Wevers
observes, is the midwife (*Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis,* 647).The feminine form in verse 39 is more
likely to refer to the midwife than to Tamar, as the midwife is the last recorded speaker. Hamilton
(*Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 453) also highlights the improbability of Tamar offering a commentary in the
midst of giving birth to twins. This improbability may be compounded by the fact that Tamar is
experiencing labour for the first time and labour with twins for good measure.

Most scholars translate the verb as "she named" or else translate the verb in the passive voice, for
example, "he was named/called" (Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 362; Arnold, *Genesis,* 325) or in the plural,
"they named/called" (Speiser, *Genesis,* 297; Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus,
Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* [London: Harvill, 1995], 186). Blachman is one of the few who retain
the masculine form, "he called" (*Transformation of Tamar,* 14). Logic seems to suggest that it is the
midwife who does the naming. Comparison with the naming of Esau and Jacob is unhelpful as the verb
קרא changes from plural וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו (25:25) to singular וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב (25:26), although this is
frequently interpreted as impersonal in both instances. See Chaim Rabin, "The Ancient Versions and the
Indefinite Subject," *Textus* 2 (1962): 62, and Abraham Tal, *Genesis*, BHQ 1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche
Bibelgesellschaft, 2015), 141-42. To compound matters LXX uses two different verbs ἐπωνόμασεν
(25:25) and ἐκάλεσεν (25:26) which gives rise to the suggestion that Rebekah named both her sons. Cf.
Adelman, *Female Ruse*, 23, and Tal, *Genesis,* 141-42.

Further confirmation of the identification of the midwife as the one who confers the name may be
provided by the aetiology of Perez's name, which purports to relate to the manner of his birth (38:29),
an event probably not witnessed by Judah. While Judah could, of course, have been informed
subsequently of the incident, the text suggests that the person who named the child witnessed the
birth. In biblical times fathers did not normally attend the birth of their children (see Marjo C.A. Korpel,
A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine, UBL 8 [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag,
1990], 251), as is evident in Jeremiah 20:15, when the father receives the news of his son's birth, clearly
indicating he was not present at the birth himself. Cf. John Makujina ("Male Obstetric Competence in
Ancient Israel: A Response to Two Recent Proposals," *VT* 66 [2016]: 88-89) who argues convincingly that
in emergencies or in more isolated locations "the husband may have been the only available surrogate
for the midwife."

[8] Speiser assesses the aetiologies as "symbolic retrojections in which the correct etymology is
immaterial" (*Genesis*, 299).

connotation of making a breach. Its normal meaning in qal is simply "go out (from), come out

(of), leave."[9] The same verb is used in the imperfect and perfect forms in the birth accounts of

Jacob and Esau (25:25-26), but on that occasion no link with making a breach is made: "The

first came out (וַיֵּצֵא) red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterwards

his brother came out (יָצָא)". Similarly a survey of all the other uses in Genesis of יצא in both

perfect[10] and imperfect[11] qal forms confirms that there is no fundamental link between the

verb and the concept of a breach.[12]

The explanation for Zerah's name is even more tendentious. The implication in the text, based

partly on the pattern established by Perez's naming, that Zerah's name relates to the red cord

on his hand, is picked up by Victor Hamilton's translation of verse 30: "Afterward his brother

came out, with the red string on his hand. Accordingly his name was Zerah."[13] The causal link

Hamilton implies between the name and the colour of the string is not explicitly supported by

the Hebrew which merely states: וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ זָרַח. Nonetheless Claus Westermann also believes

it is likely that Zerah is given "a name that has to do with the scarlet thread"[14]and similarly E.A.

Speiser suggests it is perhaps "alluding to the crimson band."[15] These links, suggested on the

basis of folk etymology and on wordplay between זרח and a concept of "bright colour," have

been shown to have no foundation and have been firmly rejected.[16] In particular, attempts to

relate Zerah's name to the western Aramaic word *z^ehôrî* which means "scarlet or scarlet

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[9] Clines, ed., *Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 159.
[10] Gen 10:11; 19:23; 24:50; 27.30.
[11] Gen 4:16; 8:7; 8:18; 14:8; 14:17; 19:6; 19:14; 24:63; 28:10; 31:33; 34:6; 39:12; 39:15; 41:45; 41:46; 42:28; 43:31; 44:28; 47:10.
[12] Commentators have suggested some rather far-fetched explanations for the relevance of the word "breach" to the chapter. For instance, Westermann (*Genesis 37-50*, 55) refers to the tear Perez made to his mother's perineum while Adelman suggests that the name Perez signifies "a spontaneous breach of boundaries, alluding to the rupture of those social norms that Tamar so audaciously defied" (*Female Ruse,* 86). It seems improbable that either explanation would have occurred to the original audience. See also Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 275; Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 454.
[13] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 452.
[14] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 55.
[15] Speiser, *Genesis,* 297.
[16] Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament,* JSOTSup 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 157. זרח in Isaiah 60:1, 3 refers to the bright rising of the sun.

thread" seem improbable because it would involve metathesis (זרח < זחר).[17] There is therefore

no evidence to support any aetiological explanation of Zerah's name.[18] This creates a rather

unbalanced conclusion to the coda where one child's name is given an aetiology, albeit a lame

one, and the other child is given none at all.[19]

The aetiologies of Perez's and Zerah's names suffer from an additional weakness. Normally an

aetiology either refers to the emotions or thoughts of the parent at the time of the child's

birth, for example, 4:1 where Eve plays on the link between קנה and קין or 35:18 where the

dying Rachel names her son בֶּן־אוֹנִי "son of my sorrow," or an aetiology can be prophetic,

referring to the child's future role or destiny or to events that will occur during the child's

lifetime,[20] as in the cases of Noah (5:29), Peleg (10:25), Esau (25:25) and Jacob (25:26). Perez

and Zerah play no part in the main narrative[21] and no exploits of theirs are subsequently

revealed to explain or justify giving unusual prominence to their names. As outlined in Genesis

and as mentioned in several of the other books of the Bible, history records nothing

memorable about the life and exploits of Perez and Zerah, apart from the circumstances of

their conception. The information supplied about them can be briefly summarised. Perez and

Zerah were conceived as a result of the unconventional encounter between Tamar and Judah

(Gen 38:24; Ruth 4:12). Perez's name, which he receives at birth (38:29), purports to have the

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[17] Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 619. See also François Jacquesson, "Les mots de la couleur en hébreu ancien," in *Histoire et géographie de la couleur*, ed.Pascale Dollfus, François Jacquesson, and Michel Pastoureau (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 2013).

[18] Wenham (*Genesis 16-50,* 369), for instance, acknowledges that Zerah's name is not explained in the text.

[19] Suggestions by Susan Ackerman ("'I Have Hired You with my Son's Mandrakes': Women's Reproductive Magic in Ancient Israel," in *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and James Robson [London: Routledge, 2015], 15) and by Carol Meyers ("From Household to House of Yahweh: Women's Religious Culture in Ancient Israel," in *Congress Volume: Basel 2001,* ed. André Lemaire, VTSup 92 [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 290) that the red thread has an apotropaic function to protect the child may safely be regarded as irrelevant in light of the scantiness of the evidence and the fact that in the two recorded ANE examples the thread is tied during delivery to the mother, not the child. The Hittite Text H (Gary M. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals*, 2nd ed. StBoT 29 [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983], 90-91) reads as follows: *A-NA QA-TI-šU-ya-aš-ši-iš-ša-an SÍG SA$_5$ ḫa-ma-an-ki*: "and to her hand [the mother's] he binds red wool." For the Sumerian text see Irving L. Finkel, "The Crescent Fertile," *AfO* 27 (1980):37-38, 40, 47-48.

[20] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 230.

[21] Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37-50," 17.

connotation of making a breach. Later he is listed as travelling with Jacob and his offspring to Egypt in the company of Judah, Shelah and Zerah (46:12).[22] Leader of the Perezites (Num 26:20), he is the father of two sons: Hezron (Gen 46:12; Num 26:20; Ruth 4:18; 1Chr 2:5) and Hamul (Gen 46:12; Num 26:21; 1 Chr 2:5). Nehemiah 11:6 records that "All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant warriors." Zerah is similarly named among those travelling to Egypt (46:12) and his descendants are named as Zerahites (Num 26:20). According to 1 Chronicles 2:6 Zerah had five sons: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara. Zerah is also named in connection with two of his descendants: Achan, who was stoned to death (Josh 7; 22:20), and Pethahiah (Neh 11:24). There is nothing innately extraordinary about either twin.

Many scholars who view 38:27-30 as an integral part of the chapter believe that its goal is the reversal of the birth order[23] and that the passage reflects ante-natal strife between Perez and Zerah. The issue of the pre-eminence of a younger sibling has particular relevance in the Jacob and Joseph narratives of which Genesis 38 is a part. Perez and Zerah belong to a dynasty where both their grandfather Jacob and uncle Joseph supplant their elder/eldest brother. Genesis 38 is followed ten chapters later by the strange incident in which the younger of Joseph's sons, Ephraim, receives Jacob's blessing (Gen 48:14). When Joseph attempts to place his father's hand on the head of his firstborn son (Gen 48:17), Jacob states firmly, "his younger brother shall be greater than he" (Gen 48:19). Noble sees 38:27-30 and 48:8-20 as parallel codas about "the reversal of primogeniture."[24]

But even here there is uncertainty. The issue of the first-born is conspicuously absent from the last four verses of Genesis 38. Whenever the attribution of first-born status to a character is

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[22] The references to the presence of his sons Hezron and Hamul as part of the group (46:12) are universally rejected. The timescale of the Joseph narrative makes it impossible: Bosworth, *Story within a Story*, 41; Clifford, "Genesis 38," 527; Steven D. Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," *BSac* 146 (1989): 383; Bryan Smith, "The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37-50," *BSac* 162 (2005): 167n17.

[23] Cowan, *Genesis 38: The Story of Judah and Tamar,* 220; Clifford, "Genesis 38," 528.

[24] Noble, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches," 139. See also Menn, *Judah and Tamar,* 93n181: "The concluding episode in Genesis 38 thus condenses into a few phrases the ascendancy of the younger son illustrated at length in the Jacob cycle."

relevant to the plot in the book of Genesis, the words בכור or בכירה are always used

unambiguously. Examples include Jacob pretending to be Esau (27:19, 32); Er, whose death

precipitates a particular sequence of levirate marriages (38:6-7); Manasseh whose birth right

as the firstborn Jacob deliberately ignores (48:18); Reuben (35:23; 46:8; 49:3) who loses his

firstborn status by sleeping with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Leah whose firstborn

status is used by Laban as a pretext to marry her first to Jacob (29:26). בכור is used of Perez

and Zerah neither in the coda nor in any other book of the Bible which refers to them.[25] This

may be due partly to the fact that technically neither Perez nor Zerah is Judah's firstborn. They

are not even the eldest surviving son: Judah's son Shelah is still alive (46:12; Num 26:20). All

that can be said of them is that the elder of the two is Tamar's firstborn and Judah's fourth

son.[26]

When the birth narrative is examined in detail the confusion remains. In the course of the

twins' birth, one child, subsequently named Zerah, puts out a hand, on which the midwife ties

a crimson thread, and then he withdraws his hand, and his brother Perez is born first. Opinion

is divided as to which of them is therefore the elder. There is no evidence in the passage that

Perez, unlike Jacob (27:5-19), took any action or permitted any action, for example by the

midwife, to supplant his brother. According to the text Zerah appeared to withdraw his hand

voluntarily. The hiphil of שׁוּב is used with יָד in Lamentations 2:8 and Ezekiel 18:8 and in each

instance has the connotation of the subject refraining from doing something, rather than of

being compelled by another. There is no indication that Zerah was forced to do so nor is there

any reference to ante-natal conflict between them, unlike that recorded between Jacob and

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[25] A useful comparison can be made with 1 Chronicles where בכור is never used of Perez or Zerah although it is used extensively of others including Er and Reuben: 1 Chr 1:13, 29; 2:3, 13, 25, 27, 42, 50; 3:1, 15; 4:4; 5:1, 3; 6:28; 8:1, 30, 39; 9:5, 31, 36; 26:2, 4, 10.
[26] Frederick Greenspahn, an authority on biblical younger siblings, confesses that in relation to Tamar's twins, "it is all but impossible to ascertain which was considered to have been born first" (*When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 125.

Esau, who "struggled together" in Rebekah's womb (25:22).[27] The suggestion that "Perez grabbed his twin by the feet and pulled him back, and then hurried to be the first out of the womb"[28] is highly improbable.[29]

At best the coda reveals sibling rivalry rather than a struggle for precedence.[30] If precedence is the key issue there should have been greater clarity about who is considered the elder, the child who puts out a hand first or the child who is born first. The text offers support for both possibilities: the hand which is marked by the red thread, subsequently identified as that of Zerah (38:30), is clearly stated to have come out first, רִאשֹׁנָה (38:28), but when he is eventually born, the adverb אַחַר, its significance underlined by its initial position in the verse, indicates that Perez was born first (38:30). By comparison, in the case of Esau and Jacob there is no ambiguity about which is the elder: "The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau" (25:25). Perez's position as the elder is confirmed by Genesis 46:12, which lists the first three sons precisely in the birth order as outlined in 38:3-5: "The children of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah." It is unlikely the redactor would then reverse the birth order for the remaining pair. For Westermann this is further evidence that the coda was "a once independent genealogical note, because the suggestion of a dispute over precedence (vv. 28, 29) has no connections with the narrative in vv. 12-26."[31]

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[27] Koptak ("Reading Scripture with Kenneth Burke," 90), for instance, argues that Zerah's hand "is withdrawn, not pulled back, and there are no other indications of strife or violence."

[28] Eran Viezel, "The Influence of Realia on Biblical Depictions of Childbirth," *VT* 61 (2011): 686. A similar suggestion is made by Everett Fox: "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif," *JSOT* 18 (1993): 45.

[29] Less improbable is Viezel's hypothesis that "men in antiquity projected their knowledge of the process of the emergence of sheep and cattle from the womb, which was very familiar to them, onto the experience of human childbirth, which they never saw first-hand, and assumed that the two were equivalent." (Viezel, "Influence of Realia," 689). John Makujina claims *contra* Viezel that in animal husbandry the "appearance of a single leg is considered a malpresentation and usually requires intervention." See "'Behold, There Were Twins in Her Womb' (Gen. 25:24-26; 38:27-30): Medical Science and the Twin Births in Genesis," *TynBul* 68 (2017): 41. It may be best to conclude simply that twin births were known to be unpredictable and that there was a certain willingness on the part of the reader/header to suspend disbelief.

[30] Von Rad speculates that the aetiological motives in the coda reflect "a recollection of a rivalry between the two Judean lines Perez and Zerah" (*Genesis,* 361).

[31] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 55.

Moreover it is important to note that the resemblances between the birth narratives of Perez and Zerah and those of Esau and Jacob, which will be discussed later in greater detail, are only relevant in the context of a story placed in its current position in the Genesis text. As outlined in Chapter 1 Tamar's story began as an independent narrative complete within itself and was not reliant on any external information for full understanding. When the birth scene is heard in isolation from the patriarchal narratives it would make little sense to an uncomprehending hearer, who would otherwise have followed completely the logic of the previous 26 verses. This narrative is exceptionally skilfully constructed with sparse, telling detail, where the tension has been adroitly heightened to achieve the climaxes of the announcement of the brutal death sentence against Tamar and Judah's startling admission of paternity. It is incomprehensible that it would have ended with a birth scene whose details can only be interpreted properly with the aid of information not at the disposal of the hearer.

Menn draws attention to a final weakness of the coda: the lack of connection between the birth scene and the narrative that immediately continues in Genesis 39, which focuses on Joseph in Egypt. In Genesis 25:24-26 the struggle between Jacob and Esau introduces the subsequent stories of the twins' lives, whereas the birth scene in Genesis 38:27-30 "serves a terminal function."[32] It has no relevance to the immediately subsequent narrative or to their later lives and actions as revealed in the scanty biblical references to both Perez and Zerah. Unlike the birth narrative of the supplanter Jacob, that of Perez the breachmaker appears totally irrelevant to later events and is never alluded to again.[33]

The independent nature of verses 27-30 is vividly illustrated in the following table, which illustrates twelve of the many ways scholars have sub-divided the text of Genesis 38.[34] Two

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[32] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 93

[33] Greenspahn (*When Brothers Dwell Together,* 116) agrees that the story of the twins plays "virtually no part in the continuing biblical account" in Genesis.

[34]This is an expansion of a table in Hilbrands, *Heilige oder Hure?,* 14, annotated with a sample bibliographical reference for each pattern.

A: Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis,* trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 395, 398, 402.

aspects are particularly striking: the variations in how the first 26 verses are divided and the

unanimity that verses 27-30 form a distinct, cohesive unit.

Sample sub-divisions of Genesis 38

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1-11	1-11	1-11	1-11	1-5	1-5	1-6	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-6	1-5
				6-11	6-11	7-11	6-11	6-10	6-10	7-11	6-10
								11	11		11-12a
12-26	12-23	12-19	12-19	12-26	12-23	12-23	12-19	12-19	12-14	12-24	12b-18
									15-18		
									19		
		20-26	20-23				20-23	20-23	20-23		19-23
	24-26		24-26		24-26	24-26	24-26	24-26	24-26	25-26	24-26
27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30	27-30

This makes it all the more puzzling why a cumbersome epilogue with inappropriate and

clumsily executed aetiologies, which slows the action, delays the ending of the story and has

no overt link with the rest of the story or with the subsequent Joseph narrative, should be

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B: Diane M. Sharon, "Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 296.
C: Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 429-51.
D: Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 40.
E: Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 50-55.
F: Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: feministisch-theologische Studien Zu Genesis 12-36,* BZAW 222 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 31-35.
G: Coats, *Genesis,* 272-73.
H: Speiser, *Genesis,* 295-97.
I: Hans-Georg Wünch, "Genesis 38-Judah's Turning Point: Structural Analysis and Narrative Techniques and Their Meaning for Genesis 38 and Its Placement in the Story of Joseph," *OTE* 25 (2012): 786.
J: Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," 146.
K: Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 38.
L: David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 63.

considered an integral part of the original independent story. I contend that it cannot have been composed by the same person who wrote 38:1-26. It will become clear that the last four verses are a subsequent addition whose details deliberately recall the birth scene of Esau and Jacob. The verses were added at a subsequent stage in Israel's story when it became important for a later age to trace the links to Judah and the patriarchs.

The coda and the Jacob and Esau Birth Narrative

For well over a millennium scholars have noted how the birth of Tamar's sons recalls the birth of Esau and Jacob.[35] The coda is at pains to highlight the similarity between the birth narratives of Perez and Zerah and Jacob and Esau.[36] At first glance the similarities are striking. These are the only descriptions of twin births in the Bible.[37] In each case there is ante-natal awareness that the birth of twins is imminent. In Rebekah's case the LORD acts as obstetrician and breaks the news to her: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided" (25:23). In Tamar's case the midwife has a "crimson thread" on hand to indicate the first born (38:28), clearly anticipating a twin birth. It is unclear whether the midwife had made the diagnosis or whether she was relying on what Tamar had told her about her awareness of two babies' movements in her womb.[38] The birth announcements have a similar pattern. Both indicate the imminence of the birth, an expression of surprise, and a recognition of the presence of twins in the woman's womb:[39]

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[35] *4th to 5th centuries CE*: Gen. Rab. 63:8; *1906*: Luther, "Novella," 116.
Gunkel (*Genesis,* 402) believes that it is a "variant of the legend of Jacob and Esau".
[36] In light of the weight of evidence, Emerton's suggestion (Some Problems in Genesis XXXVIII," 347) that the resemblance between the two birth accounts is due to a parallel motif in oral tradition rather than to literary dependence, can be ignored.
[37] Westermann (*Genesis 37-50*, 56) argues with a certain plausibility that originally the birth of only one son, Perez, was recorded. He observes that the line of Zerah is listed by itself in Josh 7:1, 16-18, 24; 22:20. He believes that the original conclusion described the birth of Tamar's son Perez. It was important to those who added the coda that a parallel tradition, which credited Tamar with two sons, be highlighted to enhance the parallels with the earlier birth narrative.
[38] Expectant mothers can identify the existence of twins, for instance, by the double set of kicking they experience. S. Levin ("Obstetrics in the Bible," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 67 [1960]: 492) assumes the diagnosis was made by the midwife but supplies no corroborating evidence.
[39] Menn, *Judah and Tamar,* 90.

וַיִּמְלְא֥וּ יָמֶ֖יהָ לָלֶ֑דֶת וְהִנֵּ֥ה תוֹמִ֖ם בְּבִטְנָֽהּ׃ (Genesis 25:24)

וַיְהִ֖י בְּעֵ֣ת לִדְתָּ֑הּ וְהִנֵּ֥ה תְאוֹמִ֖ים בְּבִטְנָֽהּ׃ (Genesis 38:27)

בטן is used in both cases for womb but there is a slight variation in the spelling of the rarely-

used word for twins: תאומים, where the aleph is dropped in 25:24.[40] In each situation there is

an apparent ante-natal altercation, although as we have seen in the case of Perez and Zerah it

may not be all it seems. Hands feature in both accounts: Jacob emerges from the womb

gripping Esau's heel with his hand (25:26), while Zerah puts out and then retracts his hand

(38:28-29). The colour red is associated with both births: Esau "came out red" (25:25) while

the midwife ties a crimson thread on Zerah's hand (38:28).[41] The choice of red is not

accidental. As Arnold Ehrlich observes it is the loudest and most striking of all colours[42] and

accordingly is both noteworthy and memorable.[43] All the children are duly named and the

Hebrew naming phrase used in relation to Jacob, Perez and Zerah is identical: וַיִּקְרָ֥א שְׁמֹ֖ו. Each

naming implies an aetiology which relates to the nature of the child's birth or the child's

appearance at birth.

On closer examination some of the similarities between the two birth narratives are more

apparent than real. The aetiologies of Jacob's and Esau's names emerge naturally from the

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[40] Gen 24: GKC §23f; Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1986), 88. Song 4:5 and 7:4 retain the aleph.
The rabbis noted that a defective spelling was used for Jacob and Esau and a correct *plene* spelling for Perez and Zerah, and explained the difference as follows: "Tamar gave birth to Perez and Zerah, both of whom were righteous, while of Rebekah's sons—Jacob and Esau—one was righteous and the other wicked" (Gen. Rab. 63:8). See Tamar Kadari, "Rebekah: Midrash and Aggadah," *in Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rebekah-midrash-and-aggadah*). In the rabbis' view the birth of the wicked, defective child gave rise to the defective spelling. Rashi agrees that the defective spelling is "because one [son] was evil but these [Tamar's twins] were both righteous". This was in accordance with the traditional belief that the fuller and more perfect the spelling, the more perfect the thing being described (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations,* ed. and trans. Gordon Tucker with Leonard Levin [New York: Continuum, 2005], 592n13).
[41] Different Hebrew words are used for the colours: אדמוני (25:25) and שני (38:28). The observant reader or listener would also be aware that subsequent passages strongly associate Esau with the colour red. He barters his birth right for a red pottage and is consequently renamed אדם (25:30) and thereafter is recognised as the ancestor of the Edomites, the descendants of the "red" one (32:3; 36:1, 8, 19).
[42] Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Mikrâ ki-pheschutô: The Bible According to its Literal Meaning* (New York: Ktav, 1969), 1.105-6: "Rot ist von allen Farben die schreiendste und auffallendste."
[43] This does not preclude the fact, noted by Menn (*Judah and Tamar*, 91), that in both instances the colour is associated with the twin who is more peripheral to Israel's history.

narrative context and are underlined by later references and repetitions. Esau bitterly recalls the aptness of Jacob's name: "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times." (27:36).[44] Here Esau deliberately emphasises the play on words between עקב and יעקב, Esau's heel grasped by his brother during their birth and Jacob's name, and between the עקב "heel" and the denominative verb עקב, which means to "follow hot on the heels" of someone, and therefore to "supplant."[45] The repetition of words with "red" connotations in connection with Esau has already been noted[46] as have the weaknesses of the aetiologies in chapter 38. These limitations are immaterial. To those who added the coda, the general impression is what mattered. Nobody could fail to notice the parallels between the birth stories of the two sets of twins.

Perez – Ancestor of David

Why did a later redactor take the trouble to add a coda loosely based on the birth narrative of Jacob and Esau? The answer to the riddle can be explained most easily by reference to Ruth 4, where there is an explicit allusion to "the house of Perez," (Ruth 4:12). Initially it is unclear why Perez is selected for specific mention in Ruth. His name occurs in the context of the people's good wishes to Boaz on the occasion of his forthcoming marriage to Ruth: "May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah" (Ruth 4:11-12). In the very next verse, the wish finds fulfilment when the birth of Ruth's and Boaz' son is announced (Ruth 4:13). More careful scrutiny reveals how Perez is being subtly linked with the Davidic dynasty. Verse 11 refers to Ephrathah and to Bethlehem, both associated with David, who is described in 1 Samuel as "the son of an

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[44] The subsequent widespread acceptance of this aetiology is evident in Jeremiah 9:4 where Jacob's name is the basis of a pun regarding the deceitful nature of all brothers: כִּי כָל־אָח עָקוֹב יַעְקֹב.
[45] See Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 18-50,* 179.
[46] See note 41 above.

Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse" (1 Sam 17:12).[47] Ruth 4:12 mentions Perez,

son of Tamar and Judah, and in verse 13 the birth of Obed is announced - "When they came

together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son" - but Obed's name is not revealed

until his genealogy is spelt out in verse 17: "They named him Obed; he became the father of

Jesse, the father of David." Perez is therefore at the centre, always a key position, of a chiastic

pattern which emphasises Davidic links.[48]

Ruth 4:11   Ephrathah and Bethlehem (Places associated with David)

Ruth 4:12   House of Perez

Ruth 4:13   Birth of Obed (Grandfather of David)

In itself that may have seemed insignificant or coincidental. Consequently at a later stage a

redactor added a coda to spell out the link more clearly:

> Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron
>
> of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of
>
> Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David" (Ruth 4:18-22).[49]

It is now evident that the reference to Perez is not accidental. As a direct ancestor of David he

casts completely new light on to David's lineage. When David is first introduced in 1 Samuel no

details are supplied of his ancestors. All that is known is that David's father is "Jesse the

Bethlehemite" (1 Sam 16:1) and that is how the situation remains, until the details are

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[47] See also 1 Sam 16:1, 18; 17:15, 58; 20:6.

[48] Biblical authors and editors "placed the main idea, the thesis, or the turning point of each literary unit, at its center": Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 51.

[49] See Dirksen, *1 Chronicles,* 42. Scholarly opinion is divided on whether Ruth 4:18-22 is a later addition. Carolyn Pressler (*Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 307) believes it is incongruous for the story to conclude with a totally male genealogy. Others, including Terry Giles and William J. Doan (*The Naomi Story – The Book of Ruth: From Gender to Politics* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016, 91) view the genealogies at the beginning and end of the book as "necessary mechanisms" and therefore part of the original text. In the view of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld ("Why Perez? Reflections on David's Genealogy in Biblical Tradition," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004], 406) the original or secondary character of the genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 cannot be "finally determined." Nonetheless I am persuaded that both Ruth 4:18-22 and Genesis 38:27-30 were added at later dates.

revealed in Ruth 4 and 1 Chronicles. Perez, "whom Tamar bore to Judah," (Ruth 4:12) is the

link between David and the patriarchs. David can now be shown to be a direct descendant, via

Perez, of Judah, founder of the pre-eminent tribe, and through Perez and Judah, David is also

descended from Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. On the balance of probabilities it now seems that

the coda was added to Genesis 38 at a later date to reinforce the link between David and his

patriarchal ancestors.

The Chronicler's Approach to David's Genealogy

For the full understanding of Perez's significance we must turn to 1 Chronicles, where Perez's

family tree is part of a detailed nine-chapter genealogical prologue to the story of David.

Before examining the location and significance of Perez's genealogy it is necessary to outline

briefly how genealogies were understood and interpreted in ancient Israel.

It is widely recognised that biblical genealogies were not created or preserved for

historiographical purposes. They are not included simply as a matter of historical record. "Even

when genealogies are recited as part of a lineage history, they are likely to reflect domestic,

political, or religious relationships existing in the *present* rather than in the past." [50] Lines of

descent are used to validate contemporary realities.[51] As Thomas Willi notes, when the

Chronicler retells the past, "at the same time he is speaking about the present."[52] Increasingly

research on HB genealogies recognizes that they are deliberately designed to "pursue

theological as well as political aims in the community of their composers."[53] Scholars have

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[50] Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, YNER 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 54. [My emphasis].

[51] Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9,* AB 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 263.

[52] Thomas Willi, "Late Persian Judaism and its Conception of an Integral Israel according to Chronicles: Some Observations on Form and Function of the Genealogies of Judah in 1 Chronicles 2.3-4.23," in *Second Temple Studies: Vol. 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period,* ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 148. See also Christine Mitchell, "Chronicles and Ben Sira: Questions of Genre," in *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes,* ed. Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol, DCLS 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 17, 19; Walter E. Aufrecht, "Genealogy and History in Ancient Israel," in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, ed. Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor, JSOTSup 67 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 222-23.

[53] Löwisch, *Trauma Begets Genealogy,* 82.

ascribed a wide range of possible motivations for the Chronicler's work including hopes for the restoration of the Davidic kingship,[54] the legitimization of the second temple[55] and the desire to convey hope for a new future,[56] and "the near revival of Israel, in all its glory."[57] It is immaterial to this discussion whether the Chronicler's aims referred to current situations or his future aspirations for Israel in the light of their existing plight. What matters is that the genealogies he outlines relate to the concerns of his contemporaries and the Chronicler's perspective on those concerns.

Gary Knoppers warns that because lineages in the ancient Mediterranean world tend to reflect the current claims of the groups who have a vested interest in their composition, "genealogies are the least stable of historical traditions."[58] In other words, at different points in time, details may be manipulated or conflicting versions may be offered by different interests or varying versions will be presented. Robert Wilson recognises that genealogies reflect current relationships which may differ from relationships in the past but he argues that genealogies will be cited as historical evidence only after a society accepts a particular version as correct. After a period of flux a consensus emerges which reflects the commonly accepted view. Moreover once an oral genealogy has been committed to writing it will be far less susceptible to change. It then takes a fixed, final form. The effectiveness of the genealogy is based on its accepted validity. A genealogist will not commit to writing a genealogy that is likely to be discredited or rejected. Wilson believes that only the fact that "genealogies are considered to be accurate historical records permits them to be used as charters."[59] In the case of Perez it can be assumed with confidence that his genealogy as outlined in Chronicles was accepted as

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[54] David Janzen, *Chronicles and the Politics of Davidic Restoration: A Quiet Revolution*, LHBOTS 657 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 3.
[55] Steven S. Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles,* IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 11.
[56] Wai Ching Angela Wong, "The Politics of Remembrance: Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9 and Haunting Memories in China" in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 381; Steven Schweitzer, "Reading Utopia in Chronicles" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 423.
[57] Japhet, "Postexilic Historiography," 166.
[58] Gary N. Knoppers, "'Great Among His Brothers,' But Who Is He? Heterogeneity in the Composition of Judah," *JHebS* 3 (2001): §5.5.
[59] Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, 55.

correct by Israelite society at that time. Ingeborg Löwisch offers a useful summary of the forces

at play in the development and contemporary understanding of genealogies such as Perez's:

> Genealogies emerge in interplay between deliberate constructions on the basis of
>
> actual needs and choices on the one hand, and commitments to previous generations
>
> and particular legacies and stories on the other hand. They are fluid, changeable and
>
> flexible. Genealogies' *fluidity* facilitates their ability to chart fluctuations and
>
> reconstitute identity over periods of change.[60]

There is much debate about whether the Perez-David genealogy was recorded initially in Ruth

or in Chronicles[61] or whether both of them were following a third unknown source.[62] In light of

the extraordinary and explicit emphasis in Chronicles on David and the Davidic line, and in light

of the Chronicler's remarkable interest in and use of genealogy, it is much more probable that

the Chronicler initiated the genealogy. In doing so he relied primarily on Genesis 38, Genesis

46 and Numbers 26 but perhaps drew on other sources for any missing generations.

The only links in the genealogical chain between Perez and David that are not found in Genesis

46 and Numbers 26 are those of Ram and Salma/Salmon (1 Chr 2:10-11).[63] The additions of

Ram and Salma need not be taken as fabrications. It is probable that the Chronicler had access

to a wide range of extra-biblical sources[64] including oral traditions,[65] private family archival

material, administrative records including records kept for taxation and military purposes,[66]

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[60] Ingeborg Löwisch, "Genealogies, Gender, and the Politics of Memory: 1 Chronicles 1–9 and the Documentary Film *Mein Leben Teil 2,"* in *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 230. [Löwisch's emphasis].
[61] According to Ernst Würthwein (*Die Fünf Megilloth: Ruth, Das Hohelied, Esther*, HAT 1/18 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969], 24) the list in Ruth is an excerpt from 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9-15.
[62] Jacob M. Myers (*I Chronicles*, AB 12 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965], 14) suggests both Chronicles and Ruth go back to "an original temple source." See also J.A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles,* NAC 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 61.
[63] Elsewhere their names appear only in 1 Chronicles: Ram in 1 Chronicles 2:25, 27, and Salma, described as "father of Bethlehem," in 1 Chronicles 2:51.
[64] Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1993), 23.
[65] Willi, "Late Persian Judaism," 151.
[66] Diana Edelman, "The Manassite Genealogy in 1 Chronicles 7: 14-19: Form and Source," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 182.

building records,[67] and even information gleaned during his own journeys in the countryside.[68]

In theory the names of Ram and Salma could have been omitted from the Chronicler's

genealogy.[69] Since the only biblical references to them are in Ruth 4 and 1 Chronicles 2,

nobody would have been any the wiser, but clearly the Chronicler did not feel free to do so.

This may have been, as Katharine Sakenfeld argues, because "David's genealogy is likely to

have been established sufficiently in corporate memory that changes even with regard to

unknown individuals were not possible."[70] Moreover the Chronicler appears to have been

meticulous in his method of compiling genealogies. Comparisons of passages in Chronicles

which have other biblical parallels suggest that whenever the Chronicler has made noteworthy

changes or additions, little of importance hangs upon the changes, and therefore they are

unlikely to be fabricated by him.[71] It can therefore be assumed that the inclusion of Ram and

Salma is based on other information to which the Chronicler had access but which may now be

lost,[72] and that consequently the genealogy of Perez records accurately the traditional

description of the descent of David from Perez, son of Judah and Tamar (1 Chr 2:3-5, 9-15).

Sara Japhet and Sakenfeld, among others, indicate the chronological difficulties with David's

genealogy in 1 Chronicles.[73] Nahshon, a contemporary of Moses (Exod 6:23) is placed in the

sixth generation from Judah, whereas normally the Exodus takes place in the fourth generation

in accordance with the genealogies of Levi and Reuben (Exod 6:16-20; Num 26:5-9). Similarly

there are too few generations to bridge the period from the descent to Egypt to the accession

of David or from the Exodus to the last of the Judges to coincide with the lifetime of Boaz.

These discrepancies may be explained by the phenomenon of "telescoping," noted in ANE

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[67] Levin, "Who Was the Chronicler's Audience?," 244.

[68] Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 121.

[69] Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary,* trans. Edward Broadbridge, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 97.

[70] Sakenfeld, "Why Perez?," 413. Nielsen (*Ruth*, 16) refers to a Perez genealogy which "existed in the context of the traditions of Tamar and Judah." The Chronicler may have drawn on these traditions.

[71] H.G.M. Williamson, "Sources and Redaction in the Chronicler's Genealogy of Judah," *JBL* 98 (1979): 352; Japhet, *I and II Chronicles,* 69.

[72] Martin Noth, *The Chronicler's History,* trans. H.G.M. Williamson, with an Introduction, JSOTSup 50 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 60.

[73] Japhet, *I and II Chronicles,* 77; Sakenfeld, "Why Perez?," 411.

genealogies, where instead of giving a full genealogy several generations are omitted, particularly those involving lesser known characters. Telescoping is found most often in genealogies recording more than three generations[74] and especially when a king wished to connect himself with the founder of a dynasty.[75] A more fundamental explanation is that we are dealing with a theological and sociological concept rather than a historical one. In the intellectual and theological framework being constructed by the Chronicler, issues of chronology do not detract from the significance of the genealogy he is outlining. The number of steps and the identity of the intermediary personages between the two key individuals, in this instance Perez and David, are irrelevant.

The Chronicler's Purpose

Nearly 20 chapters of Chronicles are devoted to David's reign (1 Chr 10:14-29:29). David Noel Freedman outlines the Chronicler's purpose as follows:

> It seems clear therefore that the principal objective of the Chronicler was to write a history of the dynasty of David, not primarily in terms of its historical and political achievements … but its accomplishments in the religious and specifically cultic areas. To summarize, the Chronicler establishes through his narrative of the reigns of David and Solomon the proper, legitimate pattern of institutions and their personnel for the people of God; and they are the monarchy represented by David and his house, the priesthood, by Zadok and his descendants, the city and the temple in the promised land.[76]

The Chronicler puts his understanding of the process into the mouth of David:

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[74] Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, 68.

[75] Deirdre N. Fulton, "Jeshua's 'High Priestly' Lineage? A Reassessment of Nehemiah 12.10–11," in *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd,* ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Lester L. Grabbe with Deirdre N. Fulton, LSTS 73 (London: Continuum, 2009), 106.

[76] David Noel Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 437.

Yet the LORD God of Israel chose me from all my ancestral house to be king over Israel

for ever; for he chose Judah as leader, and … he has chosen my son Solomon to sit

upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel." (1 Chr 28:4-5.)

For him the greatest time in Israel's past was David's reign and the greatest event was the

building of the temple and its subsequent role in worship. Steven Tuell summarises the

Chronicler's thinking: "the portrayal of David in Chronicles is not so much idealized as *focused,*

narrowly and precisely, on one aspect: David as worship leader and founder."[77] David's reign

and the building of the temple now offer inspiration in the present for the reconstruction of

Israel's post-exilic identity,[78] and the Chronicler seeks to legitimize the existing temple and its

ordinances by portraying them as Davidic.[79] In 1 Chronicles 1-9 the Chronicler highlights the

tribes of Judah and Levi in order to establish the theological importance of the Davidic line and

the priestly house in the subsequent historical narrative.[80]

There is a strong emphasis on God's election of the House of Judah and of Judah's

descendants: God has chosen Judah, chosen Jesse's house, chosen David and, finally, chosen

Solomon. It is assumed that the ruler mentioned in 1 Chronicles 5:2 is David: "Judah became

prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him." The tribe of Judah has produced

the Davidic dynasty which was chosen by God to build the temple.[81] The divine selection which

culminated in God's choice of Solomon began with God's choice of Judah. The Chronicler is at

pains to emphasise David's Judahite ancestry and this is achieved by tracing his roots back

through Perez.[82]

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[77] Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles,* 43. [Tuell's emphasis].
[78] Alice L. Laffey, "1 and 2 Chronicles," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 111.
[79] Ben Zvi, "Late Historical Books and Rewritten History," 298.
[80] Sakenfeld, "Why Perez?," 415. For an overview of the various purposes proposed by scholars for the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9 see David Janzen, "A Monument and a Name: The Primary Purpose of Chronicles' Genealogies," *JSOT* 43 (2018): 46-7.
[81] Dirksen, *1 Chronicles*, 42.
[82] Lockwood argues that it was known that David was descended from Perez but perhaps it was "not so well known that he was a descendant of Judah" ("Tamar's Place in the Joseph Cycle," 37).

In his account the Chronicler emphasizes the importance of Judah in a number of ways. First, Judah's prominence is indicated by the initial position and the length given to his genealogy. In the original listing of Jacob's sons in 1 Chronicles 2:1, as expected, Judah appears fourth: "These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher." The Chronicler is following the precise birth order as outlined in Genesis: first Reuben (29:32), then Simeon (29:33), next Levi (29:34) and fourth Judah (29:35). This is also in accordance with the well-established practice in Genesis 46:12 and Numbers 26:19-20 where Judah is listed fourth after Reuben, Simeon and Levi and fourth after Reuben, Simeon and Gad respectively. But then having listed the twelve sons, the Chronicler overturns the traditional order by dealing first with Judah (1 Chr 2:3-4:23). Giving Judah's line this priority is also a clear break with the Chronicler's usual pattern of dealing first with less important family members before returning to focus on the person from whom stems the line considered most significant for the Chronicler's purpose. A typical example of the Chronicler's normal practice is that of the sons of Noah, where he lists the sons in 1 Chronicles 1:4, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" but deals first with the descendants of Japheth (1 Chr 1:5-7) and Ham (1 Chr 1: 8-16) before tracing the line from Shem to Abraham (1 Chr 1:17-27). Similarly he charts the descendants of Ishmael (1 Chr 1:29-31) and the sons of Keturah (1 Chr 1: 32-33) before returning to Isaac (1 Chr 1:34), and likewise he names the descendants of Esau and Seir (1 Chr 1:35-54) before returning to Jacob/Israel (1 Chr 2:1). If the Chronicler wanted to give Judah a particular prominence he would have been expected to follow his usual pattern and deal with Judah at the end. Instead the Chronicler rejects both the traditional order of discussing Judah fourth and his own practice of dealing with the most significant figure last. This departure from the expected pattern which he had painstakingly constructed in chapter 1, serves, as Tuell notes, "to underline the significance of Judah, and of David, all the more."[83]

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[83] Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles,* 22.

The length of Judah's genealogy is also notable. Judah's genealogy is allocated 100 verses. The others range from 81 for Levi [84] down to one verse for Naphtali (1 Chr 7:13). Perez's own importance is reflected in the fact that the descendants of Zerah and of Shelah are recorded in only six verses in total (1 Chr 2:6-8; 4:21-23) but Perez's descendants take up 92 verses (1 Chr 2:5, 9-55; 3:1-24; 4:1-20). This emphasis on Judah and Judah's offspring in the genealogies is complemented by their substantial standing in the narrative sections of the work.[85]

The importance of Judah's offspring is furthermore confirmed by the Chronicler's use of a double *inclusio* to protect the integrity of the list of Judah's sons.[86] First, the Chronicler uses a literary *inclusio* to frame the list, repeating in this instance a phrase at beginning and end. It is introduced by בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה (1 Chr 2:3) and concludes with כָּל־בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה (1 Chr 2:4). Then he adds a numerical *inclusio.* According to Isaac Kalimi a numerical *inclusio* was apparently added to a list of names to "prevent additions to or deletions from the list, either deliberately or because of erroneous interpretation."[87] In this instance the list is secured by the final word of the verse: חֲמִשָּׁה. "Judah had *five* sons in all" (1 Chr 2:4).[88]

Another notable difference is that the Chronicler has used Genesis 38 as the starting point for his genealogy of Judah; for most of the other twelve tribes he begins with the information supplied in Genesis 46 or Numbers 26.[89] The opening verses of Judah's genealogy are a concise summary of chapter 38:

> The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, and Shelah; these three the Canaanite woman Bath-shua
> bore to him. Now Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put

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[84] Dirksen (*1 Chronicles,* 32) reduces Levi's number to 66 after the deduction of 5:27-41 as secondary.
[85] Gary N. Knoppers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah," *JBL* 120 (2001): 16. Cf. Noth (*Chronicler's History,* 38) who argues that the bulk of 1 Chronicles 2-9 is a "secondary accretion to the work of Chr."
[86] Isaac Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 318.
[87] Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles,* 296.
[88] My emphasis.
[89] Thomas Willi, *Chronik: 1 Chr 1-10, BKAT* 24 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 72; Willi, "Late Persian Judaism," 152.

him to death. His daughter-in-law Tamar also bore him Perez and Zerah. Judah had five

sons in all. (1 Chr 2:3-4)

His account of Er's death is almost verbatim from Genesis:

וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיְמִתֵהוּ יְהוָה: (Gen 38:7)

וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיְמִיתֵהוּ: (1 Chr 2:3)

The only differences are that the Chronicler avoids repeating יְהוָה and there is a minor

difference in the spelling of the final verb מות. While Er's death is mentioned, Onan's is not, but

it may have been excluded as irrelevant or perhaps some words were omitted through

homoioteleuton.[90] Admittedly for Judah's other brothers there is no text describing their

families which is equivalent to Genesis 38 with its detailed account of the births of Judah's five

sons. Nonetheless for Judah the Chronicler deliberately chooses the fuller version and in doing

so refers explicitly to Tamar (1 Chr 2:4). Of the wives of the sons of Jacob only Bath-Shua,

Judah's wife, and Tamar, a putative levirate wife, are mentioned or named in 1 Chronicles.

This offers further evidence of the importance of the Judahite line in the Chronicler's scheme.

The Redactor's Composition of the Coda in Light of the Abrahamic/Davidic Connection

It is now clear that Genesis 38:27-30 is indeed a later coda added to reinforce the claim

outlined in 1 Chronicles 2 and Ruth 4 that David was a direct descendant of Perez, and of Judah

and Tamar.[91] It is doubtful whether it can be discerned who added it or precisely when but it

probably draws on the same tradition which the Chronicler followed or is inspired by the

genealogy devised by the Chronicler and is designed to support his work. It is unlikely that the

Chronicler was responsible for adding the coda, as there is no evidence for the Chronicler's

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[90] Dirksen, *1 Chronicles*, 50; H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 50; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, HAT 1/21 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), 10. See also David Noel Freedman and David Miano, "Slip of the Eye: Accidental Omission in the Masoretic Tradition," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 273-99. Pancratius Beentjes merely observes, "The reader will not be surprised that there is no mention of Onan's deed" (*Tradition and Transformation in the Book of Chronicles,* SSN 52 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 26n30).
[91] John Jarick notes how the "masses of names" in the genealogies are carefully structured, so that a focus on the sons of Israel yields to a focus on the sons of Judah and ultimately to a focus on the house of David (*1 Chronicles* [London: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 9).

involvement in the redaction of Genesis. One would also presume that a redaction by the Chronicler would have been more theologically and stylistically adept.

From the scanty references to Perez in Genesis and in the other books of the Bible it seems clear that the redactor had no independent narrative of any substance to draw on for the details of his coda narrative except perhaps a genealogical list. The sketchy details indicate only Perez's parentage, the names of his sons, the existence of later descendants and the fact that he is recorded as travelling with Judah to Egypt as part of Jacob's clan. Clearly nothing further was known about him. Lacking any suitable material about Perez which he could use or embellish, the redactor fell back on the possibilities offered by the tradition that Perez was a twin. The actual Hebrew word for "twin", תאומים, is used only by the redactor and by no other narrator in relation to Perez and Zerah. There is no independent evidence for naming Perez and Zerah as twins but there is a number of references which when taken together suggest that they were. Both Genesis 46:12 and Numbers 26:19-20 credit Judah with five sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah. Genesis 38:3-5 makes it clear that the daughter of Shua was the mother of the first three and Genesis 38:24-26 reveals three additional facts: Tamar became pregnant, proof of Judah's paternity was revealed and tacitly acknowledged by him, and he had sexual intercourse with Tamar on one occasion only, "he did not lie with her again." In the absence of any reference to any other woman in Judah's life the obvious inference is that Tamar has given birth to both Perez and Zerah.[92] If Tamar and Judah had sex only once but she bears him two sons, then the redactor concludes Tamar gave birth to twins. The only other information at the redactor's disposal was their names. The names of Perez and Zerah were already well-established in the tradition as is evident from Genesis 46 and Numbers 26 and could not be changed by the redactor.[93]

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[92] 1 Chronicles 2:3-4 explicitly confirms the identity of the mothers of Judah's children.
[93] Excluding Genesis 38 and Ruth 4 there are ten other references to Perez, all in genealogies (Gen 46:12; Num 26:20-21; 1 Chr 2:4-5; 4:1; 9:4; 27:3; Neh 11:4, 6). Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman observe that the sheer number of references suggests that Perez was a known person and "fosters the idea that Perez is valuable" (*Ruth*, 158).

Particular phraseology in Genesis 38:27 may support the claim that Tamar gave birth to twins. Rashi notes the difference between the descriptions of Rebekah's and Tamar's pregnancies. Rebekah gave birth at full term וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לָלֶדֶת (25:24), literally, "when her days to give birth were completed" but in Tamar's case the wording does not appear to indicate completion, "when the time came for her to give birth," וַיְהִי בְּעֵת לִדְתָּהּ (38:27), and Rashi therefore concludes that Tamar's twins were born prematurely.[94] Anecdotal evidence and modern medical research confirm that a majority of twin births occur prematurely.[95]

When the redactor comes to add the coda he therefore creates his account on the presumption of a twin birth. This gives him an opportunity to base his birth narrative on the very familiar one of Jacob and Esau and he could also draw on their subsequent history. He therefore focused on three aspects of Genesis 25: a struggle between the children before or during birth, the issue of precedence, and the recounting of birth-related aetiologies.

The suggestion of a birth struggle in the womb was derived from the ante-natal strife between Esau and Jacob and may also reflect the sibling rivalry between Onan and Er, hinted at in Onan's reluctance to beget a son for his dead brother (38:9). The redactor underlines the link between the two birth accounts by highlighting the movements of Zerah's hand which echo the reference to Jacob's hand gripping Esau's heel. Both hand actions are symbolic rather than realistic as the presentation of a baby's hand during birth is a rare and potentially fatal occurrence.[96]

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[94] According to Rashi, Tamar "gave birth to them after seven months": Rashi, *The Metsudah Chumash/Rashi: A New Linear Translation: Volume 1 בראשית Bereishis,* trans. Avrohom Davis, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1993), 276.

[95] In 2006, of the 137,085 twins who were delivered in the United States, approximately 60% of the twins were premature: Suneet P. Chauhan et al., "Twins: Prevalence, Problems, and Preterm Births," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 203 (2010): 309.

[96] Ironically if such an occurrence did happen it could reinforce the claim that Zerah was the younger twin as a medical study of such births confirms that prolapse of a limb in twins usually occurred "in the last-born baby." See Lokenath Bhose, "Compound Presentation: A Review of 91 Cases," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 68 (1961): 308.

The unresolved question of who has the status of the younger son not only simulates the exploits of Jacob and Esau (25; 27) but also links Perez and David. The ambivalence concerning the order of Perez's birth suggests that while he was the first to be fully born, Zerah, as the scarlet thread and the reference to רִאשֹׁנָה (38:28) indicate, was technically the elder. In all the reports of David it is stressed that he is the youngest son, whether his position be seventh (1 Chr 2:15) or eighth (1 Sam 16:11). The passing of the birth right to a younger son is recalled by Zerah's scarlet thread and the colourful connections with Esau. The issue of the younger son is raised in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2:

> The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Judah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph.

In this passage the Chronicler makes careful distinctions between the firstborn, the one who receives the birthright and the one who becomes prominent: Reuben, Joseph and Judah. The ambiguity concerning Perez may be used to imply that birth order is immaterial and in some instances confers no material benefit on the younger. What is important are the achievements of the son who gains prominence, be it Judah, David or even Solomon.

As already indicated the names of Perez and Zerah were already well-established in the tradition provided by Genesis 46 and Numbers 26 and could not be changed by the redactor. The redactor therefore devised or borrowed aetiologies which ostensibly fitted the names and which also associated Perez and Zerah with Jacob and Esau. For the aetiology of Perez's name the redactor may have drawn some inspiration from the links between David and the verb פרץ. Three times in Samuel David is associated with the verb. In 1 Samuel 25:10 Nabal asks concerning David, מִי דָוִד וּמִי בֶן־יִשָׁי הַיּוֹם רַבּוּ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו, and later the aetiologies of two place names are connected with David, those of Baal-perazim (2 Sam 5:20) and Perez-

uzzah (2 Sam 6:8). In relation to Baal-perazim David uses both the verbal and nominal form of

פרץ (פָּרַץ; כְּפֶרֶץ) to describe the breach the Lᴏʀᴅ has made on his behalf against the Philistines,

while at Perez-uzzah David is distressed at the breach the Lᴏʀᴅ had inflicted on Uzzah.[97] In

Zerah's case the redactor was more interested in highlighting the links between the "red" half

of the twins, Esau and Zerah, and therefore stressed the scarlet theme: שני (38:28, 30).

In the hands of the redactor the coda has a two-fold purpose. It highlights Perez who is the link

between David and the tribe of Judah but in doing so it also emphasises the descent of both

Perez and David from the patriarchs. The importance of the patriarchs even in post-exilic times

is evident in the genealogies in Chronicles.[98] In the main narrative, while his primary

preoccupation is with David and Solomon, the Chronicler puts into the mouth of David a psalm

of thanksgiving which draws on a medley of psalms including verses 8-10 of Psalm 105, which

recall the covenants made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In 1 Chronicles 16 those verses are

spoken by David:

> Remember his covenant for ever,
>
> the word that he commanded for a thousand generations,
>
> the covenant that he made with Abraham,
>
> his sworn promise to Isaac,
>
> which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
>
> to Israel as an everlasting covenant (1 Chr 16:15-17).

Later David invokes **"**the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors" (1 Chr 29:18). Susan

Brayford summarises the situation as follows: "This postscript, which at first seems only weakly

sutured to the main story, is central to the overall link between Israel's Abrahamic past and

Davidic future."[99]

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[97] Both place names are recorded again in relation to David in 1 Chronicles 13:11 and 14:11.
[98] Löwisch, *Trauma Begets Genealogy,* 67.
[99] Susan Brayford, *Genesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 401.

The redactor intends the reader to view the coda through a Janus-like lens, looking back to the patriarchal narratives as epitomised by Jacob and Esau and looking forward to the Chronicler and Ruth who reveal the object of the story, the reign of David and all that implies for the future of Israel. The main narrative (38:1-26) had emphasised conceiving a child for Er; the coda switches attention to the provision of offspring for Judah.[100] By stressing the links with the birth narrative of Judah's father, even in a superficial and cursory way, it subtly confirms the truth of Perez's parentage, especially in light of Judah's ambiguous declaration of paternity. What is at stake is not the exact details of the birth account but rather the perceived similarity with the birth account of Jacob and Esau. Therefore the coda should be viewed as one would view an impressionist painting where the picture dissolves into flakes of paint if one tries to examine it too closely. Rather one must stand back and view as a whole the impression it creates and the message it conveys.

Tamar the Matriarch

The revelation of Perez as direct ancestor of David has enormous implications for our understanding of Tamar's role. It is no accident that the Chronicler gives her pride of place in the verse which records her children: וְתָמָר כַּלָּתוֹ יָלְדָה לּוֹ אֶת־פֶּרֶץ וְאֶת־זָרַח (1 Chr 2:4). As Willien van Wieringen notes, "Tamar's name is actually included, contrary to the names of so many women who are much more prominent in the earlier biblical narratives." Moreover her name is mentioned right at the start of the sentence, "a syntactical position of great focus."[101] Tamar has moved from being the mother of two insignificant members of Judah's tribe to being the ancestress of David, whose intrepid actions have secured his line. She is no longer merely one of "the walking womb-bearers for their husbands/mates, with absolutely no significance of their own,"[102] as described so graphically by Antje Labahn and Ehud Ben Zvi. Her status has

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[100] Löwisch, *Trauma Begets Genealogy,* 94.

[101] Willien van Wieringen, "Why Some Women Were Included in the Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9," in *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes,* ed. Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol, DCLS 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 297.

[102] Antje Labahn and Ehud Ben Zvi, "Observations on Women in the Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9," *Bib* 84 (2003): 465.

changed to that of dynastic matriarch. As Rachel Adelman asserts, "she risks everything –

biological, social and legal censure – to become the grand matriarch of the monarchy."[103]

The Fifth Matriarch

For a long time Tamar has been excluded from the circle of the traditional matriarchal

foursome of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah,[104] but gradually the confined list is experiencing

change: Athalya Brenner includes Sarah, Hagar, Lot's daughters, Leah and Rachel and their

maids, while Jo Ann Davidson restricts her analysis to Sarah, Hagar and Rebekah.[105] Exum

deliberately limits any discussion of matriarchs in Genesis to chapters 12-35, on the grounds

that the matriarchs have no role in chapters 37-50, while *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*

treats of patriarchs and matriarchs together under the common heading of "ancestors."[106]

Regardless of the shifting parameters it seems clear that the exclusion of Tamar from any list

of dynastic matriarchs is no longer tenable and she is gradually being accorded the status of

"honoured matriarch,"[107] while some include Tamar in a group of so-called "secondary

matriarchs".[108] Dohyung Kim more categorically asserts that Tamar can be presented as "the

fifth matriarch."[109] At the very least she is a *de facto* matriarch.[110]

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[103] Adelman, *Female Ruse*, 68.

[104] Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated,* ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 27; Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 12-13.

[105] Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 92; Jo Ann Davidson, "Genesis Matriarchs Engage Feminism," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 169-78.

[106] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 70n2; J.W. Rogerson, "The Ancestors," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible,* ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26-27.

[107] Fiona D. Hill, "Disarming the 'Bible-bashers': Claiming the Bible for Australian Abuse Survivors" *(*PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2008), 165n3. See also Peter W. Coxon, "Was Naomi a Scold? A Response to Fewell and Gunn," *JSOT* 45 (1989): 35.

[108] Moshe Reiss and David J. Zucker,"Co-opting the Secondary Matriarchs: Bilhah, Zilpah, Tamar, and Aseneth," *BibInt* 22 (2014): 307.

[109] Dohyung Kim, "Literary-Critical Analysis of the Role of Genesis 38 within Genesis 37-50," vii.

[110] For an opposing view see Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 94, where he states: "This mother is, in a sense, a pseudo-matriarch. Or more strongly put, she is an anti-matriarch. Her experience diverges from the matriarchs' in certain key aspects: she is a non-ancestral woman who, without the help of God, secures offspring, not from a husband but from her own father-in-law." Kruschwitz does not always see non-ancestral women negatively. For reference in the same work to

Even before the new insights offered by the re-examination of the coda are taken into

account, several similarities had been noted between Tamar and the traditional quartet. Like

Sarah and Rebekah she had encountered dangerous situations (38:14, 24) although in their

case it was the danger of being taken as a wife of another man after being passed off by her

husband as his sister (12:10–30; 20:1–18; 26:1–11). Like Sarai (11:29), she is an outsider whose

family and ethnicity are unclear or uncertain.[111] Like Rebekah (25:24; 27:9, 15-17) she bears

twins and uses trickery to gain her ends (38:14, 18, 27). Like Leah she deliberately chooses the

man who is to father her children[112] and is associated with payment for sex.[113] A summary of

the matriarchs' characteristics reads as follows: "independent, strong willed … smart,

proactive, sharp tongued, strategic-minded, and possessed of iron wills."[114] They were

"women who independently assessed their situation, set their sights on a goal, and decided on

a course of action that would accomplish this aim. Their methods were varied, but creative,

well crafted, but sincere."[115] It is easy to identify the characteristics of Tamar in this

matriarchal list.

A subtle hint of Tamar's future role may be indicated by the location of the encounter between

Judah and Tamar: בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם. Enaim is often understood as a place name,[116] but there is no

unanimity about its meaning: the word עין can be translated as "eyes" or as "springs/wells"[117]

Sarai as an outsider see page 284. For my views on God's role in the conception of Tamar's children, see
pages 152-53.

[111] Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 284.

[112] The emotions involved are very different. Tamar's choice of Judah is a pragmatic, cold-blooded affair
to conceive the child she has been denied, while it is patent that Leah longs for Jacob to return her love:
"surely now my husband will love me" (29:32). See also 29:33-34.

[113] Judah pays for Tamar's services with a generous prostitute's fee (38:17), while Leah gives her son's
mandrakes to Rachel as payment for a night with Jacob. Leah is under no illusion about the nature of the
transaction, telling Jacob, "I have hired you (שְׂכַרְתִּיךָ) with my son's mandrakes" (30:16).

[114] J.J. Gross, "Vayeshev: Tamar, the Fifth Matriarch (and more of a man than Jacob, Joseph and Judah
combined)." *The Times of Israel,* 2 December 2015.

[115] Mara Kelly-Zukowski, "The Subversiveness of the Marginalized Women of Scripture: Models of Faith
and Action for Twenty-First Century Women," *Gender Issues* 22 (2005): 40.

[116] There is no other reference to a town named Enaim in the HB but it can be associated with the town
of עין, Enam (Josh 15:34). According to Westermann (*Genesis 37-50*, 53) Enaim is "a small village near
Timnah." Bos ("Eyeopener at the Gate," 121) states, "it is not clear whether a place name or a more
general location is intended."

[117] Adelman, "Seduction and Recognition," 106n27; Kohn, "Drunkenness, Prostitution and Immodest
Appearances," 179n229.

and the clever narrator may wish to imply both meanings. It is generally understood that

Tamar takes up her position outside the gates of the city. This is not only a likely location for a

prostitute to ply her trade but is also close to the common location of wells and springs.[118] An

encounter near water echoes the stories of two other matriarchs, Rebekah and Rachel.[119]

Rebekah meets Isaac's servant who is seeking a bride for his master at a well. Her first

appearance in the story is described as follows: "there was Rebekah … coming out with her

water-jar on her shoulder. The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had

known. She went down to the spring (עין), filled her jar, and came up" (24:15-16). Similarly

Jacob sees Rachel first time at the mouth of the well (29:10).[120] It seems more than

coincidental that Tamar's most significant encounter with Judah, an encounter which like

those experienced by Rebekah and Rachel will lead eventually to the perpetuation of

Abraham's dynasty, occurs at a place whose name may be associated with water.

A particular condition which Tamar shares with all of the traditional matriarchs is that of

barrenness. Like Sarai (16:2), Rebekah (25:21), Rachel (29:31) and Leah (30:9) she fails to

conceive.[121] In Tamar's case it has rightly been described as "enforced barrenness"[122] but like

the other women she longed to bear a child for her husband and circumstances prevent her

from doing so. Her predicament may be hinted at in Tamar's actual name, as Frymer-Kensky

explains:

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[118] Both 1 Samuel 9:11 and Genesis 24:11 make clear that sources of water were frequently outside the city gates. The location of water supplies outside the city gate is well attested by archaeological evidence. Frank S. Frick (*The City in Ancient Israel* SBLDS 36 [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977], 80) explains the reason for the extramural location of the wells: "The preferred source of water was a fresh spring, but since springs do not flow from hilltops, they were usually located outside of the city walls."

[119] Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 93-94.

[120] Hagar, another potential matriarch, is also associated with water both in springs, "a spring (עין) of water" (16:7), and wells (21:19).

[121] In Leah's case it is an instance of secondary infertility since she had already borne four sons (29:32-35).

[122] Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 170. It is also worth noting that Tamar did not see herself as intrinsically barren. When she encounters Judah at the city gate it is with the confidence that she is capable of conceiving.

"*Tamar* is the date palm tree, a tree that can bear copious and precious fruit. But the

fertility of the date palm is not assured; it must be pollinated by direct human action.

The name Tamar hints that … her fertility will be endangered."[123]

Tamar's solution to her barren condition strangely resembles that of the other women. Sarai

(16:2), Rachel (30:3) and Leah (30:9) use other women, in each instance their maids, as

surrogate mothers. Menn astutely observes how Tamar does not use another woman as a

surrogate woman. "Rather, Tamar solicits the necessary sexual services of one of the

recalcitrant males by posing as another woman herself."[124] She becomes in effect her own

surrogate.[125]

Sight and Insight

The links between Tamar and the other matriarchs are reinforced by a web of images and

motifs which bind them together, most notably imagery of sight and insight and the theme of

trickery or tricksterism. Kruschwitz in particular has explored how sight is one of the

matriarchal motifs which is also reflected in the Tamar interlude. He outlines the connections

as follows:

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[123] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible,* 266. This interpretation of Tamar's name is dependent on the assumption that the hand pollination of date palms would have been a familiar process to the readers of Genesis 38. The date when hand pollination, as opposed to wind pollination, was first practised in biblical times is open to debate according to Mariana Giovino (*The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations*, OBO 230 [Fribourg: Academic, 2007], 111). Visual evidence is lacking and the main textual evidence for the practice is derived from Laws 64-65 of the Code of Hammurabi: "he gave his orchard to a gardener to pollinate" (L64); "the gardener has not completed the pollination of the orchard" (L65), translated in M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary*, BibSem 73 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 254. In these laws the verb *rakâbu* has been interpreted as "to pollinate a date palm". See A.H. Pruessner, "Date culture in Ancient Babylonia," *AJSL* 36 (1920): 225-26.

[124] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 95.

[125] Tamar does not share all the matriarchs' traits. As Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman have observed, in Genesis all the matriarchs are described physically (*Ruth*, 74n64). Sarah is "beautiful in appearance" (12:11), Rebekah was "very fair to look upon" (24:16), and Rachel was "graceful and beautiful" (29:17). Leah's eyes were "lovely" (29:17), although some translate רַכּוֹת as "weak" (RSV, NJPS, LXX - ἀσθενεῖς) or "delicate" (Everett Fox, Five Books of Moses, 137); cf. Aaron Michael Jensen's argument ("The Appearance of Leah," VT 68 [2018]: 514) that the reference to Leah's eyes "speaks not of her eyes but of her general appearance." In contrast Tamar's appearance is not described. This lack need not weaken her claim to be considered a matriarch. Tamar's story has a different origin, is considerably shorter than the others with consequently less scope for description, and in the chapter as a whole no character, including Judah's wife, is described physically, unlike, for instance, the reference in the following chapter to the "handsome and good-looking" Joseph (39:6).

The dynamic of sight, however, echoes with affirmation, showing Tamar to resemble the matriarchs (and other women in Genesis). Inasmuch as the matriarchs become a part of the ancestral story by sight—by being seen, by seeing, and by making others to see (or not see)—Tamar parallels them … She—like Sarah, Leah, and Rachel, and most of all Rebekah—is a game-changer in terms of what she sees, how she is seen, and how she makes others see.[126]

Being seen is a key element of all the matriarchal stories. Sarai is taken to the Pharaoh's house and into a potentially dangerous situation because the Egyptians "saw that the woman was very beautiful" (12:14). Similarly Rebekah's appearance is stressed by Abraham's servant when he arrives at Nahor: "The girl was very fair to look upon" (24:16). During Rebekah's and Isaac's sojourn in Gerar Abimelech realises the truth of Isaac's relationship to Rebekah when he "saw" through his window Isaac fondling Rebekah (26:8). Jacob is drawn to Rachel on first sight (29:10), while sight is also implicit in Jacob's realisation that he has been duped when he realises he had spent his wedding night with Leah: "When morning came, it was Leah!" (29:25).[127] Tamar's plot to waylay Judah is predicated on the assumption that he will react to the sight of her at the city gate. Judah duly "saw" Tamar at the roadside, surmised she was a prostitute (38:15) and responded accordingly.

Seeing on the part of the matriarchs is equally important, in particular the form of seeing which brings insight. For several of the matriarchs – and for Tamar – this occurs at key moments of their stories. When Sarah "saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac" (21:9) she acted promptly to have Hagar and Ishmael cast out, thus securing Isaac's future as Abraham's heir and heir to God's promise. Gaining insight into their situations also governs the actions of Rachel and Leah, whose realisations lead them to solve their problems through surrogacy. When Rachel "saw" that she was barren (30:1) she pleads with Jacob for a child and then gives him her servant Bilhah

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[126] Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 263.

[127] הנה in the phrase וְהִנֵּה־הִוא לֵאָה replaces the verb of sight in this instance.

(30:3). Similarly "Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children" and gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob (30:9). The defining moment for Tamar which triggers her decisive sequence of actions occurs when she "saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage" (38:14).

The verb ראה is used only once in connection to Rebekah, when she saw Isaac for the first time (24:64).[128] In her machinations on Jacob's behalf two of the other senses, those of touch and taste, are more important to the plot (27:9-10, 15-16). This time she exploits the fact that Isaac was unable to see clearly: וַתִּכְהֶיןָ עֵינָיו מֵרְאֹת (27:1). Rebekah's actions will eventually lead Isaac to see that his blessing must remain with Jacob (27:35, 37). Likewise Tamar relies on the assumption that Judah will not "see" that the woman he meets at the city gate is in fact his daughter-in-law. Eventually Judah will also gain fresh insight when he acknowledges Tamar's righteousness and his own culpability (38:26). Her encounter with him at the entrance to Enaim, בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם, a phrase which may be translated literally as "opening of eyes"[129] has been the prelude to Judah opening his eyes to the truth.

Trickster Matriarchs

The figure of the trickster is one which spans both time and space. Marilyn Jurick has cited examples from across the centuries, whose origins range from Iceland to the Amazon and from Mexico to Japan and including tales from Jewish, Russian, Greek, Indian and Hausa cultures.[130] Within the realm of the biblical trickster special attention has been given to the trickster matriarchs. It will become clear that Tamar is eminently eligible for inclusion in this select group.

Susan Niditch is usually credited with providing a theoretical framework for the biblical trickster, drawing both on examples from folklore and on her analysis of tricksters in Genesis

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[128] Is it co-incidental that when Rebekah met Isaac he had settled in the Negeb (24:62), having come there from Beer-lahai-roi, whose name means "the well of the living one who sees me" (16:13-14)?
[129] See, e.g., Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 159n130.
[130] Marilyn Jurich, *Scheherazade's Sisters: Trickster Heroines and Their Stories in World Literature* (London: Greenwood, 1998), 249-54.

and the book of Esther.[131] She has developed a five-stage morphology, which begins with an underdog of low status, who then carries out a deception to improve that status. In the third phase the underdog's status is improved as a result of a trick or deception. This is followed by the revelation of the deception. In the final stage the underdog's status is reduced or he or she returns to their marginal or outsider role.[132] Tamar seems to fulfil many of these criteria. A childless widow of little account, her covert seduction of Judah leads to a successful pregnancy. Her deception is revealed and by the end of Genesis 38 she seems to fade from the narrative. Nonetheless rather than dwelling excessively on Niditch's influential criteria it may be more useful to heed Naomi Steinberg's wise comment that the diversity of the trickster types makes "any universal statements about the function, and even the definition of this character impossible."[133] Instead I will trace the trickster characteristics which unite the matriarchs and will examine how closely Tamar exhibits the same traits.

The matriarchs vary in the extent and nature of their trickery. Jackson groups Tamar, together with Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, as the "trickster matriarchs of Genesis," but even Sarah also deserves to be included. [134] The themes which connect these trickster women include their participation in deception, which frequently involves using their sexuality, the motivation for their deception and its relationship to the realisation of the divine plan, and the relationship between their trickery and counter trickery.

Rebekah is often perceived as the quintessential trickster who moves the men around her "like chess pieces."[135] Like Sarah she colludes with her husband in pretending to be his sister in foreign territory (26:7). Rebekah's consent to co-operate with Isaac's plan to safeguard his life

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[131] Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (London: Harper & Row, 1987).
[132] Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*, 44. See also Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 44. Jackson elaborates more clearly Niditch's five steps.
[133] Naomi Steinberg, "Israelite Tricksters, Their Analogues and Cross-Cultural Study," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 4.
[134] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 41.
[135] Niditch, "Genesis," 36.

in Gerar is presumed,[136] whereas in Genesis 12:11-14 Abraham openly cajoles and commands

Sarah to accede to his deception in Egypt. The phrase אִמְרִי־נָא (12:13), which Abraham utters,

is a perfect reflection of the situation, combining the imperative of the verb with the entreaty

of the enclitic. A strange repeat occurrence happens when Abraham and Sarah reside in Gerar

as aliens (20:2). More importantly both Sarah and Rebekah take steps to ensure that the right

son inherits the blessing: Sarah, by plotting against Hagar and her son Ishmael,[137] and Rebekah,

by winning Jacob his father's blessing by means of a masterful strategy, superbly devised to

deceive utterly the elderly, almost blind Isaac (27:5-17).

The sisters, Leah and Rachel, are associated with an unusual trick, when Leah colludes with her

father Laban to replace Rachel as Jacob's intended bride (29:23-25), although it is Laban, not

Leah, whom Jacob blames for the trick: "Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to

me? … Why then have you deceived me?'" (29:25). Nonetheless Leah had to play a vital role in

the deception.[138] Rachel's role in this trick is frequently overlooked or downplayed but Jackson

believes Rachel was a "tertiary player" in Laban's and Leah's deceit of Jacob.[139] Similarly

Wendy Doniger believes that Rachel was "a party to the deception" in that she facilitates the

events by not going to Jacob's bed on their wedding night.[140]

The trick Rachel plays on her father is unusual from beginning to end. The significance of the

תרפים which Rachel steals from Laban and her motivation for stealing them are uncertain.[141]

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[136] One would imagine that if a woman of Rebekah's strength of character had objected strongly to the plan or had refused to co-operate, this would have been indicated in the text.

[137] It can be argued that Sarah acts openly rather than uses deception to alienate Hagar and Ishmael, but nonetheless Sarah's behaviour has been rightly branded as "subversive". See Olivia DePreter, "Women of Genesis: Mothers of Power," *Denison Journal of Religion* 10 (2011): 53.

[138] The deceptions practised by Leah and Tamar may share a particular circumstance. It is possible they exploited the fact that Jacob's and Judah's perceptions were dulled by the consumption of alcohol. Jacob sleeps with Leah after the wedding feast provided by Laban (29:22), when he may have been intoxicated. See J.A. Diamond, "The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem," *VT* 34 (1984): 212. Tamar waylays Judah when he is en route to or from a sheep-shearing, a time associated with feasting and drinking (1 Sam 25:8, 36; 2 Sam 13:27-28).

[139] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 52.

[140] Doniger, *Bedtrick,* 161.

[141] Numerous reasons have been put forward for Rachel's theft. According to Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn (*Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993], 79) the תרפים may represent "a legal claim to the property Jacob had acquired from Laban."

They are obviously of such value and importance that Laban went in hot pursuit "for seven days" (31:23).[142] Translated as "household gods"[143] or "household idols,"[144] they are usually considered to have noteworthy religious import and may be equivalent to the Roman *penates*.[145] Rachel successfully frustrates her father's search for the תרפים by remaining seated on the camel's saddle in which she had concealed them (31:34-35).

Inherent in most of the deceptions committed by the matriarchs is the concept of what Shakespearean scholars were the first to describe as "the bed-trick."[146] The bed-trick, as applied in Genesis, has two components. The first component means "You go to bed with someone you think you know, and when you wake up you discover that it was someone else". The second component of the bed-trick is that the mistaken partner deliberately pretends to be someone else.[147] Therefore Leah masquerades as Jacob's bride Rachel (29:23), Tamar pretends to Judah that she is a prostitute (38:13-15), and Sarah and Rebekah pretend to be their husband's sister and by implication are consequently free to receive another man's

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Westermann (*Genesis 12-36: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion S.J. [London: SPCK, 1985], 493) suggests they confer "protection and blessing", while Yair Zakovitch, ("Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *BibInt* 1 [1993]: 141) believes that they may have powers of divination, like Joseph's goblet, and that Rachel stole them to prevent Laban using them, as a quasi-biblical GPS system, to trace their escape route. (In the event this was clearly fruitless as Laban does not seem to have needed the תרפים to find them.) Perhaps more plausibly her motivation could have been related to her much-prized role as mother of Joseph and any future sons (30:22-24). She may wish to obtain a "special privilege for her son," or claim that the proper line of descent should be traced through Joseph (Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 101, 99). Alternatively she may wish to exclude Jacob as *paterfamilias* and legitimate her claim to Joseph "as her descendant in her family's line of descent, as a 'mother's son'." See Nancy Jay, "Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs," *VT* 38 (1988): 66. It may simply be that they are associated with Laban's role as head of the family and therefore his most precious possession. By stealing them Rachel may merely be inflicting a devastating blow to Laban's *amour propre.*

[142] Jacob tasks Laban, כִּי דָלַקְתָּ אַחֲרָי: "that you have hotly pursued me" (31:36). דלק literally means "burn", an indication of Laban's fiery haste.

[143] NRSV

[144] NJPS

[145] Savina J. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 237; Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 169.

[146] The phrase was first coined in connection with *All's Well That Ends Well.* See William Witherle Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 51.

[147] Doniger, *Bedtrick*, xiii, 1.

attentions (12:13; 20:2; 26:7).[148] Rachel's duplicitous actions employ the bed-trick and the

wider realm of sexuality in more unusual ways. Unlike Leah and Tamar, who have sex in the

guise of other women, Rachel does not have sex with the deceived man but rather facilitates

his deception on two specific occasions. Even more remarkably in both occurrences the

woman she facilitates is her sister Leah. In the first instance, as noted above, Rachel must have

deliberately absented herself from Jacob's bed so that Leah can sleep with him (29:23). In the

second incident she again allows Leah to be her substitute as Jacob's bed-fellow but this time

it is in return for the mandrakes Reuben gave to Leah in the hope they will promote her

fertility (30:14-16).[149] In her third deception Rachel again uses her sexuality to her advantage.

She successfully conceals the תרפים from Laban by refusing to rise from her camel cushion on

the grounds that "the way of women is upon me" (31:35), a phrase which is commonly

interpreted as indicating that Rachel is menstruating.[150] In light of Rachel's activities Tamar's

seem almost tame by comparison but there is no doubt that Tamar's "bed-trick" earns her

inclusion among the matriarchs' ranks.

A common motive for the matriarchs' tricks is the preservation and perpetuation of their

family. Sarah consents to act as Abraham's sister to preserve his life and schemes against

Hagar and Ishmael to safeguard Isaac's future. Rebekah ensures the blessing falls on the

correct son, while Tamar fights to conceive the child denied her by Onan's and Judah's actions.

Rachel acts to protect her family's interests with the aid of the תרפים and bargains with Leah to

increase her own chance of conceiving. Both Rachel and Leah are concerned by their father's

attrition of their inheritance and that of their children:

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[148] In the case of Sarah and Rebekah, unlike Leah and Tamar, a sexual relationship is not consummated (20:4; 26:10-11), although there is ambiguity about the following reference, "the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house" (12:15). What does being taken into Pharaoh's house imply?

[149] Alter, *Five Books of Moses,* 160n14. There is one other subtle difference in the second incident. Jacob expects to sleep with Rachel but on this occasion it is revealed to him beforehand that he is going to have sex with a woman other than the one he presumed: "When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, 'You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.' So he lay with her that night" (30:16).

[150] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 53.

For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property

that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children (31:15-

16).[151]

Rachel's resentment at these actions on the part of Laban culminates in the theft of the תרפים.

But the matriarchs' actions are not entirely altruistic. As Exum notes, "It is in their interest to

secure their sons' futures, for their own future well-being depends upon their sons."[152] Tamar,

as already recorded in Chapter 2, shares that more self-centred motivation with her fellow

matriarchs but she also shares their willingness to play their more selfless role in the

perpetuation of the line, so that God's promise to Abraham and Sarah to make "a great

nation" (12:2) of their descendants will be fulfilled.[153] The weight of their responsibilities lies

heavily on them: eight times in Genesis the promise of numerous descendants is made (13:16;

15:5; 17:2-21; 22:17; 26:3-4, 24; 28:13–14; 35:11) and each matriarch, including Tamar, does

all in her power to bring God's plan to fruition as God's "female accomplices."[154]

A final aspect which connects Tamar with the other trickster matriarchs is that of the trickster

tricked or of counter-trickery. The counter-trickery is conveyed in a number of ways. There are

three domino-like sequences. In the first Isaac is tricked by Jacob (27:19) who is tricked by

Laban (29:23-25) who is tricked by Rachel (31:35). In the second Esau is tricked by Jacob

(27:36) who is tricked by Leah (29:23-25). In the third Jacob is tricked by Judah (37:31-32) who

is tricked by Tamar (38:14-18). The rabbis were keenly aware of how the tables could be

turned in this way on the trickster. Commenting on the line "but in the morning behold it was

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[151] Cf. Sarah Shectman who asserts that as married women Rachel and Leah would gain nothing from making an inheritance claim ("Rachel, Leah, and the Composition of Genesis," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwarz [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 210).

[152] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 89.

[153] See pages 158-67 for Tamar's involvement.

[154] Deborah F. Sawyer, "Queen Vashti's 'No' and What It Can Tell Us about Gender Tools in Biblical Narrative," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 348.

Leah," the midrash explicitly links Leah's deception of Jacob by impersonating Rachel with

Jacob's deception of his father by impersonating Esau:[155]

> Jacob said to her: 'You are a deceiver and the daughter of a deceiver!' 'Is there a
>
> teacher without pupils?' she retorted. 'Did not your father call you Esau, and you
>
> answered him! So did you too call me and I answered you!' (Gen. Rab. 70:19)

Similarly the kid Tamar receives for prostituting herself with Judah is connected to Judah's

deception of his father when Joseph's coat was dipped in a kid's blood:

> The Holy One, Praised be He, said to Judah, 'You deceived your father with a kid. By
>
> your life, Tamar will deceive you with a kid…...The Holy One, Praised be He, said to
>
> Judah, 'You said to your father, haker-na. By your life, Tamar will say to you, haker-na'
>
> (Gen. Rab. 84:11, 12)

In each midrash the rabbis implicitly argue that the final trickster tricks a trickster who has

deceived a third party: Leah, Jacob, Isaac; Tamar, Judah, Jacob. They ignore a feature which is

unique to Tamar's situation. Judah deceived her by implying he would give her in marriage to

Shelah (38:11) after the latter reached adulthood. When Tamar discovers the truth she gains

her revenge by deceiving Judah in turn. Alone of all those deceived, she does not wait for a

later generation to avenge her. Instead she takes steps to cast Judah in the role of the

"counter-tricked fool."[156] In the words of Melissa Jackson, "Tamar is a master trickster. She

devises a plan, chooses the perfect time to execute it, and does so flawlessly."[157] She has truly

won her place among the trickster matriarchs.

Twin Matriarchs: Tamar and Rebekah

Of all the traditional matriarchs Tamar bears the closest resemblance to Rebekah and the

similarities between them serve to enhance her status as an "ancestress of kings."[158] Genesis

Rabbah was one of the first to note the likenesses: "Two covered themselves with a veil and

[155] Doniger, *Bedtrick,* 256.
[156] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 55.
[157] Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 56.
[158] Kohn, "Drunkenness, Prostitution and Immodest Appearances," 240.

gave birth to twins, Rebecca and Tamar."[159] Menn observes how these parallels create a link

between Tamar and an "important Israelite matriarch." What is more, they present Tamar as

"a parallel figure to the mother of Israel himself."[160]

The similarities between the two birth narratives have already been discussed but the

references to the act of veiling require further exploration. Rebekah "took her veil and covered

herself" (24:65) while Tamar "put on a veil, wrapped herself up" (38:14). The similarities are

more marked in the Hebrew text:

(24:65) וַתִּקַּח הַצָּעִיף וַתִּתְכָּס

(38:14) וַתְּכַס בַּצָּעִיף וַתִּתְעַלָּף

The verb כסה, albeit in different forms, is used in both verses, while most unusually the term

צעיף is used for "veil" only in these two HB chapters. Tamar veils herself to conceal her identity

from Judah at the entrance to the city while Rebekah veils herself on seeing Isaac for the first

time as she approaches the entrance to his settlement. Rebekah's veiling is usually associated

with her position as a bride. Although there is no explicit evidence for the custom of a Hebrew

bride wearing a veil, on the basis of references to the veiling of brides in Babylon[161] and

Mari,[162] it has been assumed that the practice was also common in Israel. This is borne out by

the substitution of Leah for Rachel (29:21-25). This stratagem could not have succeeded unless

the bride was veiled.[163] It would be far-fetched to suggest that Tamar approaches Judah as a

bride[164] and the reference to her veil is as a disguise rather than the adornment of a new wife

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[159] Gen. Rab. 85:7

[160] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 94.

[161] In Akkadian the bride was called *kallatu kuttumtu*, "the veiled bride." See Tzvi Abusch, "An Incantation-Prayer: Gods of the Night 1," in *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction,* ed. Alan Lenzi, ANEM 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 159. Matitiahu Tsevat notes that *pussumtu,* the "veiled one," is a synonym of *kallatu*, a bride: "The Husband Veils a Wife (Hittite Laws, Sections 197-98)," *JCS* 27 (1975): 237n10.

[162] Jack M. Sasson, "The Servant's Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse," *JNES* 65 (2006): 265.

[163] Karel van der Toorn, *The Significance of the Veil in the Ancient Near East* in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom,* ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 331.

[164] For example, Fewell and Gunn (*Gender, Power, and Promise,* 88) suggest improbably that by wearing a veil Tamar hopes to confront Judah with his responsibilities through reminding him that she is still betrothed to his family and that she should be married. In fact, it is clear that Tamar knows her plan will work only if Judah is ignorant of her identity and believes he is having sex with an unknown prostitute.

but there may be a subtle hint to Tamar's eventual status as a *de facto* if unconventional

levirate wife. This ambiguity may be underlined by the description of Tamar is 1 Chronicles 2:4

as Judah's כַּלָּתֹו. In the entire Book of Chronicles this is the only use of the term.[165] Depending

on context כלה can mean "bride,"[166] "spouse"[167] or "daughter-in-law."[168] Is there a suggestion

that the Chronicler sees as her both? At the very least it can be agreed that both Tamar and

Rebekah veil themselves before a significant encounter with the fathers of their future

children.[169]

There are some further similarities in the veiling incidents. In both instances, unlike the

practice in Babylon,[170] where the bride is veiled by others, Tamar and Rebekah take the

initiative and veil themselves. In Rebekah's case it has been interpreted as "the murmurs" of

her independence[171] while Tamar's veiling of herself is part of the decisive, independent action

she takes when she learns of Judah's deception.

Both Tamar and Rebekah are noted for listening closely[172] and for achieving their aims covertly

and at risk to themselves. In both instances their plan of action is triggered by information they

receive through listening.[173] Rebekah formulates her plan to win Jacob his father's blessing

because she "was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau" (27:5) and has realised the

possibilities for action inherent in what she has heard. Similarly Tamar springs into action to

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Even Judah will not sleep knowingly with his daughter-in-law, a fact confirmed by the narrator's subsequent comment in Genesis 38:26: "And he did not lie with her again."

[165] Van Wieringen, "Why Some Women Were Included in the Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9," 297.

[166] See, e.g., Jer 7:34; Isa 49:18; 61:10; Joel 2:16.

[167] See, e.g., Song 4:8 (although only in certain translations, e.g. KJV).

[168] See, e.g., Gen 11:31; 38:11; Lev 18:15; Ruth 1:6.

[169] In both instances this encounter is overshadowed by death: in Rebekah's and Isaac's case by the death of Sarah and for Tamar and Judah the deaths of Onan, Er and the daughter of Shua. Coincidentally in regard to both Isaac and Judah an identical phrase records their consolation for their loss: וַיִּנָּחֵם יִצְחָק (24:67), וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוּדָה (38:12), although Isaac is consoled for the loss of his mother *by* his union with Rebekah while Judah is consoled for the loss of his wife *before* his union with Tamar.

[170] Van der Toorn, *Significance of the Veil,* 336. MAL §41 links veiling and marriage: "If a man veils his concubine in public by declaring: 'she is my wife,' this woman will be his wife." Similarly when the daughter of the king of Aleppo was married to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, envoys from Mari veiled the bride on behalf of her husband: "nous avons mis les voiles sur la fille" (ARM 26, 106: translation of 10:13-15).

[171] Adelman, *Female Ruse*, 37. See also Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, "The Woman of their Dreams: The Image of Rebekah in Genesis 24," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J.A. Clines, JSOTSup 257 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 100.

[172] Niditch, "Genesis," 37.

[173] Cf. Sarah (18:10).

waylay Judah on the basis of information she receives through listening to an anonymous

source or sources: וַיֻּגַּד לְתָמָר (38:13). It is made clear that this information concerning Judah's

whereabouts is not something Tamar has observed herself but that she has heard from

another and has grasped its implications and potential.

It is remarkable how Rebekah works totally behind the scene to achieve her goals.[174] Not once

during the encounters between Isaac and Jacob and between Isaac and Esau is Rebekah

recorded as being present. She effaces herself completely: from 27:17, when Rebekah hands

Jacob the food she has prepared to bring in to his father, until 27:42, when she is informed of

Esau's death threat against his brother she neither appears nor is mentioned in the

narrative.[175] In a very different way Tamar effaces herself, disguising herself so effectively that

Tamar, the daughter-in-law Judah knows, is invisible not only behind the concealing veil but

also behind the persona of the hard-bargaining prostitute who accosts Judah at the city gate.

In achieving their aims both are prepared to take considerable risks: Rebekah is willing to bear

any curse which results from Jacob's deception of his father - "Let your curse be on me, my

son" (27:13) - while Tamar's risky behaviour at the city gate imperils her own life (38:24).

Tamar follows Rebekah in another aspect, her self-sufficiency and autonomy. Ann Engar

observes that Rebekah, "the second of the great matriarchs of the Hebrews, stands far above

the other patriarch's wives in her completeness." Sarah is shadowed by Hagar, while Leah and

Rachel, in what Engar terms "the baby wars of the Jacob story", are shadowed by their maids

Bilhah and Zilpah.[176] There is no hint that a surrogate was proposed either for Rebekah or for

Tamar.[177] Rebekah does not need the completeness of another woman, even during her

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[174] Niditch, "Genesis," 37.

[175] The verb used in Genesis 27:42, וַיֻּגַּד לְרִבְקָה is identical to that used in Genesis 38:13 וַיֻּגַּד לְתָמָר.

[176] Ann W Engar, "Old Testament Women as Tricksters," in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text,* ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 144.

[177] In Tamar's case it may that her marriages to Er and Onan were so brief that no concerns were raised about the possibility that she might be infertile.

twenty barren years;[178] Tamar, apart from the vague figure of the daughter of Shua, is devoid

of any explicit form of female companionship and fights her battles alone at the gate of Enaim.

In a similar way Rebekah had taken her destiny into her own hands when she leaves her family

and home for Canaan.[179] Both are characterized by actions, rather than speech,[180] and move

quickly in a flurry of verbs to achieve their objectives.[181] Alter has observed, in an apt phrase,

that Tamar's activity is "expressed in a detonating series of verbs".[182] These actions form an

inclusio framing her encounter with Judah:

(38:14) וַתָּסַר וַתְּכַס וַתִּתְעַלָּף וַתֵּשֶׁב

(38:19) וַתָּקָם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּסַר וַתִּלְבַּשׁ

Tamar's burst of activity to deceive Judah recalls Rebekah's sequence of actions, on this

occasion listed in consecutive verses, when she masterminded Jacob's scheme to deceive

Isaac: וַתַּעַשׂ (27:14); עָשָׂתָה, וַתִּתֵּן (27:17). (27:16); הִלְבִּישָׁה (27:15); וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ, וַתִּקַּח

Both Tamar and Rebekah play their role in ensuring the continuity of Abraham's line and do so

in unconventional ways. Rebekah subverts the normal order in ensuring by duplicitous means

that her younger son receives Isaac's blessings, while Tamar resorts to an incestuous liaison to

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[178] The length of Rebekah's barrenness is based on references to Isaac's age: he was forty at the time of his marriage (25:20) and sixty when the twins were born (25:26).

[179] Savina Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Chicago: Swallow, 1984), xv.

[180] The motives for their silence may differ. Rebekah's strong-minded approach does not need to explain itself while Tamar, situated in a hostile or at least inimical environment, has no one in whom to confide.

[181] Lieve Teugels, "'A Strong Woman, Who Can Find?': A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, with Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives," *JSOT* 19 (1994): 97. In Genesis 24 alone 30 verbs are used to describe Rebekah's actions: 24:15: יֹצֵאת; 24:16:וַתֵּרֶד, וַתְּמַלֵּא, וַתַּעַל; 24:18 וַתֵּרֶד, וַתְּמַהֵר, וַתֹּאמֶר; 24:19: וַתְּכַל, וַתֹּאמֶר, וַתַּשְׁקֵהוּ; 24:20: וַתְּמַהֵר, אֶשְׁאָב, וַתֹּאמֶר; 24:24: וַתֹּאמֶר; 24:25: וַתֹּאמֶר; 24:28 וַתָּרָץ, וַתַּגֵּד; 24:58: וַתֹּאמֶר, אֵלֵךְ; 24:61: וַתָּקָם, וַתֵּעַר, וַתָּרָץ, וַתִּשָׁאַב; 24:64: וַתֵּרֶא, וַתִּפֹּל; 24:65: וַתֹּאמֶר, וַתִּקַּח, וַתִּתְכָּס. This list excludes the verbs used by Abraham's servant when he repeats the account of their meeting (24:43-47). Several of these verbs emphasise not only the multiplicity but also the speed of Rebekah's actions, notably וַתְּמַהֵר (24:18); וַתָּרָץ, וַתְּמַהֵר (24:20); וַתָּרָץ (24:28).
Another busy matriarch, although to a lesser degree, is Rachel who appears for the first time in the story industriously tending her sheep. Wilda C. Gafney (*Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017], 55) argues that translations such as the NRSV's which imply that Rachel merely "kept" sheep (29:9) unlike, for instance, the NJPS which describes her as a "shepherdess", do not reflect the reality that Rachel was a working shepherd. In my view "keeping" sheep is an inadequate translation of רֹעָה הִוא where the verb רעה means to tend to a flock. Rachel was actively involved in the care of her sheep.

[182] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed., 7.

secure the conception of her child. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5 Tamar exhibits some of Abraham's traits, while Rebekah, as Jack Sasson comments, like Abraham can make "harsh choices between sons."[183] As Rebekah leaves home to marry Isaac her family prays:

אֲחֹתֵנוּ אַתְּ הֲיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה וְיִירַשׁ זַרְעֵךְ אֵת שַׁעַר שֹׂנְאָיו:

May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads;

may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes. (24:60)

It is surely no accident that her family's blessing is analogous to God's promise to Abraham:

כִּי־בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ וְהַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו:

I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of

heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies (22:17).

As well as a shared general meaning the key words are common to both speeches: זרע and שער, and the related concepts of רבה and רבבה, while the two verses end with equivalent terms for "enemies": שֹׂנְאָיו and אֹיְבָיו. No clearer indication could be given that Rebekah, even more than Isaac, is considered Abraham's successor and his equal, or perhaps "Abraham's proxy."[184] She is descended from the same family and with equal courage departs to live in a land that is both strange and promised.[185] Rebekah, not Isaac, is the link in the line between Abraham and Jacob; Isaac may have bestowed the blessing on Jacob but it was Rebekah who facilitated it.[186]

Queen Mother of the Davidic House

Tamar's role as matriarch differs from the traditional quartet in two subtle ways. Rachel and Leah are the ancestresses of the whole Israelite people, while Tamar, as mother of Perez, is the

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[183] Sasson, "Servant's Tale," 265.
[184] Adelman, *Female Ruse*, 34.
[185] Gillmayr-Bucher, "Woman of their Dreams," 100.
[186] Prouser, "Truth about Women and Lying," 23.

ancestress of only the tribe of Judah[187] including the house of Perez (Ruth 4:12). Ultimately this is not to her disadvantage as the second difference reveals, as Amit explains: "Chronicles is responsible for her place in the Judaic genealogy and her final recognition as the ancestress of the royal Davidic dynasty."[188] Unlike Rachel or Leah Tamar becomes fixed in the imagination as a royal ancestress or in the words of Susan Ackerman as the "queen mother" of the Davidic house.[189] Her delivery of Perez, a fact whose significance is recognised by the later genealogies, has won her this accolade. It is an accolade she richly deserves.

Tamar's special status is endorsed in 1 Chronicles 2 by the Chronicler's careful narration. Kalimi has outlined the chiastic structure of 1 Chronicles 2:3-4, which puts Tamar at the heart of the genealogy:

a. *Er and Onan and Shelah -*   c. **And Tamar, his daughter-in-law,**

b. these three <u>were born to him</u>   b. <u>bore him</u>

c. **of Bath-Shua the Canaanitess**   a. *Perez and Zerah.*[190]

It is notable that apart from Keturah (1.32-33) and Bilhah (7.13), Bath-Shua and Tamar are the only women of the patriarchal period to be included in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9 and of these Tamar is the matriarch *par excellence.*

Conclusion

Ultimately Tamar's right to be included in the select group of Genesis matriarchs rests on her fulfilment of the primary task of all matriarchs, to ensure the continuity of the dynasty by giving birth to significant members of the tribes of Israel and in particular of the tribe of Judah. Has anyone risked more than Tamar to secure the dynasty and the future of Israel? As early as

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[187]Moshe J. Bernstein, "Two Multivalent Readings in the Ruth Narrative," *JSOT* 50 (1991): 23.

[188] Amit, "Tamar, from Victim to Mother of a Dynasty," 305. In the same work Amit also acknowledges the role of the book of Ruth in enhancing Tamar's reputation. She claims it "not only upgrades her status to one of the matriarchs but also contributes to her royal status in the national memory" (301-2).

[189] Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 221.

[190] Kalimi, *Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles*, 220. [Kalimi's emphases].

the first or second century CE[191] Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* was quick to recognise Tamar as "our mother", "mater nostra Thamar," the phrase thus placing her on the same level as the patriarchs, such as "Abraham your father" (28:13).[192] This accolade is interpreted as the highest praise of Tamar's character and conduct, elevating her to the status of a matriarch.[193] Marina Hofman's pithy verdict captures the extent of Tamar's achievement over Judah: "She negotiates with the patriarch for the position of matriarch and she wins."[194]

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[191] The text was written sometime between 50 CE and 150 CE. See Mary Therese DesCamp, *Metaphor and Ideology: Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum and Literary Methods through a Cognitive Lens,* BibInt 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3. DesCamp is following the chronology of Howard Jacobson. Cf. D.J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo (First Century A.D.)," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume Two*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 299. Harrington dates LAB between 135 BCE and 100 CE and believes a date "around the time of Jesus seems most likely."

[192] See Donald C. Polaski, "On Taming Tamar: Amram's Rhetoric and Women's Roles in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*," *JSP* 7 (1995): 94.

[193] Pieter Willem van der Horst, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*," *JSP* 3 (1989): 32.

[194] Hofman, "Tamar as the Unsung Hero of Genesis 38," 116.

Chapter 5

The Theology of Genesis 38 - Tamar: Agent of God

Genesis 38 is frequently dismissed as a secular story of little theological value. This chapter will show that on the contrary God is depicted as being active in defence of God's plan for the descendants of Abraham but largely uses humanity to advance the divine purposes. To the possible surprise of many it is Tamar in particular who acts as God's agent by ensuring the continuity of Abraham's line and by exhibiting the godly qualities of righteousness, holiness and loving kindness.

Role of God

Walter Brueggemann and Claus Westermann typify the scholars who have dismissed the chapter as purely secular. For Brueggemann it is not evident that "it provides any significant theological resource. It is difficult to know in what context it might be of value for theological exposition."[1] Westermann is equally trenchant: "It is a secular narrative through and through… and says nothing of God's action or speech."[2] It is true that explicit references to God are largely conspicuous by their absence, with specific references in only two verses, 38:7, 10:

> [7]But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death.

> [10]What he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also.

The progressive diminution of God's explicit activity in the book of Genesis cannot be denied: "The God who walks about in the Garden of Eden, freely conversing with his creatures, gives way to one

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 307-8.
[2] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 56. See also Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 612-13; Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family,* 131.

who appears, occasionally in human guise, occasionally in dreams, and finally, in the Joseph story, to one who never directly talks to the hero at all."[3] This reduction in God's visible or audible presence in the later chapters of Genesis, including chapter 38, is even more marked when contrasted with God's central role in the later books of the Pentateuch "which are replete with revelations of divine thought and speech, with self-disclosures to individuals and a chosen people, and with powerful displays of mercy and anger towards the created world, humanity, and Israel in particular."[4]

Some scholars have tried even to dismiss the two references to the LORD (38:7, 10) as merely a convention to describe any unexpected or premature death: "What we would call misfortune is expressed by the Israelite as the direct action of God."[5] It is argued that Israelite narrators seldom explain the secondary cause of death such as accident or illness and instead claim, as in the case of Er, that a displeased God killed him.[6] This figure of speech could, it is suggested, cover a variety of causes.

Closer examination of the text reveals a different perspective. The deaths of Er and Onan are not depicted as natural occurrences but as deserved retribution for their moral failings.[7] Er was "wicked in the sight of the LORD" while what Onan did "was displeasing in the sight of the LORD." The manner of their deaths is not described but their culpability is made clear, especially in Onan's case. No details are given of Er's wickedness. It is noteworthy that Er is described as *being* evil, rather than *doing* evil.[8] The customary phrase is וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה (e.g. 1 Kgs 22:52). Er is the only figure in the

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[3] Everett Fox, "Can Genesis Be Read as a Book?," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 33.

[4] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 41.

[5] Thomas and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *VT* 18 (1968): 93.

[6] Arnold, *Genesis*, 326.

[7] Jeansonne points out that "the *hiphil* of *mwt* is used of God as a penalty for severe wrongdoing, such as in Gen. 18:25; Exod. 4:24; Num. 14:15; Deut 9:28; 32:39; Judg. 13:23; 1 Sam. 2:6, 2:25, 5:10, 11; 2 Kings 5:7; Isa 65:15; Hos. 9:16; 1 Chron. 2:3, 10:14" (*Women of Genesis,* 140n7).

[8] In a midrash on Tamar's story Nancy R. Bowen speculates that Er was both violent and unfaithful ("Women, Violence and the Bible," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 196).

.Bible whose person, rather than his deeds, is described as wicked: וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה.[9]

The rabbis according to Rashi speculated about Er as follows: "For it is written of Onan, God slew him also. [Also, indicating] that Onan's death was for the same sin as the death of Er. Why did Er waste his seed? So that [his wife] would not conceive thereby diminishing her beauty."[10] Their speculation was in vain. The omission of an explanation for Er's death is deliberate; the narrator wants to draw attention to the focus of the whole chapter, the issue of "seed" (38:8-9). זרע is a keyword in Genesis occurring 59 times in all.[11] It is made plain that God kills Onan not because of the nature of his sexual acts but because of their implications. By engaging in *coitus interruptus* Onan is frustrating Tamar's right to a child under the terms of a levirate relationship[12] and is potentially frustrating God's plan for Abraham's lineage.[13] God had repeatedly promised the patriarchs: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (17:6; also 17:20; 28:3; 35:11). God also promised their offspring would be "as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore" (22:17; also 15:5; 26:4; 32:12). Onan's actions demonstrate his opposition to this "divine agenda."[14] By destroying seed, the source of

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[9] Neriah Klein, "Between Genealogy and Historiography: Er, Achar and Saul in the Book of Chronicles," *VT* 66 (2016): 227-8.

[10] Rashi, *Bereishis*, 431. The rabbis may be correct in their speculation that Er's sin was also of a sexual nature but the reason they suggest is improbable. Given the importance in Israelite society of begetting children and especially an heir, the whole *raison d'être* of the chapter after all, it seems unlikely that Er would put the untouched beauty of his wife before the begetting of his children.

[11] 1:11 (x2), 12 (x2), 29 (x2); 3:15 (x2); 4:25; 7:3; 8:22; 9:9; 12:7; 13:15, 16 (x2); 15:3, 5, 13, 18; 16:10; 17:7 (x2), 8, 9, 10, 12, 19; 19:32, 34; 21:12, 13; 22:17 (x2), 18; 24:7, 60; 26:3, 4 (x3), 24; 28:4, 13, 14 (x2); 32:12; 35:12; 38:8, 9 (x2); 46:6, 7; 47:19, 23, 24; 48:4, 11, 19. This is in contrast with 170 occurrences in the rest of the Old Testament, as calculated by T. Desmond Alexander ("Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 [1993]: 259-60).

[12] Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity,* OTR (London: Routledge, 2000), 113-14. See also Amelia Devin Freedman, *God as an Absent Character in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Literary-Theoretical Study,* StBibLit 82 (New York: Lang, 2005), 39.

[13] Suggestions by Clifford ("Genesis 38," 525) and Carmichael (*Law and Narrative in the Bible,* 295) respectively that Er and Onan died because Judah's marriage to a Canaanite was cursed by God or because of a desire to remove the Canaanite influence on Judah's line can be ignored in the light of the lack of explicit censure of Judah's marriage and of the implicit approval of Tamar who was also probably a Canaanite.

[14] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 367.

future offspring, God's promises will be nullified.[15] It is unclear whether Tamar is aware of God's involvement in the deaths of the brothers[16] but what is clear is that God's response to their wickedness shapes the rest of the narrative.[17]

God's involvement in the narrative does not end with the brothers' death. Although it is not explicitly stated, the birth of Tamar's twins would have been read by the original hearers/readers of the story as evidence of God's blessing and approval of her plan.[18] When the book of Genesis is taken as a whole Tamar appears as the latest in a line of women whom God has blessed with a child. Beginning with the first birth recorded in Genesis, that of Cain, Eve acknowledges God's role: "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD" (4:1). Subsequently the name Eve gives Seth is a similar acknowledgment: "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him" (4:25). In the patriarchal narratives God's involvement is made plain. Both Abram and Sarai blame God for their childless state: "You have given me no offspring" (15:3); "the LORD has prevented me from bearing children" (16:2). These complaints imply the reverse: conception is in God's gift. God is shown promising the birth of a son even before Sarah becomes pregnant (17:16) and the birth announcement duly recognizes God's role: "the LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him" (21:1-2). Other events in the patriarchal stories reveal the same understanding of God's involvement. Isaac prays that Rebecca will conceive (25:21) while Jacob reminds the barren Rachel, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (30:2). When a matriarch conceives and gives birth, God is duly given the credit.

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[15] Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 42. The NRSV translation says, "he spilled his semen on the ground" (38:9) but the verb used, שחת, means "destroy," not "spill". This detail is also noted by Calum Carmichael (*Sex and Religion in the Bible* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010], 52).

[16] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 47. Judah is probably too deluded by his conviction that Tamar was the "killer wife" who was responsible for his sons' deaths to consider any involvement on God's part.

[17] God's reaction to the wickedness of Er and Onan also recalls God's judgment on the wickedness of humanity רָעַת הָאָדָם which led to the Flood (6:5-7). See Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 165.

[18] Hieke, "Genealogy as a Means of Historical Representation," 186.

For example, God opens Leah's womb (29:31) and Leah accordingly reflects this in the naming of her

sons: Reuben - "the LORD has looked on my affliction (29:32); Simeon - "Because the LORD has heard

that I am hated, he has given me this son also'" (29:33) and Judah – "This time I will praise the LORD"

(29:35). The same pattern is followed in the naming of Leah's fifth and sixth sons (30:18, 20).

Perhaps the clearest example of God's role is when Rachel finally gives birth:

> Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived
>
> and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach'; and she named him Joseph,
>
> saying, 'May the LORD add to me another son!' (30:22-24)

God is given credit for opening her womb and any future pregnancies seem also in God's control.

Against this backdrop there is no doubt that despite the dubious circumstances of their conception

the births of Perez and Zerah are to be viewed as a blessing from God and as proof of God's

continuing, if silent, action in the story.[19]

Tamar as Agent of God

God's action and presence does not end there. One of the theological insights the chapter confirms

is that God's presence can also be detected not only in what Frank Spina terms God's "lurking

providence"[20] but also in the actions of the human characters. This has been explained as follows:

"ontological absence becomes ethical presence; difference becomes my non-indifference to the

other. Ethics as obligation and responsibility to and for the other is the relation and Revelation of

Otherness."[21] In other words, God may be absent in word or deed from the later parts of the chapter

(and the later part of the book) but is present through the medium of ethical actions or as Rachel

Adelman expresses it, "in the ethical epiphany of the fragile face-to-face human encounter."[22] Alter

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[19] Black, "Ruth in the Dark," 22; Amit, "The Case of Judah and Tamar," 220.
[20] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 43.
[21] Susan Handelman, "Facing the Other: Levinas, Perelman and Rosenzweig," *Religion and Literature* 22 (1990): 74.
[22] Adelman, "Ethical Epiphany," 67.

puts it in a slightly different way, "God's purposes are always entrammelled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization."[23]

What these purposes are must be viewed in the light of the context of Genesis 38. Situated towards the very beginning of the Joseph narrative the chapter can be viewed in two ways: as a precursor to the Joseph narrative and as a natural continuation of the preceding chapters, particularly the patriarchal story (Genesis 12-36). Onan dies because he attempts to frustrate God's plans for Israel as announced to the patriarchs. Tamar on the other hand is instrumental in their realization.

The desperate measures Tamar takes to achieve a pregnancy can be attributed simply to her natural desire for a child and for the fulfilment and possible security the birth of a child would bring. The chapter appears to validate such human desires but it also implies that such desires can be used by God for God's further purposes. Even the widowed Judah's desire for sexual gratification plays its own part in the events (38:12, 15). By her commitment to conceive Tamar plays a role in two ways in God's plans: supporting the concept of levirate marriage and ensuring the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.

Given the paucity of explicit references to levirate marriage in the HB[24] it may be difficult to confirm whether levirate marriage was considered in Israelite society as a purely secular institution or whether it had religious connotations. The situation summarized in Deuteronomy 25: 5-10 has a largely civic context where the widow has recourse to "the elders at the gate" (Deut 25:7) but there is no reference to any religious authorities.[25] On the other hand when Naomi realises she cannot offer her widowed daughters-in-law a levirate husband, the next best option she suggests is that the

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[23] Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 175.
[24] Some would argue that levirate marriage is a feature of the whole book of Ruth, but while the marriage of Ruth and Boaz does bear some similarities to a levirate union, only the references in Ruth 1 can be taken as referring to the common understanding of a levirate marriage, that between a widow and her late husband's brother. See Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family*, 31.
[25] Later that changed. See Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family*.

"the LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband" (Ruth 1:9),

which could imply that Naomi sees God at work in both possibilities.

Levirate marriage has a two-fold purpose. Judah is clear about its primary purpose when he instructs

Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up

offspring for your brother" (38:8). This view is supported by the statement in Deuteronomy that "the

firstborn whom she [the widow] bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that

his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Deut 25:6). In this way there is continuity of name,

lineage and property.[26] The issue of inheritance is stressed in the situation of the daughters of

Zelophehad where continuity of property ownership is achieved by a different method (Num 27:5-

11). It is noteworthy that Moses brought their case "before the LORD" (Num 27:5).

The secondary purpose ascribed to levirate marriage, support for and protection of the widow, is

never mentioned explicitly in the HB,[27] but it was an important consideration.[28] Tamar's son, as

future heir, would ultimately be responsible for his mother's support. Meanwhile she gained access

to the economic value of her former husband's estate.[29] It is presumed that Tamar would have

functioned as widow, guardian and trustee for the property of Perez and Zerah until they reached

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[26] There has been much confusion about whether succeeding to the "name of the deceased" means that the child must bear the actual name of the dead man: any son of Tamar and Onan should therefore be called Er. Rashi's note on Genesis 38:8 reads "The son will be called by the name of the one who is dead" (*Bereishis*, 431-2). The names of the sons listed in the HB who were the fruit of a levirate or levirate-like relationship do not bear this out. Tamar's sons are named after none of their potential (Er, Onan) or biological (Judah) fathers. After a detailed aetiology they are named Perez and Zerah (Gen 38: 29-30). The son of Boaz and Ruth, widow of Mahlon, is Obed (Ruth 4:17) and the sons of the daughters of Lot are Moab and Ben-ammi (Gen 19:37-38). Alternatively a son could bear the father's name as a patronym. The consensus seems to be that patronymics normally did not go back more than one or two generations and in this context שם is not to be taken literally. Ayelet Seidler suggests that perpetuating the name means either to produce a son for the deceased or to ensure that the deceased's estate is inherited by his progeny. See "The Law of Levirate and Forced Marriage - Widow vs. Levir in Deuteronomy 25.5–10," *JSOT* 42 (2018): 438-9. Seidler makes no reference to the actual name.
[27] Dvora E. Weisberg, "Levirate Marriage and *Halitzah* in the Mishnah," *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* 1 (1998): 40.
[28] It is well attested in the literature, e.g. Ian Cairns, *Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy,* ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 216; George W. Coats, "Widow's Rights: A Crux in the Structure of Genesis 38," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 462; Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage: Part 2," 267-68.
[29] Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary,* OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 297.

legal majority.[30] In Exodus 22:21-24; 23:6, Richard Patterson reminds us, "the widow, the orphan, and the poor fall under the protection of God Himself. This is reiterated in Deuteronomy, where God is represented as the supreme judge who has the interest of these elements of society at heart (10:18 ff.)"[31] Surely the care of a widow through the institution of levirate marriage can also be seen as a sacred duty. When Tamar fights for her levirate rights she was insisting that Judah should fulfil what Calum Carmichael terms "a sacred obligation."[32] Bruce Vawter puts "Onan's refusal of the sacred duty of the *go'el*" first on his list of Onan's faults and misdeeds, which led to God's displeasure and brought about his death.[33] Onan was expected to act as *levir* rather than *go'el*, but although the two roles have distinct responsibilities they also overlap, and thereby bring Tamar's commitment to levirate marriage more manifestly within the ambit of God the *go'el*, יְהוָה גֹּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל (Isa 49:7).[34]

Tamar's levirate marriage assumes an additional importance in the context of the continuity of Jacob's line and the priority it will enjoy among the tribes of Israel in the future. By Genesis 38 the number of Jacob's potential heirs has considerably reduced. Reuben has betrayed his father by sleeping with "Bilhah his father's concubine" (35:22). Simeon and Levi have fallen into disgrace by making Jacob "odious to the inhabitants of the land" (34:30). Naphtali and Dan, the sons of Bilhah, and Gad and Asher, the sons of Zilpah, will probably be excluded by virtue of their birth to Jacob's concubines. The precedent of their exclusion has been set in the case of Ishmael, born to Hagar who could also be considered a concubine. Ishmael is rejected by God who declares firmly that Ishmael

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[30] Zevit, "Dating Ruth," 577.

[31] Richard D. Patterson, "The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *BSac* 130 (1973): 228.

[32] Calum Carmichael, *The Sacrificial Laws of Leviticus and the Joseph Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 10. Elsewhere Carmichael has argued that Tamar's "act was deemed to be in order because the levirate custom was a profound and vital duty whose obligation was so sacred that it even superseded the incest taboo" (*The Book of Numbers: A Critique of Genesis* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012], 32). The Zohar also considered levirate marriage a "sacred task" but that was because its kabbalistic purpose was reincarnation: "Tamar seduced her father-in-law, Judah, because she wanted to ensure the reincarnation of the souls of his childless sons Er and Onan, who were respectively her husband and brother-in-law" (Zohar, Vol. 3, 148n40). This latter view can be safely ignored as a concept alien to the original writers of Genesis 38.

[33] Vawter, *On Genesis*, 395.

[34] In a similar vein Waltke and Fredricks believe that the LORD regards "the abuse of levirate marriage a capital offense" (*Genesis*, 511).

will be blessed, "But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year (17:21). This process of diselection, it has been argued, is in conformity with the will of God.[35] Joseph, a more probable heir, has disappeared into Egypt at the end of the previous chapter and his fate is uncertain. Judah is therefore a key contender among the dwindling number of heirs and now it seems his progeny can only be secured through levirate marriage.

But Jacob's line is no ordinary family. When Tamar bears a child she is not only fulfilling the sacred obligation attached to a levirate marriage, but she may also be instrumental in ensuring the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (17:6). This moves Tamar's actions from the realm of the ordinary to the extraordinary. Tamar is now an essential link in the chain of patriarchal promises.

Is Tamar to be imagined as an unwitting player in the continuing drama of these promises, intent on having a child for her own purposes which are then used for divine purposes? Benno Jacob casts an interesting light on this question:

> Her motive cannot have been the wish for a child at any price; she could have had one by marrying another man. She, however, is aware of the exalted mission which became hers by marrying into Judah's family. … Without doubt Judah informed Tamar about his family, their mission, and the divine promises when he gave her to his oldest son. After Reuben (35:22) and Simeon and Levi (chapter 34) had been rejected, Judah as the next had reason to think that the promise "Kings shall spring from you." (35:11; 17:16) referred to him. Tamar has understood that she would be the mother of these kings. She wants to live solely for this mission.[36]

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[35] R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, SemeiaSt 39 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 184. According to Heard diselection is exclusion from among the elect.

[36] Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, abridged, ed. and trans. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2007), 262.

His first point concerning Tamar's option of marrying another man is open to question. Hamilton has outlined the four options open to a woman on the death of her husband as follows: she can return to her father's house (Lev 22:13 and Ruth 1:8), marry her *levir* (Deut 25:5-10), remarry (1 Sam 25:39-42; 2 Sam 11:27) or "remain celibate and attempt to support herself."[37] As a childless widow Tamar's only practicable choice is to accept a levirate marriage with Er's brother. She has to face both societal expectations and Judah's intransigence. It would not even occur to Judah to consult her: the first time we see Judah speaking directly to Tamar is after the death of Onan when he is sending her home, ostensibly to wait for Shelah. Judah's instruction to Tamar is very explicit: "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up" (38:11). שְׁבִי אַלְמָנָה does not allow Tamar the option of remarriage to any man other than Shelah.[38]

Benno Jacob's second point concerning Tamar's awareness of the family's "exalted mission" is a very significant one. In the chapter's original form as an independent story there would be little or no suggestion of Tamar's knowledge of her future family but when the chapter is read in its current location following chapters 12-36 the implications are clear. During those chapters there have been repeated references to God's promise. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are depicted as hearing about the promise directly from God (17:6; 26:4-5; 35:11); Jacob's situation is particularly relevant to Tamar. Before God appears to Jacob at Paddan-aram (35:9) he has already learned of the promise from his father. When Jacob is being dispatched to marry one of Laban's daughters, Isaac tells him:

> May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien—land that God gave to Abraham. (28:3-4)

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[37] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 437. See page 43.
[38] Rabbinic laws may confirm her predicament. Under the terms of those laws from the moment of Er's death Tamar would be considered to be no longer Er's widow but a *yevama*, that is, a woman waiting for her *yavam* or *levir*. The alternative term for someone in Tamar's situation is *shomeret yavam*, a woman who is awaiting her brother-in-law. See Sarna, *Genesis,* 269; Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family*, 124.

No comparable scenes are recorded either of God speaking directly to Jacob's sons or of Jacob communicating the promise to his children but it is unthinkable that the early readers of Genesis would not have assumed that this had occurred. Jacob received the promise at least twice, once from God and once from his father,[39] but surely this must also have been common family knowledge.[40] A promise from God that "all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring" (26:4) is not one to be hidden. To take a British analogy it would be like neglecting to inform Kate Middleton that her future husband was in line to the throne. Under these circumstances Benno Jacob's contention that "Judah informed Tamar about his family, their mission, and the divine promises when he gave her to his oldest son" is highly plausible.

If Tamar is aware of the family's mission, it begs the question why Onan would not similarly know of it and act accordingly. Although they are not explicitly stated in the chapter there are several reasons why Onan might reasonably be unwilling to become a *levir*. The first is linked to one of the main purposes of the institution – inheritance. According to Numbers 27:9, Er's inheritance, if he had no heir, would pass next to his brothers. As discussed in Chapter 2, when Judah dies, if Er has no son (natural or surrogate), Onan will receive 67% of Judah's estate as opposed to 25%. There is a further possibility that the son born of the union would also inherit a share of Onan's own personal estate. In analogous circumstances the kinsman in the Book of Ruth was reluctant to act as redeemer: "I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance" (Ruth 4:6). Thus by giving Tamar a son who would have prior claim to the inheritance of Er, Onan would clearly be acting significantly contrary to his own interests.[41] It could be argued that such financial considerations would be set aside when Onan would consider the wider implications of God's promise. It may well be that Onan would assume that just as his son by Tamar would be considered Er's son from the point of view of

[39] The ever vigilant and keen listener Rebekah (27:5) may also have shared the news.
[40] Judah's care to choose a wife for Er (38:6), his instruction to Onan to act as *levir* (38:8) and his fears for Shelah's survival (38:11) may reflect not only a father's concern for his children and his own desire to achieve immortality through his posterity, but also his awareness of God's promise and his responsibility to fulfil it.
[41] See Michael D. Matlock, "Obeying the First Part of the Tenth Commandment: Applications from the Levirate Marriage Law," *JSOT* 31 (2007): 307.

inheritance, this would also apply in regard to God's promise. It would be Er's son, not his, who would reap the reward.

Tamar's desire for a child and the risks she will take to conceive a child now take on a different complexion. Her determination to conceive a child through levirate marriage marks a double commitment: to honour her dead husband by conceiving a child in his name and to enable the fulfilment of God's promise by begetting a child through what now seems the essential mechanism of levirate marriage. According to Spina, "she ended up preserving the whole family's future and thus managed to keep its divine mission intact."[42]

The Righteousness of Tamar

Tamar's role in the divine plan may be considered to be confirmed by Judah's recognition of her as צְדָקָה. It is a unique occurrence in the feminine form. She is the only woman in the HB to be declared righteous.[43] Judah's proclamation raises three immediate issues: the meaning of righteousness in this context, the questions concerning the impropriety of Tamar's behaviour, and Judah's credentials as a witness.

The difficulty of defining righteousness is evident in John Scullion's *ABD* survey on the topic. The meanings suggested by the authors he examines range from "community loyalty" to "world order" and from "justice" to a "judicial and soteriological process of judging, acquitting, and saving."[44] In

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[42] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider,* 36. Lambe comes to a similar conclusion through a different approach: "In the biblical worldview, God's presence, purpose and agency are actualized through the Law in history. Here it is realized through Tamar's responsibility to the Levirate law. Tamar is no puppet or automaton. She freely responds to the intention of the Levirate law." See Anthony J. Lambe, "Genesis 38: Structure and Literary Design," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places and Perspectives*, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J.A. Clines, JSOTSup 257 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 108.

[43] Nobuko, "Story of Tamar," 62. The only other occasion when righteousness is attributed to female figures occurs in an allegorical passage in Ezekiel 16:51-52 but the use there is of a completely different order and nature. God compares sinful Jerusalem to her "sisters" Samaria and Sodom and claims, "you have made your sisters appear righteous" בְּצַדֶּקְתֵּךְ אֲחָיֹותֵךְ. The barbed comment merely highlights the fact that the depth of Jerusalem's depravity makes Samaria and Sodom, by-words for sin, seem righteous in comparison.

[44] John J. Scullion, "Righteousness: Old Testament," *ABD* 5:726.

Genesis 38:26 the meaning of צדקה is considered to have two main senses: either the forensic or the ethical.[45]

The verb צדק occurs only twice in Genesis: 38:26 and 44:16. The second example helps clarify the meaning of the former. On Joseph's instructions his silver divination cup has been planted in Benjamin's sack of food. His steward overtakes the brothers as they travel homewards, blames them for stealing the cup (44:6) and discovers the stolen item in Benjamin's sack (44:12). The brothers return to Joseph's house to face his accusation (44:15). Judah then speaks: "What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves (וּמַה־נִּצְטַדָּק)? God has found out the guilt of your servants" (44:16). An apparently clear cut crime has been committed; evidence of guilt has been found; an accusation of theft has been made and Judah wonders how he and his brothers can acquit themselves of the charge.[46] This is clearly a forensic use of the verb צדק.[47]

For those who favour the forensic interpretation of צדק in Genesis 38 Tamar is on trial, Judah is her prosecutor/judge and the word צְדָקָה is being used in a strictly legal sense as a formal declaration of her innocence and an announcement of her acquittal.[48] In the legal context the word does not necessarily imply that Tamar is an admirable character. James Hardy Ropes argues that צדקה in Genesis 38 refers to the strength of her case rather than to her moral probity. In cases like Tamar's it refers not to "the God-fearing or the morally excellent, but the party in court which has a good case; not *probus*, but *rectus in curia*."[49] To those who view the phrase צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי in a comparative sense it can be interpreted that Tamar is more likely to be exonerated and Judah more likely to be indicted.[50]

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[45] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 49-50.

[46] The fact that the theft has been rigged by Joseph is immaterial. Benjamin, and by association his brothers have been accused of an apparently real crime. The accusatory verbs in both 44:4-5 and 44:15 (הֲרֵעֹתֶם ,שִׁלַּמְתֶּם, עֲשִׂיתֶם and יְדַעְתֶּם) are all in the second person masculine plural, implicating all the brothers.

[47] δίκαιόω in LXX is also considered a forensic term. See Gottfried Quell and Gottlob Schrenk, *Righteousness*, trans. J.R. Coates (London: Black, 1951), 57-58.

[48] Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 230.

[49] James Hardy Ropes, "'Righteousness' and 'The Righteousness of God' in the Old Testament and in St. Paul," *JBL* 22 (1903): 214. See also Harold G**.** Stigers, "צָדַק (*ṣādēq*)," *TWOT* 2:753.

[50] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 49-50.

The final scene between Judah and Tamar does have the superficial trappings of a court: an implicit accusation (the *notitia criminis*),[51] production of physical evidence (38:25), passing of sentence (38:24),[52] and declaration of innocence (38:26).[53] If it is a trial, it is a highly unusual one, as it develops into a double trial or a trial within a trial when the accused turns the tables on her prosecutor and produces the evidence that will prosecute him. Standard court procedures are not applied. In Tamar's case no evidence is produced, apart from the report of her pregnancy which precipitated Judah's reaction. Neither legal questioning, nor legal argument, nor parental pleas ensue (cf. Deut 21:20; 22:15-17). In Judah's case he is not officially accused. It is his own admission that reveals his tacit guilt. Tamar is never formally acquitted. The charge is just quietly dropped and the threatened sentence is never carried out as Tamar survives to give birth to her children.[54]

The initial anonymous charge against Tamar was that of זָנְתָה, "she has had illicit sexual relations" (38:24)[55] and it was in an apparently immediate response to that charge that Judah had ordered her to be brought out and burned (38:24). If Judah had stopped after he said, "she is in the right," it could be correctly assumed that he had a forensic meaning in mind and that he was formally announcing that she was acquitted of this charge.[56] The two additional statements he makes change that perspective totally.

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[51] Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 71. Bovati also notes that the verb נגד used when Judah is informed of Tamar's misconduct - וַיֻּגַּד לִיהוּדָה - is also used in other texts where a misdeed is reported, e.g. 1 Kgs 2:41; Deut 17:4; 1 Sam 14:33; Esth 2:2.

[52] הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשָּׂרֵף - יצא in the hiphil is frequently used in relation to the execution of the sentence in legal texts. See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 372n79.

[53] Righteousness and innocence can be equated or at least closely linked, as for example in Exodus 23:7: "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or those in the right (וְנָקִי וְצַדִּיק), for I will not acquit the guilty".

[54] F. Gerald Downing, "Justification as Acquittal? A Critical Examination of Judicial Verdicts in Paul's Literary and Actual Contexts," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 303.

[55] Translations such as "played the harlot" (NJPS) or "played the whore" (NRSV) are misleading if they wish to imply that Tamar is being accused of prostitution. The identity of the prostitute who met Judah is still unknown. Wenham's translation is more accurate: "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has been promiscuous." (*Genesis 16-50*, 362).

[56] Judah does not intend to imply that because he had kept Shelah from her that she was therefore entitled to seek sexual gratification wherever she found it.

First of all, he announces his own guilt: "she is in the right; not I."[57] צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי is frequently

erroneously translated in a comparative form: "She is more in the right than I,"[58] but it is in fact a

comparison of exclusion where "the subject alone possesses the quality connoted by the adjective or

stative verb, to the exclusion of the thing compared."[59] Tamar's righteousness is absolute, not

comparative. To what charge is Judah pleading guilty? Biblical law does not prohibit a man from

consorting with a prostitute.[60] Any abhorrence is with the actions of the prostitute, rather than

those of the customer (Deut 23:18). In Judah's conversation with Hirah about the latter's failure to

reclaim the pledge (38:23) Judah's concern is not that his moral failure will become public

knowledge but that he would be laughed at for being hoodwinked by a prostitute. His standing as a

business man in the community, rather than his moral standing, is at stake.

The actual charge he is admitting is implicit in his second additional statement: כִּי־עַל־כֵּן

לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי, "since I did not give her to my son Shelah" (38:26). The reference to Shelah refers

both to Judah's initial actions after the death of Onan, "Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar,

'Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up'—for he feared that he too

would die, like his brothers" (38:11) and to his subsequent failure to give Tamar to Shelah once he

had reached adulthood: "She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in

marriage" (38:14).

Aschkenasy makes the improbable claim (*Woman at the Window,* 85) that Tamar was attracted to Judah and
"may have slept with a man whom she knew very well and may have lusted after, or at least admired." This
suggestion is based on Aschkenasy's belief that Tamar could gauge when Judah would look for a sexual partner
because of "a strong emotional tie" to him. One would have thought that any general observation of men in
her family or community, supplemented by female confidences, would have been more than adequate for
Tamar to predict when Judah would be interested in a prostitute's services.
[57] My translation.
[58] See, e.g., NRSV and NJPS.
[59] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,
1990), 265. See also GKC §133b n2. Adelman argues (*Female Ruse,* 81) that justification cannot be compared:
"Either one is vindicated or not."
[60] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 65. On the other hand negative attitudes to prostitutes are found as far back as the
middle of the third millennium BCE. See *The Instructions of Šuruppak:* "Do not buy a prostitute, it is horrible."
(Bendt Alster, *The Instructions of Šuruppak: A Sumerian Proverb Collection*, Mesopotamia 2 [Copenhagen:
Akademisk Forlag, 1974], 43:159). The second phrase is alternatively translated by Jerrold S. Cooper
("Prostitution," *RIA* 11:13) as "it is a great danger!" Both versions of the translation convey a negative attitude
but whether it is an issue of morality or imprudence is unclear.

Judah knows he cannot exculpate himself on the grounds of his ignorance of the levirate custom; on the contrary he was well aware of the procedures of levirate marriage as his instruction to Onan after Er's death reveals: וְיַבֵּם אֹתָהּ; he literally tells him, "levirate her" (38:8). He deliberately does not use the more common verb for marriage, לקח.[61] In case there is any doubt about it, Judah reminds Onan that it is his duty to "raise up offspring for your brother" (38:8). Both Judah and Onan know this is a levirate marriage, not a conventional one. Judah's sole purpose in insisting on Tamar's forced return to her father's house is to delay and if possible frustrate completely any further levirate marriage in the interests of safeguarding Shelah, whom he knew was next in line to act as *levir*. Nor does the passage of time, which surely gave Judah an opportunity to examine his conscience, prompt him to change his mind. Eventually Judah's continued resistance to such a marriage becomes evident to Tamar (38:14). Both initially and subsequently Judah has deliberately stalled Shelah's levirate marriage to Tamar.

When Judah publicly acknowledges his wrong-doing, in the same breath he has affirmed not just that Tamar is innocent of any charge of sexual immorality but that she has done right; she has been *righteous*, a righteousness made all the more evident in contrast to Judah's lack of that virtue.[62] Clearly Judah's pronouncement צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי should therefore be viewed as carrying far wider implications than a merely judicial one.[63] Genesis 38 is firmly placing Tamar among those who possess the God-given and the God-reflecting ethical quality of righteousness. Tamar's behaviour conforms well to Sun Myung Lyu's working definition: "Righteousness is the all-encompassing quality

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[61] See, e.g., Genesis 4:19; 6:2; 11:29; 19:14; 24:3-4, 37-38, 40, 48; 25:1, 20; 26:34; 27:46; 28:1-2, 6; 31:50; 34:9; 38:2.

[62] Hans Jochen Boecker highlights their strictly contrasting relationship to righteousness: "ein streng gegensätzliches Verhältnis" (*Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, 2nd ed., WMANT 14 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970], 127).

[63] This view can be corroborated by the fact that few references to righteousness in the HB are forensic. See J.A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, SNTSMS 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 37. Clifford ("Genesis 38," 530) believes Judah should be viewed as acting as *paterfamilias*, rather than as judge.

of human or divine character *in toto* above and beyond specific behaviors, which is actualized as rectitude in moral choices and fairness and benevolence in social transactions."[64]

It may be argued that Tamar's behaviour is too questionable to be considered righteous. Kruschwitz speaks for many when he asserts that posing as a prostitute to have sexual relations with one's father-in-law "hardly suggests itself as the conventional picture of righteousness."[65] This is undeniably true but the message of the story seems to agree with M.E. Andrew's view that the "continuance of life takes precedence over one particular piece of conduct not usually regarded as right."[66] It does seem to be the case of the end justifying the means. One of the theological messages of the story, and, indeed of Genesis as a whole, is that God's purposes can be fulfilled even through flawed and fallible human beings and that an enduring commitment to God's agenda is the paramount quality needed.[67] Sanctity is not a requisite.[68] By putting the survival of the family above herself she has earned the attribute of righteousness.[69] As Clifford observes, "'Righteous' here means what it meant in the case of Noah (Gen 6:9; 7:1) – doing the will of God."[70]

Menn is not the only scholar to point out that "Judah's positive comparison of his daughter-in-law with himself is no ringing endorsement of her virtue, given the long list of his own foibles and faults."[71] In a strange way Judah's own failings confirm his reliability as a witness. He recognizes they are polar opposites,[72] "She is in the right; not I," and by admitting his own unrighteousness which has been patently demonstrated to the reader, for example, in his deception of Tamar and his

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[64] Sun Myung Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs,* FAT 2/55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 13-14.
[65] Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 270n692.
[66] M.E. Andrew, "Moving from Death to Life: Verbs of Motion in the Story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38," *ZAW* 105 (1993): 267.
[67] The unconcealed failings of Abraham, Jacob, Judah and Joseph ultimately prove no barrier: (Abraham) 12:12-13; 20:2; 21:14; (Jacob) 27:19; 30:37-43; (Judah) 37:26-27; 38:11, 24; (Joseph) 37:5-11; 44:4-5. This tendency continues throughout the HB, e.g. David and Rahab.
[68] Nor it seems are direct appeals to God or requests to God for guidance of actions. Unlike Sarah or Rebekah, Tamar does not pray for a child nor does she appear to ask God for guidance in the desperate plan she conceives to waylay Judah. See Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 84; Collins, *Weapons upon Her Body,* 2, 7.
[69] Lambe, "Genesis 38: Structure and Literary Design," 81.
[70] Clifford, "Genesis 37-50," 220.
[71] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 43.
[72] Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, 127: "Sie ist ṣdq – ich bin es nicht."

declaration of her summary execution, he reveals that he is able to make a serious moral distinction. Consequently his evidence should be accepted.[73] The narrator cleverly puts the statement in Judah's mouth and so may appear to distance himself from the verdict but by moving almost immediately[74] to the birth announcement which indicates God's approbation, the narrator allows no contrary voice to challenge Judah's accolade.[75] God's approval of Tamar is underlined by the marked contrast between the verb "to be righteous" (צדק) in Judah's evaluation of Tamar (38:26) and the adjective "evil" (רע) and the verb 'to be evil' (רעע) in God's evaluations of Er and Onan (38:7, 10).[76]

Tamar is the third of the trio of characters in Genesis to be described as righteous, either by another character or by a narrator, the other two being Noah and Abraham.[77] Noah and Abraham have in common a close relationship with God.[78] God is recorded as addressing both of them: "Then the LORD said to Noah" (7:1); "the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision" (15:1). God also proclaims both to be righteous. Noah is told, "I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation" (7:1), and when Abraham believed the LORD, "the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6).

Tamar's reputation is enhanced by association with both of them, but in particular with Abraham. Moberly notes the importance of Abraham's faithful response to God's promise. "It was because Abraham put his faith in Yahweh, and Yahweh reckoned this to him as ṣᵉdāqâ, that Yahweh entered

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[73] Fuchs agrees (*Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 72). She believes that "coming from the man who was going to condemn her to death, Judah's justification of Tamar is especially effective."

[74] The only interruption is the reference to Judah's abstinence from sex with Tamar in the future (38:26) which eliminates any accusation of incest and reveals a more moral stance on Judah's part.

[75] Not all are necessarily satisfied. Lyu, for instance, considers that "being righteous implies that the person demonstrates a pervasive and consistent pattern of praiseworthy behavior, and his character as a whole, more than specific acts, embodies the ideal of righteousness" (*Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, 12). It is unclear if he believes Tamar would pass this test.

[76] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 43. Malachi 3:18 underlines the contrast between the righteous and the wicked but also highlights the link between righteousness and the service of God, which Tamar exemplifies.

> Then once more you shall see the difference
> between the righteous (צַדִּיק) and the wicked (לְרָשָׁע),
> between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

[77] Gen 6:9; 7:1; 15:6.

[78] See Kruschwitz, "Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative," 269.

into the ritual that constituted his covenant with Israel."[79] A two-fold action is required: the promise and the response.[80] Similarly, as Judah recognized, Tamar ensures the fulfilment of God's promise by her righteous commitment to the continuity of Abraham's line. Mark Brett notes that Tamar "has an overriding concern for the continuity of the family, and in this sense she plays a significant role in the fulfilment of the divine promises regarding Abraham's seed."[81] Some may object that Tamar received no direct promise from God, but this is to ignore God's clear mandate to Abraham: "I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (18:19). By marrying Abraham's great-great-grandson Tamar has received God's injunction to do "righteousness and justice," which has been transmitted to and through Abraham's descendants. The reference to Abraham's children, אֶת־בָּנָיו, is not limited to Isaac's generation, but as the temporal adverb אַחֲרָיו suggests it includes successive generations. The task of doing righteousness is required of all Abraham's descendants.[82] It is surely no coincidence that the place where Tamar sat at the "opening of the eyes" בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם was considered by the rabbis to be the entrance to Abraham's resting place.[83] It is also noteworthy that Philo construed Tamar as a female equivalent of Abraham.[84] Just as Tamar prefigures Joseph in the ensuing narrative, she also reflects the values of Abraham as outlined in the preceding narrative.

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[79] R.W.L. Moberly, "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis xv 6)," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J.A. Emerton, VTSup 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 119.

[80] See Richard S. Briggs, "The Book of Genesis," in *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture,* eds. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 22: "Of all the characters in the book, Abraham represents the original model of obedience to God's word alongside receipt of God's promise."

[81] Brett, *Genesis,* 114.

[82] Richard G. Smith, *The Fate of Justice and Righteousness during David's Reign: Rereading the Court History and Its Ethics according to 2 Samuel 8:15b-20:26*, LHBOTS 508 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 49.

[83] Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," 149.

[84] Sarah Pearce, "Intermarriage and the Ancestors of the Jews: Philonic Perspectives," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 27 (2015): 20. The 6th century CE Syriac poet Jacob of Serugh also discusses Tamar's faith and her link to the house of Abraham:

> This woman entered Judah's household and became a daughter-in-law,
> as faith in the house of Abraham was burning within her.
> She took pride in the blessed seed of the great race

but the next line of his verse homily dilutes that connection:

A further link between the righteous response of Tamar and Abraham can be detected in the double means indicated in God's instruction to Abraham: "keep the way of the L<small>ORD</small> by doing righteousness and justice" - לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט (18:19). צדקה and משפט are the key aspects of keeping the L<small>ORD</small>'s way, because they are quintessential divine characteristics, often expressed as a pair. In Psalm 33, which is addressed to the righteous (Ps 33:1), the psalmist stresses that God "loves righteousness and justice" (Ps 33:5).[85] For ancient Israelite writers it was "a standard defined and adhered to by God himself and to which he subjects his order," and in particular it is required of those in leadership roles:[86]

> See, a king will reign in righteousness,
>
> and princes will rule with justice. (Isa 32:1)

Tamar is never described by Judah or anyone else as *being* just, rather she *does* justice.

The context of Tamar's actions for justice is the ANE concern for widows and orphans, "a classic motif for social justice".[87] Isaiah 1:17 mentions justice and widows and orphans in the same breath:

> learn to do good;
>
> seek justice,
>
> rescue the oppressed,
>
> defend the orphan,
>
> plead for the widow.

As usual God is presented as the origin and model of this just behaviour: "Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation" (Ps 68:5); "he upholds the orphan and the widow" (Ps 146:9). There are numerous HB references to the plight of the widow and orphan and the need

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"and held in expectation that from her the Messiah would shine forth when he came."
Translation by Sebastian Brock, "Jacob of Serugh's Verse Homily on Tamar (*Gen*. 38)," *Le Muséon* 115 (2002): 297.
[85] Righteousness and justice are considered "the foundation" of his throne" (Ps 89:14). Proverbs considers "to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the L<small>ORD</small> than sacrifice" (Prov 21:3).
[86] Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness,* 43, 63.
[87] Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness,* 56.

to care for them. [88] This was also true of other ANE cultures. A Babylonian tablet complains that a "regent and prince would not take the part of the cripple and widow before the judge."[89]

As twice-widowed and childless Tamar should be the object of such special care. Her right to such consideration is emphasised by a three-fold use of words denoting her widowhood: אלמנה (38:11) and אלמנות (38:14, 19).[90] No one can doubt that she is indeed an אלמנה but by his injustice Judah has placed Tamar in a limbo-like state, no longer looked after by her husband's family but also not freed to find another husband or eligible to receive the care due to a destitute widow. Tamar has become not the object of justice but rather the victim of injustice and it is this injustice that spurs her to action, claiming her right to a levirate marriage. In doing so she fights for justice for herself and for others in her predicament and becomes simultaneously both the subject and object of justice. In typical fashion she turns the tables on Abraham's descendant Judah and shows him how to "keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice" (18:19). The HB recognises that a leader's responsibility to establish justice would at times require the leader to use "his ability as a warlord" to fight for justice for those in need. [91] Remarkably Tamar is now the one who is using that ability albeit with unconventional weapons and thereby adhering to the tenets of Genesis 18:19 and Isaiah 1:17.[92]

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[88] See, e.g., Exod 22:22; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 24:17, 20-21; 26:12; 27:19; Zech 7:10.
[89] Wilfred G. Lambert, "Nebuchadnezzar King of Justice," *Iraq* 27 (1965): 8, col. II, line 5.
[90] Leeb ("Widow," 160) limits the term to "a woman who is past the age of bearing children and who is not part of a male-headed household" but this is too narrow a definition and is contradicted by its undeniable use in Tamar's case.
[91] Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness,* 59.
[92] Tamar's commitment to the faith and values of the family she marries into raises the issue of whether she is to be considered a proselyte. It is instructive to compare her to Ruth, whose declaration "your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16) has been interpreted to imply that Ruth is a convert to the God of Israel. See Hubbard, *Book of Ruth,* 120.

קדשה - the Holy One

A third confirmation that Tamar works as an agent of God may be found in the use of the term קדשה

for Tamar. Judah takes her to be a common זנה (38:15), but the narrator reports that Hirah and the

townspeople of Enaim describe her three times as a קדשה (38:21-22). What did Hirah, and what did

the HB, understand by the word קדשה?

The verbal root of קדשה seems to be קדש which may mean to be set apart, to be holy, to be

consecrated.[93] Some scholars have just assumed it is synonymous with זנה and have simply

translated it as "harlot,"[94] or "prostitute."[95] Many scholars have attempted to combine the context

with the significance of the verbal root. This has resulted in a plethora of translations including "holy

woman,"[96] "holy one,"[97] "consecrated woman,"[98] "votary,"[99] "ritual prostitute,"[100] "temple

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Although the rabbinic tradition is united in believing Ruth was the "proselyte *par excellence*" (Christian M.M Brady, "The Conversion of Ruth in Targum Ruth," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 16 2013]: 135), modern scholarship is divided as to whether Ruth converted to Yahwism. Hans-Georg Wünch, ("Ruth, a Proselyte *Par Excellence*-Exegetical and Structural Observations," *Journal for Semitics* 24 [2015]:62) for instance, asserts that one of the main topics of the book is the "conversion of Ruth to the people of Israel." Campbell (*Ruth,* 82) claims that what makes Ruth an Israelite is that she behaves like one, living according to the "way of Yahweh". Regina M. Schwartz (*The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 91) also believes that Ruth "binds herself to Yahweh." Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky are more nuanced in their commentary: *Ruth: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2011). They argue that conversion as we know it is a "product of the Rabbinic world" (*Ruth,* xlii) but that Ruth has undergone various stages of "assimilation into the community" (*Ruth,* xliv).
If the evidence for Ruth is disputed, how much more must it be in the case of Tamar who makes no declaration paralleling that of Ruth. Rabbinic documents claim that Tamar was a proselyte - in tractate b. Soṭah 10a, for instance, she tells Judah when he solicits her, "I am a proselyte (גיורת) - while according to Philo she lived "for the service of and in constant supplication to the one true God" (*Virt.* 221). Modern evidence rejects these assertions. Shaye J.D. Cohen (*The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], 122, 129) dates the "harbingers of the idea of conversion, in both its religious and its social sense" to the Persian period, and places even later the earliest references to conversion to Judaism, which he observes in two texts of the Hasmonean period (2nd century BCE). The original versions of Genesis 38 predate both those periods considerably. Moreover Genesis 38 reflects no concern about explicit adherence to Israel's God or about any formal process of conversion. It suffices that Tamar has committed herself wholeheartedly to living within the tenets of the tradition she has adopted on marriage.

[93] Mayer I. Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh* and her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates," *UF* 18 (1986): 137.

[94] Von Rad, *Genesis,* 356.

[95] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,* 48.

[96] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 362.

[97] Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*," 245.

[98] Menn, *Judah and Tamar,* 26.

[99] Speiser, *Genesis,* 296.

[100] Cowan, *Genesis 38: The Story of Judah and Tamar,* 108.

prostitute,"[101] and "cult-harlot."[102] The general assumption is that this word describes a woman

involved in some form of cult prostitution, which has been defined as follows: "Religiously

legitimated intercourse with strangers in or in the vicinity of the sanctuary. It had a ritual character

and was organized or at least condoned by the priesthood, as a means to increase fecundity and

fertility."[103] Using sympathetic magic its purpose was to enhance human and animal fertility and

guarantee an abundant harvest.[104]

Initially scholars considered Herodotus (*Hist,* I. 199) a key text in offering evidence for the existence

of cult prostitution: "The most shameful custom the Babylonians have is this: every native woman

must go sit in the temple of Aphrodite, once in her life, and have sex with an adult male stranger. …

Once a woman sits down there, she doesn't return home until a stranger drop money in her lap and

has sex with her outside the temple."[105] Herodotus's evidence is now largely discredited, as is that of

Strabo and Lucian.[106] The situation has been summarised as follows: "one side of modern

scholarship has looked to the East to confirm Herodotus' account of Babylon, while the other has

looked to Herodotus to provide a single clear example of an institution that their Eastern documents

repeatedly fail to confirm." [107]

In the absence of reliable evidence from the classical authors, considerable attention has been paid

to the examination of the Ugaritic (*qdšt* [male *qdš*]) and Akkadian (*qadištu*) cognates of קְדֵשָׁה, which

derive from the same root of *qds*. Texts of all descriptions have been combed to discover what roles

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[101] Arnold, *Genesis*, 324.

[102] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed.*,* 7.

[103] Karel van der Toorn, "Cultic Prostitution," *ABD* 5:510.

[104] Karel van der Toorn, "Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 201.

[105] Translation: Mary Beard and John Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity," *Gender & History* 9 (1997): 482-83.

[106] See Richard A. McNeal, "The Brides of Babylon: Herodotus 1.196," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 37 (1988): 69; Phyllis A. Bird, "Lucian's Last Laugh: The Origins of 'Sacred Prostitution' at Byblos," in *My Spirit at Rest in the North Country (Zechariah 6.8): Collected Communications to the XXth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Helsinki 2010,* ed. Hermann Michael Niemann and Matthias Augustin, BEATAJ 57 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2011), 205.

[107] Beard and Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship," 488.

the *qdšt* and *qadištu* played in their societies, particularly in relation to cult prostitution. This examination has included masculine terms where examples of female equivalents have been sparse.

Records from Ugarit indicate both male and female *qdšm.* There is little evidence of the feminine *qdšt;* there is one example in an Ugaritic clan name: "*bn.qdšt,*"[108] but there are a number of instances where the masculine term appears in close association with priests (*khnm*) in the administrative personnel lists, for example, in *CTA* 71, *CTA* 75, *CTA* 76, *CTA* 77.[109] It is probable that *qdšm* was "a collective term for non-priestly staff … who were committed to the temple service."[110]

We can glean a certain amount of valuable information concerning the role of the *qadištu* in Mesopotamia. The word appears most often in the feminine noun form *qadištu/qaššatu/qašdatu*[111] and denoted a woman of special status. In Middle Assyrian the form *qadiltu* is found.[112] NU.GIG, the Sumerian logogram for *qadištu,* retains the meaning 'one who is taboo, sacrosanct."[113] Although in later times the reputation of the *qadištu* changed as she became associated with sorcery and witchcraft, there is no evidence that she engaged in cultic prostitution. If she did, there is no evidence to prove it.[114] Scholars from both ends of the spectrum, those like Mayer Gruber who looked at a cross-section of legal, ritual and literary texts, and those like Rivkah Harris, who

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[108] CTA 113 Col. V 11, 203.

[109] See also Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*," 249.

[110] "daß *qdšm* eine Sammelbezeichnung für nicht-priesterliches Tempelpersonal war, das durch eine Weihung dem Tempeldienst verpflichtet wurde." Wolfram von Soden, "Zur Stellung des 'Geweihten' (*qdš*) in Ugarit," *UF* 2 (1970): 329.

[111] Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*," 250; there is no masculine form recorded.

[112] Wolfram von Soden, *Grundriss der Akkadischen Grammatik*, AnOr 33 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1969), §30g: in Middle Assyrian and Late Babylonian *s* before *t* of a feminine ending is changed to *l*.

[113] Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH*, StBibLit 73 (New York: Lang, 2009), 30.

[114] See G.R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws: Volume II, Transliterated Text, Translation, Philological Notes, Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 242. Only one shred of evidence has been raised to suggest that a *qadištu* was a sacred prostitute, but this has been immediately dismissed by the person who raised it: William C. Gwaltney Jr. ("The *Qadištum* and *Ištaritum* in Mesopotamian Society" [PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 1964], 84-85). He proposes that the term *ina šûqi - "from the market/street"* – which is applied to a *qadištu* in *ana ittišu,* tablet 7, col. Iii, is the only textual grounds for arguing that a *qadištu* was a sacred prostitute. He thought the phrase indicated an "unattached" or "unattended" person or one "at large" but then dismissed the evidence as insufficient to conclude that a *qadištu* was a prostitute. Cited in Goodfriend, "Could *keleb* in Deuteronomy 23:19 Actually Refer to a Canine?," 386n20.

conducted an in-depth survey of one city, Sippar, in the Old Babylonian period[115] all agree that the

qadištu may have been a cultic functionary but was not a harlot, sacral or otherwise.[116] As Bird sums

up, "Cognate evidence from Mesopotamia and Ugarit contain no sign of the sexual associations

exhibited in the MT's use of the Hebrew terms."[117]

In the HB the word קדשה appears five times, three times in Genesis 38, once in Deuteronomy 23:18

and once in Hosea 4:14. In all three passages the word זנה appears in the same context in parallel or

in an apparent interchange.[118] As a consequence of this juxtaposition קדשה is regularly taken either

to mean "cult prostitute" or else it is regarded as a euphemism for "prostitute." A brief review of the

passages will reveal some of the complexities.

Hosea 4:14

> I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,
>
> > nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery;
>
> for the men themselves go aside with whores (עִם-הַזֹּנוֹת),
>
> > and sacrifice with temple prostitutes (וְעִם-הַקְּדֵשׁוֹת);

There are three main views as to the relevance of the Hosea passage to the task of understanding

the word קדשה. Some see the proximity of "whores" and "temple prostitutes" as further proof of

their synonymy.[119] A second group carefully distinguishes between the separate actions and declares

that one is a moral offence and the other is a cultic one and while they are perpetrated by the same

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[115] Rivkah Harris, *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894-1595 B.C.)* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975), 328.

[116] Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh,"* 145.

[117] Phyllis A. Bird, "The End of the Male Cult Prostitute: A Literary-Historical and Sociological Analysis of Hebrew *qades-qedesim,"* in *Congress Volume: Cambridge 1995,* ed. John A. Emerton, VTSup 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 43n23.

[118] Phyllis A. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 41.

[119] This may be bolstered by the Peshitta which reproduces the Hebrew parallelism by translating the two key words by two terms meaning 'prostitutes': "*zanyātā' // napqāt śūqā'*". See Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh,"* 136n8.

people, they are two distinct activities with two distinct groups.[120] A third group denies the value of

using the passage in this context at all as the language of prostitution in Hosea is a metaphor for the

apostasy of Israel in following foreign gods and the focus is on worship, not sex.[121]

Deuteronomy 23:18-19 [MT]

> [18] None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute (קְדֵשָׁה); none of the sons of
>
> Israel shall be a temple prostitute (קָדֵשׁ).
>
> [19] You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute (זוֹנָה) or the wages of a male prostitute (כֶּלֶב)[122]
>
> into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent
>
> to the LORD your God.

These two verses are frequently read as "parallel prohibitions treating two types of 'prostitutes',

'cultic' and 'secular.'"[123] The parallelism is reinforced by a pair of nouns in each verse in a very

unusual female-male order, but Bird has shown quite credibly that these two verses were composed

separately and only subsequently placed together. She points out that the two verses are neither

parallel in structure nor in content. Bird says verse 18 refers to a class, verse 19 to an action; the first

is 3rd person; the second is 2nd person; the first has two verbs; the second one has two objects.[124]

Elaine Goodfriend and Gruber are to the forefront in attempting to prove that the male and female

components of these verses are unrelated and should be treated separately. Goodfriend argues that

the קדש are a priestly class (see 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kgs 23:7) while קדשה always appears as

a synonym for זנה and they are therefore two separate phenomena and should not be treated as one

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[120] Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh,"* 135. A.A. Macintosh (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, ICC
[Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997], 158n59) thinks Gruber is "far-fetched" in claiming this.
[121] See Phyllis A. Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and
Difference in Ancient Israel,* ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 87.
[122] Hebrew: "a dog".
[123] Bird, "End of the Male Cult Prostitute," 47.
[124] Bird, "End of the Male Cult Prostitute," 48, 47.

group.[125] Gruber also separates the male and female references. He thinks that Deuteronomy 23:18-19 juxtaposes cultic and moral problems. The cultic problems refer to the male cultic singers, the moral ones to the female prostitutes.[126] The issues outlined above raise potentially serious difficulties. If the two verses were placed together during some subsequent redaction and if the male and female roles are different, it could mean that we cannot assume the synonymy of קדשה and זנה nor can we use קדש to cast light on the meaning of קדשה.[127]

Genesis 38:21-22

> [21] He asked the townspeople, 'Where is the temple prostitute (הַקְּדֵשָׁה) who was at Enaim by the wayside?' But they said, 'No prostitute (קְדֵשָׁה) has been here.' [22] So he returned to Judah, and said, 'I have not found her; moreover the townspeople said, "No prostitute (קְדֵשָׁה) has been here."'

A notable feature of the use of the term in Genesis 38 is that it is used by Hirah and not by Judah who thinks Tamar is a זנה (38:15) nor by the narrator who uses neither term in connection with Tamar. Various reasons have been put forward for Hirah's use of the term. It has been suggested that it was a local Canaanite usage[128] or a more decorous[129] or more socially[130] or morally[131] acceptable euphemism. Some scholars propose that Hirah used the term because he actually thought Tamar was a cult prostitute[132] although her roadside or city gate location makes that idea improbable; a זנה would be stationed at the wayside, a קדשה in or near the sanctuary precincts.

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[125] Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Prostitution," *ABD* 5:507.

[126] Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh,*" 133n1.

[127] When it is difficult to interpret the word קדשה, scholars have turned to the related masculine form for illumination. The masculine form appears in Deut 23:17, 1 Kgs 14:24, 1 Kgs 15:12, 1 Kgs 22:46, 2 Kgs 23:7 and in Job 36:14, although the last is usually excluded from the discussion as it is generally accepted that the Hebrew text is problematic. This is less helpful than originally envisaged because of the particular complications associated with the Deuteronomy text and because of the paucity of details in the Kings texts when they are stripped of their pre-conceived notions.

[128] Goodfriend, "Could *keleb* in Deuteronomy 23:19 actually refer to a Canine?," 386.

[129] Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 221.

[130] Speiser, *Genesis*, 300.

[131] Vawter, *On Genesis*, 398.

[132] G.R.H. Wright, "The Positioning of Genesis 38," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 525n9; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 54.

Tamar has chosen her location carefully and deliberately. Moreover there is no reference to sacrifice

or cult in the passage, unlike Hosea 4:14, which specifically mentions יְזַבֵּחוּ, "they sacrifice," or

Deuteronomy 23:18 which refers to wages being brought in to "the house of the LORD", בֵּית יְהוָה.

A recent article by Jessie DeGrado casts some light on the situation.[133] DeGrado accepts, as I do, that

there is no evidence from the Ancient Near East for cultic prostitution.[134] Any suggestion that it

existed is the product of the fevered imaginations of male scholars, both ancient and modern. The

qadištu and *qdš* played a number of roles, many of them associated with the cult, but they were not

prostitutes. In the Hebrew context, on the other hand, DeGrado proposes the following scenario:

> קדשה (like its Akkadian cognate) would have referred primarily [*sic*] a class of female
>
> religious functionaries who operated outside of the patrimonial estate, being associated,
>
> instead, with the cult of the deity to whom they had been consecrated. Over time, the
>
> Hebrew semantics shifted to include other women who occupied a social position that was
>
> not delimited within the household (and hence not controlled by husband or father).[135]

DeGrado therefore suggests that through "a process of generalization and pejoration, the Hebrew

word shifted from designating priestesses to single women more generally, with the implication of

uncontrolled sexuality."[136] Thanks to this semantic development, קדשה came to have a range of

meanings including "female cultic functionaries and prostitutes" and "single or unaccompanied

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[133] Jessie DeGrado, "The *qdesha* in Hosea 4:14: Putting the (Myth of the) Sacred Prostitute to Bed," *VT* 68 (2018): 8-40.

[134] Although as recently as 2010 J. Andrew Dearman was still discussing "some form of sacred prostitution or fertility rite" (*The Book of Hosea*, NICOT 29 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 166).

[135] DeGrado, "*qdesha* in Hosea 4:14," 28. Frymer-Kensky had noted a similar link: "The *zonah* and the *qedeshah* clearly shared one important attribute: they were women outside the family structure, with no male to protect them": *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 201.

[136] DeGrado, "*qdesha* in Hosea 4:14," 30.

women."[137] Accordingly the meaning of the word is determined by the context. DeGrado gives examples of words in English which can also have a range of meanings depending on the context. A princess, for instance, can be a royal personnage or a pampered darling.[138] A more apposite example in this instance may be the word "escort." Predominantly used in military contexts the word evolved in the 20th century to be also a conventional term for a man who accompanies a woman to a dance or party and subsequently became a euphemism associated with prostitution as in "escort agency, service, girl."

The recognition that קדשה can be translated in certain instances as simply "prostitute" is confirmed by reference to interpretations of the word in the Targum and rabbinic works, where it is frequently equated with illicit sexual activity in a secular context,[139] and by examining the LXX, Vulgate and Syriac translations of Genesis 38, as the following table illustrates:

	Hebrew	LXX	Vulgate	Syriac
Verse 15	זוֹנָה	πόρνην	meretricem	ܢܝܬܟܐ
Verse 21	קְדֵשָׁה	πόρνη	mulier	ܢܝܬܟܐ
	קְדֵשָׁה	πόρνη	meretrix	ܢܝܬܟܐ
Verse 22	קְדֵשָׁה	πόρνην	scortum	ܢܝܬܟܐ

The Greek translation uses the same word throughout. The Latin varies but this may be a stylistic feature, as in Latin *meretrix* and *scortum* are both used as a term for a common prostitute and have

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[137] DeGrado, "*qdesha* in Hosea 4:14," 8, 26. DeGrado suggests at least three categories: cultic functionaries, single or unaccompanied women, and prostitutes. In relation to Genesis 38 DeGrado thinks it makes "perfect sense" that Hirah was looking for a "single woman" who was out in the streets of Enaim, but this seems improbable. Such a description, which could apply to a number of women, would be inadequate for Hirah to find her. In everyday life it is probable that ordinary women would sometimes walk unaccompanied in the street or in the countryside. One such example is Ruth on her way to and from the fields and the threshing floor (Ruth 2:3, 18; 3:6). Deuteronomy 22:27 also makes it clear that a woman might walk unaccompanied in the countryside; when it refers to a woman being attacked, she is absolved of guilt because "there was no one to rescue her."
[138] DeGrado, "*qdesha* in Hosea 4:14," 28.
[139] DeGrado, "*qdesha* in Hosea 4:14," 22.

no cultic connotation. The Peshitta, like the LXX, makes no distinction between the two terms and renders them both as ܙܢܝܬܐ, "prostitute."[140]

When Hirah searches for Tamar he knows he is looking for a prostitute but the question still remains as to why he uses the word קְדֵשָׁה and why does he use it three times.[141] At one level Hirah uses the word because, as Bird observes, קדשה had become in some Hebrew uses a euphemism for זנה.[142] But if Judah has sent him to reclaim the pledged items Hirah must have been under no illusion as to the nature of the transaction that led to their forfeiture. What is less clear is why he uses the euphemism. Hirah, the Adullamite, is among his own; why should he feel obliged to do so? Scholarly suggestions that it was more acceptable to be consorting with a cult prostitute are now futile, if it is accepted that there is no such person as a cult prostitute, only a common prostitute with a slightly more decorous alternative title.

Equally striking is the three-fold repetition of the word. A less skilful writer than the narrator of this story could have easily abbreviated Hirah's account as follows, omitting the repetition:

> He asked the townspeople, 'Where is the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the wayside?' But they said, 'No such woman has been here.' So he returned to Judah, and said, 'I have not found her.'

Herbert Brichto alerts the reader to the importance of noting every instance of repetition of incident, action, or speech, in biblical narrative or dialogue. He rightly interprets any repetition to be "a signal for a closer reading, alerting [the] reader to a subtler communication than the one anticipated or a subtler nuance of that communication."[143] This advice is directly applicable here. The word קדשה is being used by Hirah not for the benefit of the men of Enaim nor to spare Judah's

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[140] Gruber, "Hebrew *qĕdēšāh,"* 136n8.
[141] The text is unclear about which term Judah used when he asked Hirah to retrieve the pledged items and also about whether Hirah gives a verbatim or a sanitized report of his conversation with the men of the town.
[142] Bird, "End of the Male Cult Prostitute," 40n13.
[143] Herbert Chanan Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 245.

blushes; instead, as will become evident, the narrator is conveying a subtle message to the attentive

reader. There is another unusual aspect to Hirah's triple reference to the קדשה, as George Savran

has observed. When Hirah returns to Judah he repeats verbatim what the townsmen have said: לֹא־

הָיְתָה בָזֶה קְדֵשָׁה. According to Savran this is a rare occurrence of quoted direct speech with no

omissions or additions.[144] As repetition with variation is the norm in biblical literature, this feature

draws even further attention to what is being said.[145] While it might be argued that it is easy to

repeat verbatim a four-word speech, Rendsburg notes variations can occur even in three-word

references, as in the variation between Numbers 20:17 and Judges 11:17: נַעְבְּרָה־נָּא בְאַרְצֶךָ and

אֶעְבְּרָה־נָא בְאַרְצֶךָ.[146]

The answer to the repeated use of קדשה may be found in the writings of the 13th century exegete

Nachmanides, who thought that using קדשה for a common prostitute is an example of the Hebrew

phenomenon where one word may have both a specific meaning and its opposite.[147] He explains as

follows: "Thus the woman who guards herself from forbidden relations and lewdness is called

k'doshah (holy), while she who separates herself from holiness and becomes defiled with illicit

sexual relations is called *k'deishah.* This is comparable to the usage customary in the [Sacred]

Language [to use the same root-letters to express the negative as well as the positive]."[148]   Other

examples of this phenomenon include שרש which can mean both "to uproot" (Job 31:12; Ps 52:5)

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[144] George W. Savran, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 29. There are only nine other examples: Gen 20:5; 26:9; 44:25; Exod 32:8; 1 Sam 21:12; 29:5; 1 Kgs 18:11, 14; 22:18.
[145] Gary A. Rendsburg, "Alliteration in the Book of Genesis," in *Doubling and Duplicating in the Book of Genesis: Literary and Stylistic Approaches to the Text,* ed*.* Elizabeth R. Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 91.
[146] Rendsburg, "Alliteration in the Book of Genesis," 91n28. He does admit they occur at a greater distance from each other.
[147] Goodfriend, "Could *keleb* in Deuteronomy 23:19 actually refer to a Canine?," 385n18.
[148] Ramban (Nachmanides), *Commentary on the Torah: Deuteronomy,* trans. and annotated with index by Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1976), 291.

and "take root" (Isa 40:24); ברך "bless" and "curse" (Job 1:5)[149] and דשן "to clean fat ashes" (Exod 27:3) and "to grow fat" (Deut 31:20).[150]

Although the narrator merely reveals Judah and Hirah's perception of Tamar as a prostitute and consecrated woman[151] and never explicitly states his own view, it is plausible that the narrator intends his readers to hold both meanings of קדשה in tension when they think about Tamar. The narrator after all has a track record in ambiguity beginning with the reference to Shelah's birth place כזיב (38:5). Although the word is a *hapax legomenon* it may be derived from כזב, "lying "or "falsehood,"[152] and accordingly the place name can be translated as Liarsville,[153] perhaps a subtle reference to Judah's powers of deception already evident in Genesis 37 and soon to become obvious in 38. Similarly the narrator plays with the word עֵינַיִם (38:14) which is derived from עין with the alternative meanings of "eye" or "spring."[154] By the time קדשה is mentioned three times (38:21-22) the reader will be alert to its significance. Two verses later the news of Tamar's pregnancy spreads and two verses after that Judah proclaims her righteousness.

The narrator's desire to remind us of Tamar's essential holiness may be underlined by another detail of the story. When Judah learns of Tamar's pregnancy he orders her to be taken out and burned (38:24). Hamilton correctly observes that "Judah's insistence that Tamar be burned is simply an outburst of indignation, a spontaneous reaction, and hardly a reflection of actual juridical enforcement for sins relating to sexual behavior."[155] But given the rarity in the HB of punishment by burning,[156] it seems probable that the attentive reader will bring to mind the reference in Leviticus

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[149] In the case of ברך it is possible that it is being used euphemistically. See Celine Mangan, "Blessing and Cursing in the Prologue of Targum Job," in *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translations and Interpretation in Memory of Ernest G. Clarke,* ed. Paul V.M. Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 225, 229.

[150] Goodfriend, "Could *keleb* in Deuteronomy 23:19 actually refer to a Canine?," 385n18.

[151] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 72-73.

[152] C.A. Ben-Mordecai, "Chezib," *JBL* 58 (1939): 285.

[153] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 43. See also Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," 147: "city of lies".

[154] See pages 131-32.

[155] Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18-50,* 449.

[156] There are only two instances: Leviticus 20:14 and Leviticus 21:9.

21:9, not to a priestess, but to a priest's daughter: "When the daughter of a priest profanes herself through prostitution, she profanes her father; she shall be burned to death." Later rabbinic sources attempt to enhance Tamar's character by providing her with "a famous priestly father, namely Shem, who was also known by the name Melchizedek".[157] This speculation is groundless but confirms the association in the popular imagination between Tamar and holiness.[158]

A stronger link may be provided by a consideration of the triple repetition of the word קדשה in two adjacent verses (38:21-22):

וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־אַנְשֵׁי מְקֹמָהּ לֵאמֹר אַיֵּה **הַקְּדֵשָׁה** הִוא בָעֵינַיִם עַל־הַדָּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא־הָיְתָה בָזֶה **קְדֵשָׁה**׃

וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא מְצָאתִיהָ וְגַם אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם אָמְרוּ לֹא־הָיְתָה בָזֶה **קְדֵשָׁה**׃

As noted above repetition in the HB is always significant and triple repetition even more so.[159] The recurrence of קדשה is underlined by the strategic position of two of the instances at the end of their respective sentences. The narrator is taking considerable pains to draw his reader's attention to the feature. An examination of triple occurrences in the same or adjacent verses of Hebrew words related to holiness, קָדַשׁ, קֹדֶשׁ, קֹדֶשׁ, קֹדֶשׁ and קְדֵשָׁה,[160] reveals that in only two instances does the triple repetition refer to living creatures, namely Tamar (38:21-22) and the LORD of hosts: וְאָמַר **קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ** יְהֹוָה צְבָאוֹת (Isa 6:3). It can be confidently claimed that Proto-Isaiah would have been familiar to the person or persons who retold Genesis 38 and inserted it into the book of

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[157] Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, 271. Sources for this claim include *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Genesis 38:24; Gen Rab 85:10 and *Tanḥuma* Vayeshev 9.17.

[158] Comparisons with Code of Hammurapi §110 may not be helpful. §110 is frequently translated as follows: "If a holy woman opens a tavern door or enters a tavern for a drink, she shall be burned to death," and it is tempting to relate it to the link between holy women and burning but Rivkah Harris argues ("The *nadītu* Laws of the Code of Hammurapi in Praxis," *Orientalia*, 30 [1961]: 163n3) "the *nadītu* of Sippar constituted a special class of women formed to meet certain social and economic problems. And though there were religious premises underlying the establishment of the cloister the term 'priestess' is nevertheless a fallacious description of the *nadītu*." See also Elizabeth C. Stone, "The Social Role of the Nadītu Women in Old Babylonian Nippur," *JESHO* 25 (1982): 50-70.

[159] See also Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* new and rev. ed., 111-41; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 148-55.

[160] Gen 38:21-22; Exod 26:33-34; 29:37, 43-44; 30:29-30, 35-37; 40:9-11; Lev 5:15-16; 6:29-30; 10:17-18; 16:2-4; 22:2-3, Num 18:9-10; Ezek 42:13; 45:6-7; 48:20-21; Isa 6:3.

Genesis. The question must now be answered whether the narrator is using the triple repetition to say, "prostitute, prostitute, prostitute" or "holy, holy, holy."

Two further points may help supply the answer. It has long been noted that immediately after Tamar is declared righteous, an additional statement is made: "And he did not lie with her again": וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ (38:26). It is usually understood that this comment safeguards the reputation of both Judah and Tamar by exculpating them from any future charge of incest[161] in the light of the prohibition in Leviticus 18:15: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nakedness." The wording of the phrase in 38:26 is significant. The masculine form of the verb is clearly used: יָסַף. Judah, not Tamar, is considered the more likely to transgress. Tamar's future reputation seems intact and the narrator is doing his utmost to make that clear.

Solomon Schechter provides the final link. In his discussion of "The Law of Holiness and the Law of Goodness" he reminds us that "holiness is but another word for *Imitatio Dei*"[162] and that the most frequent name for God in the rabbinic literature is "the Holy One."[163] Concentration on the ritual aspects of holiness at the expense of the ethical has obscured the reality that true holiness consists

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[161] Susan Niditch suggests that the comment might also be read "as a more integral part of the story. Judah, now more fearful than ever of the woman who survived two husbands and boldly bettered him, keeps his distance from her" ("Genesis," 43). This is to miss the point that absolving Tamar (and Judah) of incest is also an "integral part of the story". Sharp's idea, that Judah is deterred by the "excessive overwhelming results" of his first sexual encounter with Tamar and is worried about the "twin threat to Shelah's inheritance," may be discounted (*Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible,* 95). Judah's concern for Shelah when he was his sole heir (38:11) may have motivated by fears about the extinction of his line rather than affection for Shelah *per se.* When Judah originally conceived three sons with the daughter of Shua he did not seem uneasy about the future division of his property.
[162] See Leviticus 20:26: "You shall be holy to me; for I the Lᴏʀᴅ am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine."
[163] Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (London: Black, 1909), 199.

in imitating God and is revealed in action.[164] Abraham recognised this when he referred to the "Lᴏʀᴅ, before whom I walk" (24:40). While Tamar briefly adopted the guise of a זנה her actions show that at heart she is a קדשה, "a holy woman," who has played her part in responding to God's call so that the people of Israel may "grow into a multitude on the earth" (48:16).

Woman of God

As indicated in Chapter 3, in accordance with a reciprocal application of the concept of *mise-en-abyme*, the four main roles which Joseph assumes cast additional light on Tamar. Those roles are family man, worker and administrator, victim of trauma, and man of God. The first three have been discussed in Chapter 3. It is now appropriate to explore the fourth, Joseph as man of God, to examine what new insights this aspect confers on our understanding of Tamar as God's agent.

Like Genesis 38, the Joseph narrative as a whole is frequently considered a largely secular work with remarkably few direct references to God.[165] With one exception God never speaks directly to another character. That exceptional occasion, when God addresses Jacob in a vision at Beer-sheba (46:1-4), belongs to a chapter which is usually regarded as extraneous to the original text.[166] This exception appears to confirm the fundamentally secular nature of the narrative but that would be a misreading. It is surely no coincidence that the greatest number of references to "the Lᴏʀᴅ" in

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[164] This is particularly important to bear in mind when scholars, such as Moberly (*The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, OBT [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 99), propose that holiness is entirely lacking from Genesis. Moberly notes that the Hebrew root *qdš* does not appear in Genesis 12-50 except in what he terms "two insignificant ways – in the place name Kadesh (Gen. 14:7; 16:14; 20:1) and in the depiction of Tamar as a prostitute (*qedešah*, Gen. 38:21f.)." cf. Stuart Lasine's observation, "Many scholars believe that their understanding of holiness is fully present in Genesis, except for the vocabulary" (Everything Belongs to Me: Holiness, Danger, and Divine Kingship in the Post-Genesis World," *JSOT* 35 [2010]: 36).

[165] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 118; Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 233n28.
Even some of those scanty references, such as Joseph's greeting to Benjamin – "God be gracious to you, my son!" (43:29) - are often dismissed by scholars as "a nicely conventional greeting" and therefore presumably secular. See W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 219. This is to misunderstand the connection between formulaic greetings and a living faith. An Irish example illustrates the point. "Bail ó Dhia ar an obair" (the blessing of God on the work) is a traditional greeting uttered on encountering someone at work, but it is no conventional platitude. It is rooted in an implicitly shared religious belief and the use of the phrase has accordingly declined with increasing secularisation. Joseph's greeting to Benjamin reflects the innate religious values of Joseph and his family.

[166] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 154.

Genesis 37-50 occurs in Genesis 39,[167] the chapter immediately following the story of Tamar and Judah. Genesis 39 serves as the second leaf of a diptych which highlights explicitly what is implicit in Tamar's actions in Genesis 38. In 39 and in the other chapters of the narrative which treat of Joseph's relationship with God the following aspects are revealed through Joseph's own comments, those of the other characters and of the narrator: Joseph's indebtedness to God for his gifts and family, God's influence on his ethical actions, his awareness of his role in God's plan, and God's continued providence in the future.

Joseph's indebtedness to God for his gifts and family, Joseph's initial success in Potiphar's house is unambiguously attributed to God: "The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man" (39:2) and even the Egyptians recognize the role of God in Joseph's success: "His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands" (39:3). After the setback of the false accusation by Potiphar's wife and his consequent imprisonment, his next rise to success is due to his gift of interpreting dreams: the cupbearer's, the baker's and especially Pharaoh's. Joseph recognizes that these interpretations "belong to God" (40:8), and is quick to acknowledge that when he interprets dreams he is acting on behalf of God: "God has revealed" (41:25), "God has shown" (41:28), "God will shortly bring it about" (41:32).[168] Later he instructs his brothers to tell his father, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt" (45:9). Francine Prose sums up his situation as follows: "he himself learned that his gifts – good looks, authority, the prodigious abilities to interpret dreams and deliver the land from a seven-year famine - were all presents from God, gifts with the power to save human lives … beginning with Joseph's own."[169] In the same way it can be accepted that God has also endowed Tamar with the gifts she

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[167] Eight in all: 39:2, 3 (x2), 5 (x2), 21, 23 (x2).
[168] See also Franziska Ede, "Dreams in the Joseph Narrative," in *Perchance to Dream: Dream Divination in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,* eds. Esther J. Hamori and Jonathan Stökl (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018): 105. Ede argues that Joseph's ability to communicate the interpretation of dreams is directly connected to his "exceptional relation with the deity."
[169] Francine Prose, "The Story of Joseph in Egypt," in *Genesis, As It Is Written: Contemporary Writers on Our First Stories*, ed. David Rosenberg (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 200-201.

displays in Genesis 38.[170] A further God-given gift shared by both Joseph and Tamar is the gift of children. It has already been taken as given that the conception and birth of Tamar's twins are blessings from God.[171] Joseph validates that claim when he announces to his father as he presents his children: "They are my sons, whom God has given me here" (48:9). This recognition has already been made plain when the aetiologies of his sons' names are explained: "God has made me forget … God has made me fruitful" (41:51-52).

Tamar's innate compliance with God's law in conforming to the requirement of the levirate custom and her implicit commitment to justice are also endorsed by Joseph's ethical stance. When Potiphar's wife attempts to entice him to her bed Joseph's refusal is unambiguous: "How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9). He has admitted his indebtedness to her husband Potiphar - "he has put everything that he has in my hand" (39:8) – but he gradually builds up to his primary objection, וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים. The sentence is carefully structured so that it will reach a climax with the key word, לֵאלֹהִים. Later in the narrative during a meeting with his brothers Joseph is equally at pains to stress that he is a God-fearing man: אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרֵא (42:18).

Joseph is keenly aware of his role in God's plan. Benno Jacob's suggestion that Tamar was informed at the time of her marriage to Er of her new family's destiny has already been discussed. That this is a valid supposition is supported by Joseph's strong appreciation of his own role in the continuity of the family under the aegis of God: "for God sent me before you to preserve life. … God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:5, 7-8). In his speech the important elements are hammered home by the triple repetition of the key terms of שלח and אלהים. Both Joseph and Tamar have been entrusted with a mission by God.

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[170] The Egyptian Pharaoh endorses the Israelite Joseph's God-given gifts, when he states "God has shown you all this" (41:39), and it can be taken for granted that the Israelite readers of Genesis 38 recognise God's gifts in the Canaanite Tamar: fidelity, courage, initiative, foresight.
[171] See page 81n85.

Throughout this mission Joseph is both a recipient and a giver of חסד, which is a key biblical concept, used both of "divine-human and human-human relationships."[172] It is impossible to express in one word or phrase but has numerous connotations, including loving kindness, fidelity, loyalty, reliability, compassion and steadfast love.[173] חסד is not just an emotional response to a particular situation; it is a practical activity which benefits the recipient, who is frequently in extreme need.[174] One such example is Lot's rescue from the imminent destruction of Sodom: וַתַּגְדֵּל חַסְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחֲיוֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי (19:19). It can also benefit the dead, as in Saul's burial (2 Sam 2:5), and can assist the living on behalf of the dead, as when David showed loving kindness to Mephibosheth on behalf of the dead Jonathan (2 Sam 9:7). Fundamentally it is a divine attribute, which human beings reflect and imitate when they show חסד to others.[175]

In the second lowest moment of his life, after Joseph is thrown into jail, he receives God's חסד: "the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer" (39:21). Joseph's good standing with the chief jailer led to Joseph's opportunity to help the cupbearer and baker by interpreting their dreams. Although his actions are not explicitly described as חסד, his assistance to two people who have been deprived of livelihood and liberty surely qualifies. That Joseph sees it as חסד is indicated by his request to the cupbearer: "But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness [חסד] to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place (40:14). Joseph is aware that the giver of חסד can deserve or hope to receive it in return. For instance, Naomi prays that her daughters-in-law will receive the kindness they have given: "May the LORD deal kindly [חסד] with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me" (Ruth

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[172] Edward F. Campbell, "Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth: *Hesed* (חסד) and Change," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 105 (1990): 66.

[173] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1999), 24; Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, FAT 2/47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 207; Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 104; Campbell, "Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth," 64. Moreover it cannot be expressed uniformly by the same English word or phrases. See Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, 2nd ed., BibSem 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 23.

[174] Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible,* JSOTSup 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic 1993), 186.

[175] See Campbell, "Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth," 69; Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 207.

1:8). Similarly Abimelech asks Abraham to commit to a reciprocal action by swearing, "as I have

dealt loyally [חסד] with you, you will deal with me" (21:23). Eventually Joseph's request for חסד is

granted, when the cupbearer belatedly remembers Joseph's gift for interpreting dreams (41:9-13),

and the latter's interpretation for Pharaoh led to Joseph's release from prison and his position as

Pharaoh's second-in-command (41:14, 40). In the later part of the narrative Jacob asks Joseph to

perform חסד for him (47:29): "When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph

and said to him, 'If I have found favour with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal

loyally [חסד] and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt." In due course Joseph fulfils the request

(50:7), thereby fulfilling חסד to the dead.

Although חסד is never explicitly mentioned in relation to Tamar, she too offers חסד to the living and

the dead, by her commitment to perpetuating the line of Judah, her resolution to bear a child for her

dead husband and her contribution to the fulfilment of God's promises to the deceased Abraham

and Isaac. In return Tamar receives divine חסד when she is saved from certain death at the last

moment (38:26). The fact that Tamar is rescued by her own foresight and ingenuity is not a

contradiction; God's gifts, like Joseph's gift of oneiromancy, are used to help those in need. Joseph

has also shown that חסד is not bound by geographic, ethnic or religious barriers.[176] It can be given

and received by those who are not Israelites. Just as Joseph showed kindness to the Egyptian

cupbearer (and Abimelech of Gerar to Abraham), so the Canaanite Tamar can give and receive חסד.

It is notable that Tamar shares a connection to חסד with her fellow matriarchs Sarah and Rebekah.

Abraham asks Sarah to show him חסד by pretending he is her brother, while Abraham's servant

credits God's חסד towards Abraham with the success in finding Rebekah during the quest for a bride

for Isaac (24:27). Further confirmation of Tamar's association with חסד can be found by reference to

Ruth. While the book of Ruth may be influenced by Tamar's story rather than vice versa, Benno

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[176] See Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 203.

Jacob's comment is relevant here: "Ruth speaks that which Tamar thought,"[177] what is implicit in Genesis 38 is often made explicit in Ruth. A key attribute of the childless widow, who eventually bears a child "to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5) is her חסד towards the living and the dead (Ruth 1:8; 3:10).

God's loving kindness and providence do not end with the birth of Tamar's twins. In the concluding chapter of the narrative (50:24) Joseph reminds his brothers, "God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." God's providence endures, marked by God's promise, blessing and support to this family "now looking ahead to its fifth generation."[178] While it is presumed Tamar will not return to the promised land Joseph gives us a glimpse of Tamar's future life in Egypt beyond the pages of Genesis. Just as the LORD was with Joseph in both success and adversity (39:2, 3, 21, 23), the readers can be assured that God will continue to be with Tamar and that God will show to her what was shown to Joseph in prison: וַיֵּט אֵלָיו חָסֶד (39:21). When Pharaoh asked his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" (41:38), he immediately recognised that Joseph fitted the description. What is valid for Joseph is valid for Tamar, his alter ego; it can be confidently assumed that Tamar, like Joseph, is also one in whom "the spirit of God" exists.

Conclusion

Far from being a secular chapter Genesis 38 is "ein hoch theologisches Kapitel der Bibel"[179] which reveals God at work, first in punishing those who flout God's wishes and second in quietly blessing those who work to fulfil God's plans. Tamar is someone who does not appear overtly religious but because of the risks she takes to comply with both the tenets of the levirate law and God's plan for Abraham's descendants she is recognised for her righteousness, holiness and חסד, three attributes of God which are made evident by people's ethical actions. Contrary to normal expectations God is

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[177] Jacob, *First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, 263.
[178] Humphreys, *Character of God*, 226.
[179] Salm, *Juda und Tamar,* 210.

depicted employing in Tamar an agent, who confounds convention by being a woman, a foreigner and powerless; and one who challenges the notion that "male initiative alone advanced the promises of God to the ancestors of Israel."[180]

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[180] Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 37. According to Bos the purpose of her essay is to delineate the role of three women, Tamar, Yael and Ruth, who "challenge patriarchy from within patriarchal structures".

Conclusions

By putting Tamar in her place I am now in a position where I am able to articulate some definitive findings, to analyse their significance, and to flag some areas for further research. In the process of putting her in her place I have drawn on methodologies derived from literary and compositional criticism and trauma theory; subject areas as diverse as plant pollination, veterinary and human obstetrics, and the anthropology of clothing; information from places as varied as Nuzi, Sippar and Šuruppak, and on texts and sayings in Greek, Latin, Syriac and Irish but always with the focus on the primacy of the Hebrew text. On the way I answered my initial questions concerning Genesis 38: What part does this unusual story play in the Bible and especially in the Book of Genesis? What does Genesis 38 tell us of the Hebrew understanding of God? In particular, what is Tamar's role in answering both these questions?

Principal Findings

Development of Genesis 38

A *sine qua non* of putting Tamar in her place was the realisation that Genesis 38 cannot be understood without acknowledgment of the phased development of the chapter from independent oral story, to insertion in the text as a *mise-en-abyme* of the Joseph narrative and as a retrospect to the patriarchal stories, and to its conclusion by the later addition of the coda. It is a clear example of a text which must be approached both diachronically and synchronically to be comprehended fully.

Tamar

In an appropriate understatement Spina sums up Tamar's significance as follows: "This woman is no bit player".[1] Putting Tamar in her place has involved four main phases, in which she is recognised as a character credible to the contemporary Hebrew reader and as a woman who can be confidently proclaimed as being on equal footing with Joseph, a fifth matriarch, and an agent of God.

In spite of the paucity of information at our disposal, careful reading of the chapter and of relevant passages from other parts of the HB indicate that Tamar is a character whose choices, motivations and actions (no matter how unusual some of the last were) would have been comprehensible to the readers of Genesis. It was no part of the narrators' mission to make her story appear only as an aberration from the norm. The plight of a childless widow and the desperate measures she is driven to take would have made sense to the people of the time and the opportunities and difficulties presented by the operation of the levirate law would have also appeared familiar.

When Genesis 38 is considered as a *mise-en-abyme* of the Joseph Narratives the first striking aspect is the sheer weight of parallels between Tamar and Joseph. One might have thought that it would be Judah who would prefigure Joseph, but time and again the plight of Tamar, her reaction to it and the traits she revealed in the process prefigure those of Joseph. It was surely unprecedented for a female figure in the HB to be considered an equal to such a significant figure as Joseph. Regardless of Joseph's place in the Bible as a whole his position as a remarkable biblical personnage is indubitable and it puts Tamar on a completely different plane to many other characters, both female and male.

The concept of patriarch and matriarch is a post-biblical one (the first notable reference to patriarchs being 4 Maccabees 7:19) but the particular emphasis given to Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah is notable from the outset. No matter how unorthodox the manner of her sons' conceptions, Tamar rightly takes her place beside the traditional quartet. She wins her place in light of her

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[1] Spina, *Faith of the Outsider*, 37.

commitment to bearing a child, perpetuating the patriarchal lineage, and above all her role as David's ancestress, as revealed in the coda

Tamar's fourth role, that of agent of God, may seem an unlikely one. This aspect, in particular, is based on an appreciation of the subtlety at play in the narrative and a recognition that Genesis 38 can only be interpreted fully through the lens of its wider context. When examined thoroughly Tamar's divine attributes shine through: righteousness, holiness, justice and חסד, all reflected in a commitment to God's purposes. The narrator's clever exploitation of the multiple meanings of קדשה reveals Tamar's true identity beneath the prostitute's persona: Tamar, the holy woman. In a further step, the acceptance of Tamar as the holy one plays a key part in the affirmation that Genesis 38 has a theological function, where improbable people can be instruments of the divine agenda.

Judah

An unexpected bonus of putting Tamar in her place is the fresh light shed on the role of her father-in-law Judah. Despite numerous scholarly attempts to view him as a redeemed character who will repent of his ways, when observed through Tamar's eyes and in contrast to her, the consistent ambivalence concerning his portrayal becomes plain. Many scholars like to create a neat graph showing Judah following an increasingly upright path, but a more realistic appraisal of Judah's progress offers support for the Hebrew hope that God can operate through fallible humankind. It also lays a foundation for a deeper understanding of the equivocal figure of Judah's descendant, David.

Narrator of 38:1-26

The skill of the Yahwist, if Yahwist it be, who composed Genesis 38:1-26 as well as other HB texts, is confirmed once more. He is a superb writer; the apparent simplicity of his style and the meticulous realization of his shaping of the narrative are testimony to his expertise and power. Through a mere

15 verses[2] he creates in Tamar a character who more than justifies this full-length examination. In contrast he also highlights the less able hands at work in the coda, a salutary reminder of the many strands and varying expertise which go together to create the text of the HB.

Significance of the Findings

First, Tamar *is* an important character, but one whose significance can be fully appreciated only when the separate aspects of her representation are combined. The increased attention given to Tamar in the 20th century, especially by feminist readers, was more than justified. It is possible, as will be evident later, that her true importance will never be fully realised; it is sufficient for the time being that the richness and diversity of her portrayal is identified and that her meaningful role is recorded.

Second, the myth that Genesis 38 is a secular chapter is dispelled. Through the references to God, both explicit and implicit, through the actions and inactions of the characters, through the fine web of references to divine attributes, and through the links to religious themes in other parts of Genesis that claim is scotched. The reservations of those such as Westermann ("It is a secular narrative through and through… and says nothing of God's action or speech") can be soundly and definitively dismissed.[3] It also confirms the existence of what both Moberly and Wenham term the "ecumenical bonhomie" of patriarchal religion.[4] It brings into high relief the realisation that for many of the Hebrew people God's action is not limited by boundaries of gender, race or land. A Canaanite woman can also be a conduit of the divine.

Third, this study solves the conundrum of the placing of Genesis 38. Its location, as close as is feasible to the bridge between the patriarchal and Joseph narratives, is shown to be carefully chosen to optimise retrospective and prospective perspectives with Tamar as the lynchpin drawing the two

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[2] 38: 6, 8-9, 11, 13-19, 24-27. 38:27 replaces the original final verse.
[3] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 56.
[4] Moberly, *Old Testament of the Old Testament,* 104; Gordon J. Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives,* eds. A.R. Millard and D.J. Wiseman (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1980), 184.

parts together. In this way it weaves the disparate texts into a more cohesive whole and offers fresh insights into understanding both sections.

Fourth, my findings support several scholarly propositions. The most important of these is the application of the theory of *mise-en-abyme* as developed by David Bosworth and as applied by him initially to Genesis 38. The extraordinary volume of evidence, which I have found to support his original claim, more than confirms its validity. It also strengthens my belief that biblical scholarship should prioritise those approaches that would have been familiar to the original readers of the HB. The narrators relied on the memory and understanding of a knowledgeable if not always literate audience. The more we attempt to use the same approaches the closer we can come to understand the HB through their eyes and ears.

My discoveries also endorse the necessity of reading the HB in context. Tamar's relevance emerges fully only when understood in the contexts of the chapter's successive literary phases, each in their associated social, religious and historical settings. To avoid the danger of circular arguments this must be tempered by the judicious application of insights from ANE culture and from other areas of study.

Fifth, my findings challenge those who assume that the coda (38:27-30) is an integral part of the chapter and those who dismiss the importance of its levirate theme. There are compelling reasons, as was evident in Chapter 4, to argue that the coda was a later addition to the story. Those who maintain that the primary purpose of the whole chapter is to trace the ancestry of King David are clearly mistaken. Moreover such an assumption ignores the centrality of the levirate law in the unfolding of the story.

Further Research

Among the new areas for research prompted by such rich material three stand out as most deserving of further exploration in relation to other parts of the HB: the application of the concept

of reciprocity in a *mise-en-abyme*; the examination of trauma in individual cases, and the negative impact of certain aspects of reception history on the understanding of Tamar and her role.

First, the original understanding of a *mise-en-abyme,* a smaller story as a microcosm of a larger one, has gradually been gaining currency as it has been applied by scholars to Hebrew texts other than those discussed by Bosworth. In considering Tamar's place, the concept of Genesis 38 as a *mise-en-abyme* has been exceptionally fruitful.[5] Almost equally as intriguing in its possible implications has been my proposal concerning the reciprocal use of the concept. Hitherto the insights gained from the larger work have not been utilized to reflect on the smaller one, yet as has been seen in Chapter 3 unexpected benefits have accrued when this has been carried out; several aspects of Joseph's situation and character have revealed new facets pertaining to Tamar. It is now time to test the principle more broadly, beginning perhaps with the other two texts explored by Bosworth in his seminal work, 1 Samuel 25 (1 Sam 13:12–2 Sam 5:3) and 1 Kings 13:11–32 (2 Kgs 23:15–20), and then testing it on other suitable texts.

Second, there has been an even greater growth in trauma studies as applied to biblical episodes; as discussed in Chapter 3 this has produced a new understanding of the behaviour and predicament of both Joseph and Tamar. The people of Israel may not have heard of trauma theory or post-traumatic stress disorder but they would have been very familiar with the trauma that could befall an individual, a family, a community or a people. Recent studies have concentrated largely on the effect of trauma on whole groups. This has been an understandable practice considering both ancient and modern history, where events such as the Exodus, the Babylonian Exile, the Holocaust, and the massacre and displacement of almost entire populations have focused attention on collective trauma. Future research might also concentrate on HB stories of individuals, which would offer greater opportunities for more nuanced comparisons and conclusions. The current studies of individuals are still too few for conclusive arguments.

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[5] A related topic for future exploration is an examination of how the multi-faceted nature of Judah in all its light and shade acts as a form of *mise-en-abyme* for the complex character and actions of David.

A third area of research could examine how the post-biblical neglect of Genesis 38 has distorted a proper appreciation of Tamar's worth. The deliberately double-edged title of this dissertation reflects the many ways in which the story of Tamar has often been marginalised in the past. Given some of the details of the events outlined in Genesis 38 it is obvious why it may not feature at Sunday School sessions, but Tamar's story is conspicuous by its virtual absence from academic curricula at both second and third level and from the Christian lectionary. If her story were read as frequently as Rebekah's and Rachel's would it present a very different picture? If children's picture book versions of "Tamar and Judah" could be as widely available as those of "Abraham and Sarah" would there be a deeper understanding of her value and importance? In recent years considerable research has been carried out explaining how the rabbis and other early authorities dealt with some of the controversies associated with Tamar. Serious consideration should now be given to assessing the degree to which later reception history has had a negative impact, even unconsciously, on attitudes towards her.

Coda

To celebrate the years I have spent reflecting on and researching Tamar, I recently commissioned an artist friend to create a work of art inspired by Genesis 38. In conceiving the commission I was struck by the realisation that a factual, figurative depiction would not do justice to the topic. This is not just a rejection of the common illustrations of the chapter, where a prurient artist focuses on the sexual encounter between a fully-robed Judah and a scantily-clad Tamar. More importantly it is a recognition that the chapter's main themes and Tamar's traits are essentially intangible and at best can only be represented symbolically. Within the gold rim of God and the silver rim of the narration I envisage symbols conveying Tamar's tenacity, courage and creativity, her commitment to family in all its guises, past, present and future, while a subtle web connects her story with that of those around her.

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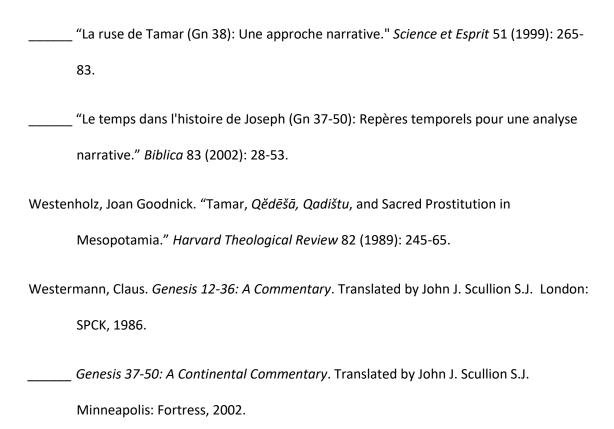
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