Weapons Upon Her Body

The Female Heroic in the Hebrew Bible
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By

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A woman [carries] her weapons about her.
—B. Yevamot 115A

Two daughters and their newly widowed father narrowly escape the destruction of their hometown—a calamity which claimed their sisters, their mother, and apparently their father’s senses. Living in a cave and feeling that their world has ended, the daughters get their father drunk and have sex with him, hoping their resulting pregnancies will secure a place in whatever society they find...

A woman’s husband dies; in keeping with tradition, her father-in-law sends the late husband’s brother to marry the new widow. But the brother shirks his duty, and so is struck dead. The father-in-law promises to send another son but has no intention of following through. The woman is now without husband or security. Knowing that her newly widowed father-in-law will be passing through her town, she disguises herself as a prostitute and successfully catches his eye. The “prostitute” asks nothing in payment from the unaware widower—merely his ring and staff as a token of payment. Months later, she is pregnant and her father-in-law is scandalized. He sends for his wayward daughter-in-law. He demands to know who did this deed; the woman shows the father-in-law his ring and staff. Realizing his error, he acknowledges his failing and restores honor to both his daughter-in-law and her offspring...

At first blush, it is hard to imagine these stories of incest and harlotry are in the Hebrew Bible, but there they are—along with other equally troubling tales of deceptive women. How can we account for their inclusion, especially when they fail to explicitly emphasize God’s protection or Israelite religion in any sort of way? Why are these tales of trickery and female intrigue in the Bible? Clearly later editors could

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reform and reshape the stories of Lot’s daughters and Tamar of Genesis 38 as well as other tales such as Ruth and Bathsheba. But they chose not to. Why did they retain these challenging characters? Are we simply to read them as moral teachings on the evils of women?

Other stories of women in the Bible are not nearly as problematic. Judith, Deborah, Michal, Abigail and Yael all appeal to God in the context of their stories. But Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba do not. They seem to act out of their own self-interest. We would be hard pressed to read these four narratives as stories celebrating divine providence since God appears so little in their stories. Nor do they reflect Israelite religious practices. The stories demonstrate neither an active prayer life nor ritual observances anywhere. The goal which the female characters strive for—access to a male who will eventually provide them with a son—seems to be what marks them as “successful” even though they employ trickery and/or deception to achieve that end. These women work for themselves and are motivated out of their own personal concerns in order to achieve their individual objective—but, that is not how these stories are understood.

Biblical scholars often view women in the Bible primarily as representative examples of communal, dynastic or religious concerns. Women serve as important vessels in fulfilling the aims of the covenant. Sarah’s and Rebekah’s problematic pregnancies point to God’s intervention in keeping His promises of fertility and greatness. Without their annunciation stories, we would not fully realize the interplay of covenant promise and divine providence. Textually, women’s symbolic significance also rises with their ability to personify the hopes of Israel’s later exiled communities, a powerless, landless people. Queen Esther’s story illustrates how one clandestine Jew in a foreign court can make a difference in the lives of thousands of her countrymen. Moreover, women provide a foretaste of great men to come. For instance, the ancestresses of David—which includes Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth—help point the way to David. This is important since together they form the line of Davidic ancestresses with Bathsheba completing the circle of women directly around him. In recognizing the ambiguous nature of these female characters, we more fully appreciate the richly paradoxical figure of David. In addition, we value the literary artistry behind biblical composition when we look at the lush and varied characterization of someone like David.

The Davidic ancestress connection is an important one since it links us to some of the most vibrant stories of women in the Bible. In Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth (as well as some of the women immediately around David, like Michal, Abigail and Bathsheba), we have women of
intrigue, initiative and resolve. These women also put us in mind of Yael, Esther, Judith and Deborah, women marked more for their physical bravery than their sexual intrigue. Furthermore, these narratives, marked by women who resist the limitations of their circumstances through strategies of deception and trickery, are subsumed within a larger epic story that showcases God’s role in Israel’s history.

And yet. Before developing a notion of these particular women as instrumental to David and national concerns, before glossing over them as part of a greater institutional representation, we return to some simple questions: why are these stories here? What if these stories are not read as examples of Davidean ancestresses or representation of Israel? If we limit ourselves to traditional interpretative frames, what do we miss? Taken on their own merits, we find that these female characters exemplify dynamic characteristics that no biblical male does. Furthermore, they are contained in a sacred text even though there is nothing overtly sacred about their stories.

We fail to read these stories for what they communicate about women, choosing instead to valorize women for informing our notions about men. I believe gender is the defining feature of these stories. By gender, I do not mean the simple measurement of male characters vs. female characters along traditional metrics of the designation of “hero.” Such comparison tends to ask how female characters compare to male characters—a one-way conversation at best. This contrast can only enhance our vision of how well women can act like men or, in a more negative vein, how men fail their gender by acting like women. 

Typical cross-gender comparisons fail to impart anything new about the women as women. Reading for gender means that we limit our vision to same gender narratives as our field of study. By assessing female characters against other female characters, we authenticate women as their own analytic category.

I treat the stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba as gender narratives, where the gender of a character defines how we identify a text as well as read a character. This distinction is a cultural one, not a

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2 This is the perspective that Boyarin takes in explaining the invective against male-male genital relations in Leviticus; see Daniel Boyarin, “Are there any Jews in the ‘History of Sexuality’?”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5:3 (1995): 333-355.

3 There exists a wide array of gendered expressions beyond the dichotomy of male and female. For example, a gender narrative can inform how we read stories of saints where they deny their gender through celibacy and self-denial; we can also
biological one. The Bible offers very clear and distinctive ideas regarding how the two genders are to act, with very detailed laws outlining the acceptable expression of gender (for example, women are not to wear male clothing and vice versa [Deuteronomy 22:10]; men alone are to be circumcised [Genesis 17:10; Leviticus 12:3]; women are to separate themselves from the community during menses [Lev. 15:19-23]). These distinctions are outward expressions and thus constitute a biological reality recognized by the Israelites: men rule, fight, enact laws and carry on the patrimony. Women menstruate, have babies and are responsible for the integrity and perpetuation of the household. Basically, men are to be men and women are to be women. Following this line of thinking, within the biblical narratives, one finds a certain set of character traits specific to each gender. A biblical character expressing those traits (or, conversely, failing to live up to the expectations of their gender) forms the basis of this analysis. In this context, it seems that comparison of female narratives to other female narratives produces rich results that help us better understand women in the text.

To accomplish this new analysis, I focus on the actions of four specific gender narratives: Lot’s daughters (Gen. 19); Tamar (Gen. 39); Ruth and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11; 1 Kings 1,2). Within these stories I find unique traits, actions and motifs which correspond to attributes of the female hero of folklore. This female heroic represents a completely separate standard with its own set of traits and features, without correspondence to established male heroic character traits. Furthermore, I find that female heroes in the Bible have nothing to do with institutional or cultic Israel. Rather, biblical female heroes inform our reading of these characters as women. Put another way, reading these as stories of heroic women puts them in league with other female hero narratives from a variety of settings and cultures, further enriching our read of them. As this distinctive picture of the female biblical heroic emerges, we find a new locus of meaning within the biblical text: a new metamyth of women in the Bible.4

4 Metamyth in this context is a component part the larger mythic story of the Bible and depends upon folkloric understandings of myth as “a shared [oral as well as written] tradition that defines and helps create the community as a whole”: Susan Niditch, Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Culture (Louisville, Ky: Read stories of men living as women (or vice versa) as gendered narratives in order to place them within a larger continuum of female narratives or, if appropriate, male narratives. However, the Bible recognizes only two genders—male and female. So, for the sake of this discussion, we limit our subset to male and female narratives with awareness that there are a greater number of gender expressions than just these two.
This new textual meaning suggests that typological similarities link these stories not because they inform our appreciation of David or as stock figures in the larger epic narrative of Israel. The stories fail to show how they respond to the demands of fidelity to the faith. Nor are they simply good biblical examples only of levirate procedures. Instead, we see them acting in profoundly gendered ways: they are using individual ingenuity and trickery, motivated out of their own self-interest, as part of a successful strategy that manipulates the patriarchal system to their personal benefit. We appreciate them as symbols of female agency and initiative. It is this action that links seemingly unrelated stories together. Under the rubric of the heroic designation, Bathsheba now becomes related to the cycle of Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth. Thus, I present these as a gendered biblical metamyth, a fundamental way to read and interpret women in the Bible.

I believe that these female narratives arose as part of Israel’s feminized domestic culture. Later editors and redactors, however, reworked them not to valorize the women, but in order to valorize the line of David or Israel or both. With this in mind, I want to consider what we fail to see by only viewing them as emblematic of Israel itself.

**Heroines and Female Heroes**

“Heroine” seems to be a category often applied without fully defining that concept (other than merely being female). So, too, the related term, “female hero,” often used generically to designate a female lead character. In this book, I apply this term in a very specific way. A female hero refers to a female literary character that fulfills a set of narrative actions that include individual initiative, deception and the use of the bedtrick. This initiative represents a non-coordinated strategy that seeks to challenge the

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Westminster John Knox, 1996, 127; see also Mark Levon Byrne, who defines a metamyth as “a fundamental or paradigmatic myth”: “The Hero of the West” in *This Immense Panorama: Studies in Honour of Eric Sharpe*, ed. Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow (Sydney: School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, 1999), 262, note 4.

Levirate refers to the legal process of raising up a son for a man who dies without issue: “If a married man died without children, his brother was to cohabit with the widow for several reasons: to prevent the widow from marrying an outsider (exogamy), to perpetuate the name of the deceased, and to preserve within the family the inherited land of the deceased. The first son born by the widow was to be considered the offspring of the deceased husband,” Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 56.
distribution of resources (in this case, available males to provide them with sons) to the female character’s advantage. The female hero mitigates the prevailing social and economic structures that we find in the text in order to help herself. She uses the bedtrick, an instance of sexual deception that contests the power and gender dynamics encoded within the story. These subversive and covert actions represent what James Scott calls the weapons of the weak. This cadre of actions marks female heroes as exemplary for their gender and not an imitation of male heroism. Furthermore, I do not assert that biblical women aspire to act like biblical men or that they are capable of fulfilling a man’s heroic requirements. My task is to analyze this unique subset in order to discover an identifiable female heroic within the biblical corpus. Some female characters that one might previously have identified as heroic will now fail to fit into the model of the biblical female heroic metamyth.

The focus here is not to savage existing methodologies but to apply a structuralist approach through the prism of gender in order to reconsider female narratives. A structuralist approach such as trait patterning is not new; others have already used it to further understand biblical narratives. However, my goal is to add gender to the critical matrix to see how we might develop a more robust notion of women in the text, rather than

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6 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xv-xviii. Scott’s book, whose title closely mirrors this one, provides some important language that supports my argument regarding biblical women and individual initiative. Scott identifies ingenuity and resourcefulness as part of the skill set used to great effect by subalterns. In his study of Malaysian peasants, Scott calls these “low-profile techniques” admirably suited to the peasantry. These include individual, non-coordinated strategies primarily focused on the redistribution of resources for their own benefit. In that particular aspect, Scott’s language provides a significant perspective for my argument. However, my justification for this argument is not based in Marxist ideology and, in that aspect, *Weapons of the Weak* is less applicable to my thesis. I do not see biblical women resisting elite forms of domination through non-coordinated strategies of foot dragging, non-compliance, sabotage or desertion in order to overthrow or dethrone the existing power structures. Scott raises important and challenging questions regarding these so-called low-profile resistance techniques. However, many of them are outside the larger argument that I offer here. Therefore, I leave aside his larger Marxist perspective and instead emphasize Scott’s tone and language regarding how powerless individuals assert themselves within an existing system and use their initiative and ingenuity, motivated primarily by self-interest, in order to successfully manipulate the system to their benefit.
reducing them down to their efficacy in representing Israel or the cult or both.

The Stories: Lot’s Daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba

Reading about Lots’ daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba, one is struck at how unusual the stories are. The women act in autonomous ways and are largely independent of masculine oversight or divine intervention. Unlike matriarchs like Sarah or Rebekah, we do not see them pray to God. They make no appeals to God, like the barren mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Hannah. In fact, barrenness is not the issue; lack of an appropriate male partner is the true dilemma. Neither do the stories emphasize participation in the established religious hierarchies or public religious practices of ancient Israel. Instead, these narratives exhibit a remarkable social independence such as claiming the right to have a child for themselves.

I will present their stories and some of the ideas that scholars have about them in the greater context of the Bible. But in the background of that discussion, I want to keep certain questions in mind: what do we miss when we view them only as representatives of larger political, historical or social causes? When we uncover their common cause, is that idea necessarily one that accords with the aims of Israel, or might we also see something of an independent nature that has been overwritten by later epic or dynastic concerns? Is there an effort afoot by later redactors to subtly wed these structural elements together? If so, can we ask why? Do we have clues here that might allow another reading about the nature and purpose of these stories?

Lot’s Daughters

A movie based on the story of Genesis 19 would earn an NC-17 rating: drunkenness, threats of rape and violence as well as trickery rule the day. Here we find Lot willingly offering his daughters to a violent crowd of men only to be saved by angels, who had come to warn him of impending doom. As the story progresses, Lot emotionally disintegrates as Sodom burns. Holed up in a cave, the unnamed daughters trick Lot into incestuous sexual intercourse when it appears that all is lost and they are

\[7 \text{ All biblical references are to the Revised Standard Version (1989) unless otherwise noted.}\]
left to repopulate their numbers on their own. The ensuing sons, Moab and Ammon, become the traditional enemies of Israel.

The story of Lot’s daughters cannot be separated from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Global as well as personal devastation abound in this narrative. Some of the earliest interpretations of the Lot tale casts this story as a moral tale against male-male genital relations. Other scholars argue for linking Lot’s saga with Judges 19 and the brutalization of the Levite’s concubine as related stories about hospitality and sacrifice of nameless women. Lot's story further serves as a parable on family values that is forcefully supported through textual and thematic links to the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34) and the rape of David’s daughter, Tamar (2 Sam. 13). Finally, some like Randall Bailey argue for the use of sex in the Bible as a polemic against political or economic enemies of Israel, evidenced by the incest and bastardy of Moab and Ammon’s birth narratives. Bailey concludes that this theme continues throughout the Bible in its dismissive vitriol against both of these geographic neighbors.

**Tamar**

Tamar, the wronged daughter-in-law, becomes the model of righteousness, one of the first women of such distinction in the Hebrew Bible. Tamar marries Er, the eldest son of Judah. When Er dies, through the law of levirate, Judah marries his second son, Onan, to Judith. Because Onan

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11 Randall C. Bailey, “They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: the Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives,” in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1, ed. F. Segovia and M. Tolbert (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 121-138.
does not wish to endanger his own inheritance by fathering a son who will threaten his birthright, he refuses to complete the sexual act with Tamar—and is summarily struck dead. Judah’s third son, Shelah, is withheld from Tamar until he reaches his majority—but the reader knows that Judah has no intention of marrying Shelah to Tamar. Tamar then tricks Judah into sleeping with her and giving her sons. Because Judah failed to fulfill his duty to Tamar, she is acclaimed the more righteous.

Certainly 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. Gerhard Von Rad sees evidence in Genesis 38 of a later editor inserting this pericope to highlight Judah's dynastic claims. Similarly, E.A. Speiser says that Tamar’s story shows that “she had the stuff… to be the mother of a virile clan, which is clearly the main theme of the story.” John Rook believes that Tamar's actions are motivated out of an authentic concern to honor her dead husband through levirate marriage despite Judah's designation of her as 'almanah, (a widow, lacking male kin and male guardianship). Authors such as Eleanor Ferris Beach argue for cultic connections from outside Israel. She links Tamar's name to various mythic images in Canaanite tradition, suggesting that Tamar's goddess

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20 A note on Hebrew transliteration: for technical reasons, the Hebrew kaph will be transliterated as q; the guttural he will be rendered as ch. Where I am quoting another scholar’s transliteration, I will preserve their spelling.
background was stamped out by the biblical redactors. Many are the scholars who relate both Lot’s daughters and Tamar narratives either to levirate concerns or the Davidic dynasty or both.

Ruth

Ruth, the faithful daughter-in-law is acclaimed as better than any number of sons. In the eyes of biblical culture, this is high praise indeed. Ruth’s story begins on the road back to Bethlehem from Moab. She is traveling with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her sister-in-law, Orpah. All three women are widowed and, as such, their means are limited. Naomi encourages the Moabite daughters-in-law to return to their native land to find husbands. Orpah does; Ruth remains with Naomi, expressing her filial affection for her mother-in-law. Ruth gleans in the fields of a near kinsman of Naomi’s, Boaz. He takes pity upon the poor women and looks out for Ruth. Naomi hears of this and encourages Ruth to approach Boaz. Ruth does, going down to the threshing floor and presenting herself to Boaz, who accepts her offer. He bargains for her hand and property in the marketplace since another has a closer claim. They marry and eventually have a son, Obed, who is the grandfather of David.

The Book of Ruth elicits a broad succession of interpretation with varying results. Ruth’s story symbolically evokes the giving of land and people. She herself is traditionally seen as emblematic of chesed, that loving kindness thematically linked to the festival of Shavuot and the giving of the Torah. Andre LaCocque sees in Ruth the redemption of the foreign woman (a marginalized character) who personifies the image of Israel herself: a landless, captive people seeking hope in a foreign


Esther Marie Menn argues for Ruth as the royal ancestress who redeems the Davidic line and is herself a mirror image of David through her morally ambiguous actions and trickery. For Mieke Bal, to read Ruth is to enter into the biblical tension between law and legitimacy, between possession of the land (go’el) and a thematized future (levirate).

**Bathsheba**

For a story where so much is said with so few words, the tale of David and Bathsheba cannot be beat. Bathsheba’s story begins in 2 Sam. 11. King David’s men, including Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, are away at war. From his rooftop, the king spies Bathsheba bathing. He calls for her; they have sex and he sends her back home. Upon discovering that she is pregnant, she notifies the king; he recalls her unwitting husband from the battlefield. David attempts to dupe Uriah into sleeping with his pregnant wife. Uriah the Hittite declines out of loyalty to the men still fighting. David subsequently has him sent into the heat of battle whereupon Uriah is promptly killed. After mourning the death of her husband, Bathsheba and David marry. The child, though, dies as a result of their transgression. But they have another son who becomes King Solomon.

We next encounter Bathsheba in 1 Kings 1 and 2. Now David is near death and Bathsheba is part of the power struggle to place her son, Solomon, on the throne, even though there are many half-brothers before him in the line of succession. She reminds David of an unknown promise to make Solomon king when he dies; David agrees to her request. Bathsheba then approaches Solomon with a request from his half-brother, Adonijah, for David’s concubine after the king’s death. Solomon realizes that this is a threat to his kingship and has Adonijah killed.

One of the standard characterizations of Bathsheba is made by R. N. Whybray who writes that Bathsheba is a “good-natured, rather stupid woman who was a natural prey both to more passionate and cleverer men.” Whybray further likens Bathsheba to the innocuous ewe lamb of Nathan’s moral parable, where a rich man wantonly takes a poor man’s beloved lamb (2 Samuel 12). Daniel Boyarin argues that this powerful metaphor is incredibly evocative for the pastoral culture of its time:

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25 Menn, 96-100.
26 Bal, 80-81.
Chapter One

the story ... performs as narrative its ideological and cultural function of female subjugation... The biblical text encodes a very vivid picture of an ideal marriage as ‘like the love of a shepherd for his only ewe-lamb.’

Further conflicting motifs are associated with Bathsheba. She is the woman who brings death, as noted by Joseph Blenkinsopp and David Gunn. Any relationship with her results in sorrow, death and suffering. She is an agent of chaos, a force of destruction rather than political harmony or cosmic order. On the other hand, Cheryl Exum finds in Bathsheba’s story a victimization: hers is an account of forcible sexual assault. Exum argues that David is not the only one responsible for Bathsheba’s violation—all later writers, redactors and commentators perpetrate this aggression by continuing her ambiguous and vulnerable presence in David’s story. George Nicol agrees that Bathsheba’s motives are ambiguous but he describes her as a resourceful character who manipulates the situation to her advantage.

Many see the links among Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth. All three are stories of women without appropriate male relationships. They have no husband and the male guardians in their lives are not doing their jobs. Left to their own devices, they must act. All fall within the range of Davidic ancestresses. Furthermore, both Tamar and Ruth relate to levirate discussions.

Bathsheba, however, is not one that we would normally associate with these three stories. True, her tale is marked by many of the same narrative elements that we find in Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth. Bathsheba is alone, albeit married; her husband is simply away at war. She acts of her own accord—when she finds herself pregnant by the king, she does not tell anyone but the king. As with the other three narratives, there are three deaths—Uriah, her newborn son and Adonijah. The rampant ambiguities in her story, noted by Nicol, Exum and Gunn, open the interpretive door and allow for her inclusion with Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth.

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will see that the textual allusions in her story find her in sympathy with these other narratives. Since we are not reading these for what they tell us about David or Israel or God, we can therefore more profoundly connect previously unrelated texts.

Women and Ambiguity

The ambiguities of these texts as well as the narrative gaps allow for new constructions that intentionally focus on female initiative. These narratives reproduce individual acts which, in the words of James Scott, “nibble away at established power structures and form a mode of individual self-help.” These stories celebrate quotidian struggles waged with nothing more than the wit, guile and sweat of the defenseless. These women use their own wit and wisdom, the weapons of the powerless, to achieve economic security. These are not grandiose ends. But what we find in their non-coordinated strategies and their individual successes are subtle confrontations within the established power structures where women succeed. And in this, I find valor in their independent resourcefulness.

Further, the motifs and allusions within the four stories argue for their relatedness as part of the cycle of female heroic narratives. This heroic relationship stands in tension to expected readings of these stories as well as the bounds of their civic or cultic usefulness. When we read them for what they tell us about women, we begin to see the women more clearly.

The Hero

Many folklorists take for granted that heroes are male. In fact, a gender qualifier is only added when the hero is female—the equivalent of a “nurse” vs. a “male nurse.” A heroine, by contrast, is not necessarily a person of great achievement. This can simply refer to the main female character of a story or a myth or a legend. No particular talents (besides two X chromosomes) are required before the awarding of this appellation:

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32 Scott, xvi.
one’s presence in the narrative merits the title “heroine,” a passive accolade at best.

A hero is a man of considerable valor and bravery, a character of combative prowess and cunning who stands metaphorically (and sometimes literally) head and shoulders above the crowd. In numerous narratives across a vast array of cultures and times, his celebrated superiority is made manifest in the fight: courage and ferocity serve as his essential battle implements.\(^{34}\) He is an extraordinary individual who embodies psychic alienation from ordinary human experiences through his myriad adventures.\(^{35}\) The hero represents mythic qualities such as virtue, strength, nobility and endurance.\(^{36}\) In conquering, he takes his rightful place among the masculine pantheon thereby achieving transcendence.

Beyond these virtuous qualities, what particular or identifiable traits define a hero? Following structuralist impulses, some folklorists charted the similarities between standard hero narratives by reducing them to a list of traits—such as their similarities in birth, death or conquests, providing an outline or system for measuring a heroic figure’s mythic achievements. Raglan and Propp—as well as J.G. Hahn, Otto Rank and Heda Jason—each developed such schemes or trait lists based on male literary exploits. Such lists yield similar traits across many types of male narratives—for instance, an unusual birth, foster parentage, a complicated quest, rising to kingship and a celebrated burial place (Figures 1-4; see also Appendix A-E).

When male categories are imposed upon female characters, the female players consistently fail to achieve a similar level of traditional (male) heroism. But when comparing female narratives to other female narratives, one obtains an entirely new but relatively regular set of standards. Such a comparative process teases out what is profoundly female about these characters and not necessarily how well they act like men.

Trait patterning has some precedent in both gender as well as biblical studies. For instance, Ilana Dan and Heda Jason champion a certain kind of heroine trait patterns.\(^{37}\) As mentioned above, Esther Marie Menn works

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\(^{36}\) Byrne, “The Hero of the West,” 263-265.

\(^{37}\) Ilana Dan, "The Innocent Persecuted Heroine: An Attempt at a Model for the Surface Level of the Narrative Structure of the Female Fairy Tale,” in *Patterns in Oral Literature*, edited by Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 13-30; Heda Jason, “The Jewish Beauty and the King: Coherence in Folk
with a list of identifiable traits associated with what she calls the Davidic ancestress motif. These traits include moral ambiguity, trickery and sexual prowess. This new research—but Menn in particular—re-informs our reading of biblical women and further directs us to see how these women enhance our appreciation for David as a morally ambiguous trickster.\(^{38}\)

The trait list closest to this study is one developed by Mary Ann Jezewski. She takes a standard hero trait list developed by Lord FitzRoy Raglan which succinctly posits a male hero of myth and ritual. With respect to Lord Raglan’s system, he finds several salient elements to male heroic narratives including:

- His father is a king
- He is raised as a foundling
- He achieves victory over a king or a beast
- He rules as well as prescribes law
- His death is memorialized

Jezewski compares Raglan’s traits to tales where gender (that is, a lead female character) is the deciding factor for inclusion in her analysis. Not unexpectedly, Jezewski finds that most female figures fail to rank in Raglan’s male-based heroic system. But, by investigating only female tales, she discovers some remarkable deviations from the accepted male model: a female hero is like a male hero in so far as her exemplary personal characteristics potentially could include courage, power or magic. However, in contrast to Raglan’s system, Jezewski’s notes the following in female narratives:

- the death of the female hero is hardly ever emphasized;
- female heroes have more morally conflicted stories which often include their misdeeds, especially amorous affairs, jealousies or revenges;
- the Andromeda theme permeates: a female hero who attaches herself to stronger/higher status male, seemingly for the purpose of becoming pregnant by him. Once this is accomplished, either the female character distances herself from that stronger male, or the female character disappears from the text.

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\(^{38}\) Menn, 100-105.
The further application of Jezewski’s model to biblical literature leads to some interesting conclusions. These stories of sexual intrigue appear in the canon of sacred literature, yet these women do not overtly seek the deity’s favor or offer their lives for the good of their community. Neither should these stories be read as cautionary tales about sexually profligate women: their stories utilize sex simply as part of the plot. The moment of true heroism lies in their enterprise in securing something for themselves that will ensure their own future status and stability. Furthermore, as Jezewski’s model makes clear, the heroic moment for women is not a valorous death or victory in battle—it is the point of adroit action, fueled by their own wits and initiative.

This study submits these structural methods to biblical tales that encompass the moral ambiguity and sexual ploys that Jezewski uncovered in her cross-cultural work. In the context of the biblical narrative, I find that individual female initiative can be viewed as heroic. This heroism does not depend upon the imprimatur of the Bible or its later compilers and editors but rather comes independently from the folkloric credentials of these female narratives. Furthermore, unlike scholars like Menn, who view the moral ambiguity and sexual shenanigans of the Davidic ancestresses as important to understanding David’s character, my work strives to define the character of the women themselves, not as proxies for David or Israel. It is my contention that the Bible offers a robust vision of female heroism that has been overlooked by previous biblical commentators.

The Approach: History, Gender and Folklore

In the next chapter, I will provide a short overview of the standard interpretations of Genesis through Kings, the books where our four stories appear. This chapter focuses on the larger discussion of Israel’s idealized history and how these particular narratives have been situated within that paradigm. I will look at four major thematic approaches: the Bible as salvation history; Bible as epic history; Bible as succession narrative or court history; and Bible as literary product only.

Amram Tropper claims the Bible demonstrates a thriving historical consciousness where subjective elements of memory combined with official modes of understanding.39 Clearly we can locate a sense of this in

the Bible where folklore, oral literature and official history come together. The Bible seems replete with a sense of the importance of Israel’s history as communicated through human lives. And, significantly for our discussion, the Bible incorporates religion into its consciousness since so much of the historical narratives concern the work of God in time and history.

While I agree that the Bible is not history in the modern sense of the word, it is important to consider how its unique historical consciousness is communicated. Our folkloric approach arises from literary-critical impulses. Yet I cannot ignore the significant historical elements within the biblical narratives that frame my chosen stories. These arguments serve my contention that Israelite writers/redactors incorporated material with a clear agenda in mind. Biblical scholars might arrive at different conclusions (Bible as history, Bible as literature, Bible as propaganda, etc.) but debating the relative strengths of those conclusions remains outside the nexus of my concerns.

A certain historical consciousness frames the biblical narratives which seek to present an idealized Israel. The task then is to situate these female stories within these various analytical frames. From here, we will see how these narratives have been used and, to some extent, misappropriated by those overriding interests. I will focus on an important thematic idea that has been overlooked—the integrity and narrative independence of these women. While I view this narrative material as historical in nature (situated as it is within a particular historical context), it is not history since its narrative elements and structures more closely approximate literature. I am not championing Ruth or Tamar or Lot’s daughters as actual historical persons; rather, I am reading them as texts. As such, I believe that their literary independence has been trumped and overwritten by the national claims of Israel. Using a text-based methodology allows new access to this material and suggests some reasons for the inclusion of these stories.

In chapter 4, I add gender to our analysis and present how stories of women in these books have been identified. I look at some of the major feminist scholars and detail their approaches to stories of women in the Bible. As such, God appears as an implied or assumed pilot of events in such analyses. This is where we will see how these stories were put to use for larger textual aims that have nothing at all to do with the gendered nature of the stories. I believe that these stories serve a more emblematic role where the motivations and actions of biblical women can be read as heroic. By using folkloric methodologies we find a means for establishing that identification.
To that end, chapter 5 outlines what a hero is and how we have been conditioned to assume the male gender of heroes. Under this rubric, we also expect that female characters must exhibit established (implied male) traits and actions in order to gain admittance to the title “valorous.” However, there exists a unique set of traits and actions that arise from female-driven narratives without reference to male heroic models. These female narratives show a consistent pattern of female initiative, trickery and moral ambiguity, characteristics not often associated with male narratives but seen with regularity in female ones. Traits and characteristics such as these argue for the female heroic, a singular designation that valorizes female initiative. I argue that Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba possess these particular traits of the female heroic. This has implications for how we read these stories and furthermore understand their place in the Bible.

The introduction of gender to the analysis adds to the richness of characterization of these figures as female gender heroes. These chosen stories exemplify what Wendy Doniger has called the bedtrick, a sexual trick or pretense, which ultimately challenges the boundaries between sex and gender, power and identity. This sort of sexual escapade is limited in the Bible to female stories.

Chapter 6 focuses solely on our four selected stories. After arguing for their designation as female heroic stories, I want to read them in isolation from the biblical text in order to discover various markers, actions, words or repetitions between the stories that further determines their relatedness under this rubric. Some of these markers include the bedtrick; use of the marketplace; the verb dabaq, or “to cleave”; three deaths; daughters; seeing/knowing and not being seen/not being known. Having ascertained their relatedness based on internal clues, some of the questions to be answered include: How important is it that all four stories share so many of these narrative units in common? Can we argue that trickery or deceit plays a significant role in female biblical narratives, and if so, why? How does any of this inform our understanding of them as gendered characters?

In chapter 7, I conclude by asserting that in viewing these women only in service to larger causes, we miss what is unique and distinctive about their resistance to established notions of power and authority. Women can and do represent their own analytical category. This work argues that gender differences do matter in the Hebrew Bible and women’s narratives

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offer another vision of subversive action that is unique and distinctive to their stories.

In the end, I want to ask questions of the Bible—questions that sometimes lead to competing and even contradictory conclusions. The Bible is a multivalent, multivocal work within a complex web of meanings and purposes. My contribution is but one argument regarding these narratives. The significance of this research, I hope, is to offer a new perspective from gender and folklore for reading these narratives that may have nothing at all to do with Israel or religion in the ancient world.
Everywhere [in the Bible] there is evidence of an effort to explain the present in terms of the past, and this effort is itself the most explicit expression of historical thinking.
—Gerhard Von Rad.

The Hebrew Bible has a problem with history. Debates rage over sources, dating, and composition. Since we lack the original written sources that make up the Bible, we can never know who composed them, nor date them with certainty, nor place them in a precise historical context. The most historians can do is compare the Hebrew Bible to other ancient Near Eastern texts by performing intricate and complex philological studies. We can hypothesize on what biblical redactors and editors thought they were doing when they compiled this material, and we can further examine how communities actually interpret these books, whether or not that was the original intention. But most historical debate is merely conjecture coupled with evidence from other ancient Near Eastern communities.

I want to start this study of our four narratives by looking briefly at biblical hermeneutics. I will begin by demonstrating the stories’ utility to the idealized story of Israel which we find in the Bible. I will next focus on four views of the Hebrew Bible—Bible as salvation history, Bible as epic narrative, Bible as succession narrative, and Bible as literary narrative—that are most relevant in considering the role of women in biblical stories. The first three approaches reflect a kind of historical consciousness among the later redactors who compiled this material—but each approach reflects a different agenda. The fourth theory comes not from literary theory. This approach argues that biblical narratives arise from literary (rather than historical) impulses. Literary theories offer their own ideas regarding the role and presentation of historical data situated

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within texts like biblical narratives. Furthermore, the literary perspective offers some noteworthy ideas about persons and actions in the story.

My intent is not to challenge the efficacy or import of these various perspectives. But I believe that these interpretations keep us from discovering much that is new or insightful about biblical women. As historians like Amos Funkenstein and Yosef Yerushalmi will each claim in their own way, what the Bible gives us is an idealized image of Israel as a people of God. By situating our reading and interpretations within this emblematic or theological framework, scholars continue to ask how women fit within that somewhat idealized notion. For example, a woman’s distinctive reproductive role is highlighted for how she furthers some aspect of the Bible’s theological or civic agenda. But reading the Bible this way limits our ability to see and appreciate the women in these narratives. Mining these stories strictly for their significance with respect to God or Israel’s faith seems to like a stretch.

These analytical frames are not intended as an exhaustive survey of biblical criticism regarding the material from Genesis to Kings. I simply want to open the argument with a general survey of relevant biblical criticism regarding the books that comprise our four biblical narratives. In fact, only the approaches that touch most directly upon our four stories will be the focus here—that is, salvation history, epic literature, dynastic history, and literary theories. Gender is not a distinctive element within any of these approaches. In fact, gender is but one component within the larger story of Israel, which subsumes many persons, nationalities and characteristics. Therefore, this chapter will look at critical approaches to biblical narrative without necessarily isolating gender as a defining factor. It is not my intention at this point to critique how well gender is incorporated into biblical analysis. It is simply my task at this point to see how women in general and our four women’s narratives in particular fit into these larger biblical discussions.

With that in mind, within these four approaches to (apparently) historical narratives, women often serve God’s salvific aims in human history through special pregnancies (Sarah, Rebekah, Samson’s mother) or through their exemplary feats in defense of Israel (Deborah, Yael, the apocryphal Judith). In this, the resourcefulness of women like Tamar and Ruth takes on providential overtones since their pregnancies indirectly illustrate God’s saving hand in ways unknown or unclear at the time. The epic narrative perspective suggests that the Bible arises out of its oral and folkloric roots and incorporates stories of women as underdogs who best their more powerful adversaries—a powerful tale for a diaspora people. The best example of this is Esther, but Tamar and Ruth as well as
Bathsheba—three powerless women—all overcome more powerful men in the context of their stories. When one reads biblical narratives with an eye to the Davidic line, this process rehabilitates and privileges the House of David as God’s chosen dynasty. This kind of reading includes incorporating stories of the Davidic ancestresses such as Tamar and Ruth (as well as Lot’s daughters in their opportunism) and seeing how their stories foreshadow David’s enigmatic ways. And literary analysis offers a useful way to liberate oppressed or voiceless characters from the hegemonic representations of power in the Bible. In all of these analyses, the Bible reproduces an established hierarchy of authority as well as patriarchal modes of influence; when we unpack the literary elements of voice, genre and context, we also get at some of culturally-informed notions of gender that the text presumes.

Admittedly, some of these historiographical theories directly compete with one another. Furthermore, the biblical narrator usually does not meet more modern standards of history. This study will not resolve these tensions. However, these issues open the door for emerging ideas about how biblical stories have been used to further some of the institutional and dynastic aims of Israel. This survey of ideas and theories is therefore intended to lay the groundwork for a more pointed consideration of women’s narratives in the Bible.

This chapter considers the historical material of Genesis through Kings—those books and stories that chronicle the formation of Israel as a people and an emerging nation up to its demise in 587 BCE.² The

² I limit myself in general to Genesis-Kings since I am specifically interested in two stories from Genesis (Lot’s daughters; Tamar); Ruth and Bathsheba (who appears in 2 Sam. 11 and 1 Kings 1 and 2). In the Tanakh, Ruth appears in the Writings (Ketuvim, in the Hamesh Megillot, or The Five Scrolls), based on its late authorship and late events, such as the restoration to Zion under Ezra. Given Ruth’s placement between Judges and Samuel in Christian Bibles, her story confirms the viewpoint of the Deutonomistic Historian and is read as a link between the time of the kings and the monarchy. Her story is also seen as a justification for the Davidic monarchy and thus, approaches interested in arguments for the Davidic dynasty would necessarily include her book. Conversely, her story can also be read as a later justification for marriage of foreign women after the return of Ezra-Nehemiah (see Andre LaCocque, “Ruth,” in The Feminine Unconventional, 84-116). However, since I am most interested in her role in defense of the Davidic line, I view her story in its chronological placement between Samuel and Kings. Furthermore, since our four stories do not appear in Exodus, Leviticus or Numbers, I will not refer to them here in any substantive way. Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers are subsumed under Heilsgeschichte as well as epic narrative theories which deal with the Pentateuch
encompasses the patriarchal narratives of Genesis through the desert wanderings of the Israelites and their eventual establishment in the land of Canaan where dynastic impulses grow and develop into a nation called Israel that is destroyed first by the Assyrians (722/721 BCE), then the Babylonians in 587 BCE.3

Yet, despite whatever claims are made regarding the Pentateuch’s purpose, the true hero of these stories is God. It is God who challenges Abraham to travel from Mesopotamia to Canaan. God provides for Jacob’s family during a terrible famine by leading them to Egypt. It is God again who leads them out of captivity in Egypt and into the Promised Land. God’s prophets anoint the kings and God’s prophets also announce the impending destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and then Judah, due to the wickedness of the people and their leaders.

As we proceed, it will be important to negotiate this boundary between history and theology. Our four stories appear in the midst of narratives that purport to tell Israelite history. But if God is the hero, is this in any sense history as we would understand it today? Did the writers intend to tell us about Israel or about God? Does it necessarily have to be one or the other? What we have before us is the story of God told through the lives of ordinary and not-so-ordinary Israelites. Or, should we change the emphasis: is the Bible the story of ordinary and not-so-ordinary Israelites who happened to have a monotheistic faith? How we work out the story’s emphasis will determine how we read the stories of men and women in the Bible (that is, identifying who the real star is—God or humanity). Therefore, our next task is to work out what sort of historical consciousness can be located in the Bible so that we might better proceed to the books themselves.

as a whole but they are not the focus of any specific textual interest in this particular study. Chronicles also falls outside our purview for several reasons: is it significantly later than the Samuel-Kings cycle; it appears to use Samuel-Kings as source material; and, most importantly to this study, the Bathsheba-David interactions are not reproduced there (see Leslie C. Allen, “The First and Second Books of Chronicles,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 299-308). At most, Chronicles provides only a cryptic mention of Bathshua, mother of Solomon and three other boys (1 Chr.3:5).
3 I use the term “nation of Israel” in a generic sense to refer to the Land of Israel which split into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (c.930 BCE – 722/721 BCE) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (c.930 BCE-587 BCE). My arguments do not debate the status of Israel as a nation or a city-state but rather use this in a general sense to designate that area that self-identifies as the people and the land of the Israelites.
Historical Consciousness

[H]istory is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual. As an individual deprived of memory becomes disoriented and lost, not knowing where he has been or where he is going, so a nation denied a conception of its past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future. As the means for defining national identity, history becomes a means for shaping history.
—Arthur Schlesinger

The Bible, says Amram Tropper, “provides evidence of a thriving historical consciousness.” Historical consciousness incorporates partial and subjective elements of memory with objective, “official” modes of understanding. However, discerning where memory ends and objective history begins creates friction when considering the historiography of the Bible. What did the writers and compilers of this material think they were writing and compiling? Did they privilege the subjective over the objective or vice versa? Can we in any way verify which elements are the result of memory production and which are institutional or public forms? And, significant for our discussion, what role does religion play, since so much of the historical narratives concern the work of God in the community?

The historical consensus seems to be that compilation of Israel’s written history began in the pre-exilic era of ancient Israel and continued through its post-exilic diaspora (6th - 5th century BCE). Shnayer Leiman argues for a basic canon of fixed texts by the second century BCE. Most scholars tend to agree with this date, claiming that there can be no question that this material was pulled together as Israel dispersed outside the land, incorporating both early oral as well as epic verse into a type of salvific literature.

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Yosef Yerushalmi, accepting the post-exilic roots of the Bible, argues that the biblical writers wrote and compiled with an historical awareness somewhere between memory and history. Yerushalmi emphasizes the role of memory production rather than history for the writers and compilers of the biblical material. He claims that those who read and interpret the Bible from a modern historiography perspective in actuality stand at odds with what is going on in the Bible since biblical historical writing is more akin to the manufactured collective memory of an exiled people. For Yerushalmi, the Bible communicates something of Israel’s past but ultimately fails to represent what might be considered a true historical consciousness.  

This does not mean that no history exists in the Bible. In history, says Yerushalmi, God revealed himself to his people. Historical events like the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai were commemorated for their sacred significance. In this context, history becomes a reenactment of sacred, momentous events. Since there can be no return to Sinai, what took place at Sinai must be commemorated and remembered (thus, the title of his work: zakhor) for those who were not there that day.  

Individual, historical memory is codified and reenacted in ritual, worship and myth which are collective and national concerns. The Bible simply represents a patterned guide to the whole of history by highlighting God’s will and how God’s people, the Israelites, exhibit that will.

Historian Amos Funkenstein claims that the writers and compilers of the biblical historical material may or may not have intended to write a history of Israel but they embodied something he terms an historical awareness. This awareness exists along a continuum between analytical history and subjective memory without completely encompassing one or the other. This, says Funkenstein, is the historical consciousness of the Bible, a mediating category between objective history and created memory.

For Funkenstein, the move from imminent expectation of God’s vindication (apocalypticism) to history as future-oriented and providential (eschatology) represents an innovation in historical consciousness. As

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9 Ibid., 10.
10 Ibid., 21.
such, God does not change, humanity does.\(^\text{12}\) This is the maturation of a theologically-informed historical understanding. Thus, what the Bible highlights is the gradual unfolding of humanity’s understanding of God and God’s ways, from earliest myth to prophetic pronouncements.

We will see that Yerushalmi’s claim that the Bible represents a patterned guide to the whole of history informs theological readings like salvation history and, to some extent, epic narrative and dynastic history approaches. But Funkenstein’s notion that the Bible’s historical consciousness presents a mediating category between memory and history also seems helpful for understanding our four narratives. As Funkenstein argues, the biblical compilers and redactors employed a type of historical awareness that was theologically informed and matured over time and came to fruition during Israel’s exile from the land. Previous stories from oral as well as epic and literary genres were committed to a final, written form and compiled into a work intended to serve as a type of directed history. In this way, the Bible is read as a predictive narrative rather than a descriptive account of Israel’s people and history.

Biblical history contains historical as well as theological, political and spiritual concerns and, depending upon one’s perspective, some or all might take precedence at any given time. How long this writing and compiling took or what debates occurred in establishing the final text—while important and significant—is outside the purview of our discussion.\(^\text{13}\)

Instead, I want to focus on what Carl Holladay contends is the task of biblical interpretation: to gauge the historical consciousness of Scripture in order to better negotiate what the story might have meant in its original context and what it might mean today. Holladay says, “Every interpretive


\(^{13}\) It seems clear, though, that the books that we are dealing with—Genesis through Kings—had a standard written form within the Jewish community prior to the exile. Something that biblical scholars would recognize as a final canonical Bible is established by the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) century of the Common Era. For more in-depth debate on canon formation and dates, see J. M. Auwers and J. H. de Jonge, ed., The Biblical Canons (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 163; Leuven: Peeters, 2003); Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, ed., The Canon Debate (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002); Eugene Ulrich, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Shnayer Z. Leiman, ed., The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible (New York: KTAV, 1974).
act is a journey there and back again.”\textsuperscript{14} To paraphrase Holladay, our task is to journey back into these stories in order to interrogate the historical awareness attached to these stories. We need to grasp their presence in the text as directed history. And ultimately, I will journey back into the present since it is the larger biblical narrative that I wish to appraise.

The content of that directed history will be the subject of our next consideration. As with sources, the original meaning of biblical historical narrative is lost. However, several theories regarding Israel’s historical destiny, tied to the stories that they told about themselves and about their place in the world, will help us to think more about the Bible’s historical consciousness. We will next look at the ways in which the material from Genesis through Kings has been approached—as a historical narrative, as epic literature, as dynastic history, and through literary approaches. Each in its own way grapples with the “problem” of history to a greater or lesser degree. And each approach seeks to read biblical narratives for what they tell us about God and Israel and its people, which includes women. Thus I will tease out how each of these approaches talks about women in their books and specifically, our four women’s narratives. We will find that our women’s stories fit quite snugly into these larger civic agendas.

**Bible as Historical Narrative**

Reading the Bible as a kind of historical narrative presupposes that the intent of the writers/editors to convey information about Israel’s past is apparent and recoverable by modern scholars. Simply stated, historical-critical approaches to the Bible claim that the Bible provides objective historical information about ancient Israel. One reads the Bible chronologically for historical cause and effect, a seemingly straightforward task. However, this means that one tracks the Bible’s unfolding of its history while also making sense of theological claims about God and divine intervention in that history. This means that this is a history “fraught with meaning”: it recounts Israel’s past and its efforts to become a people and a nation. But the true hero is never any one historical person but rather God.\textsuperscript{15} This is the story of a particular people’s (Israel’s) relationship with their God where time itself becomes sanctified. In this sense, says Leo Perdue, the scholar embarks on a quest that is first


\textsuperscript{15} Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 22.
theological and then historical. Thus, this impulse is not an historical journey to discover *what happened* but a discipline that must concern itself with what may be determined to be *true*, historically as well as theologically.\(^\text{16}\)

Under the heading of historical narrative, we locate two of our perspectives: the Bible as salvation narrative and the Bible as epic literature. Each of these sees biblical historical narratives which make claims regarding God’s role in providing for God’s people. History itself is salvific in these perspectives; any other non-theological explanation has little bearing. There exists a historical nucleus around which is built the story of God’s interactions of behalf of God’s people. We will look at these perspectives, keeping in mind how they impact our four stories.

### Bible as Salvation History

Gerhard Von Rad is representative of the school known as *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history), the story of God’s redemptive activities in history as portrayed in the Bible. This school reads the Bible in light of its religious traditions and finds that all of time, from prehistory in Genesis to the exile and beyond, is the story of God’s saving actions in the life of ancient Israel:

> The real actors in the drama are neither nations nor kings nor celebrated heroes. Yet the whole course of events is pursued with breath-taking interest, and the writer is himself deeply involved in the narrative, precisely because this is the sphere of divine activity.\(^\text{17}\)

For Von Rad, the Bible represents Israel’s notion of itself as a people under God’s divine providence. God’s covenant with Abraham, fulfilled through his son Isaac and Isaac’s son, Jacob, is the realization of land, fertility and greatness (Genesis 12-50). The Israelites sing God’s praises in Exodus 15:1-18 for bringing them, his special people, out of Egypt as they embark on their wilderness experience: “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode” (Ex.15:13). Reading this material from a salvation history perspective results in a narrative in service to Israel’s notion of itself as a people set apart:


\(^{17}\) Von Rad refers to a Hexateuch, with the addition of Joshua to the Pentateuchal material, as the completion of the covenantal promises; *Hexateuch*, 171.
And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I [am] the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I did swear to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage: I [am] the LORD. (Ex.6:7-8).

As Joseph Blenkinsopp notes, viewing these texts as salvation history means that one reads the varied stories in the Hebrew Bible under a unifying rubric which understands that this is “Israel’s view of its origins, its place in the world and its destiny.”

Thus, Lot’s daughters’ incest is viewed as justification for God’s (and Israel’s) anger against Moab and Ammon, the children of bastardy. Tamar’s and Ruth’s unexpected pregnancies become further evidence of God’s hand upon Israel since without their sons, there can be no David or Solomon. Even Bathsheba’s difficult beginnings with David are recast as an example of God’s redemption of seemingly unredeemable actions—the child of adultery dies but Bathsheba’s subsequent pregnancy results in the builder of the Temple, Solomon. In all of these, deep theological truths are imparted via human actions and foibles. Rather than focusing on the relative moral weakness of human beings, we find God’s mercy on behalf of Israel which colors her view of herself and her history.

While the historical material contained in the Hebrew Bible can have tremendous value for its emblematic sense of Israel’s salvation history, it cannot be called history in the modern scientific or analytical sense of the word. Furthermore, non-theological explanations fall outside salvation history’s purview since they fail to consider—or outright deny—divine destiny. Reading the Bible this way allows one to group unrelated (and perhaps antithetical) stories together in order to make the argument for God’s saving hand upon all that the Israelites do, have done and will do.

Bible as Epic Narrative

The Bible as epic narrative also tells the story of Israel’s national destiny but focuses on how well God’s people fulfill God’s covenant. Where salvation history looked at all of biblical history as the story of God’s saving care for his people, the epic narrative perspective frames history as the story of God’s people and how they satisfy God’s commandments.

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18 Blenkinsopp, 5.
19 Just as an aside, an example of a contradictory story regarding the Levitical injunction against marrying one’s sister-in-law and in light of the levirate marriages of Tamar (Lev.18:15-16).
Frank Moore Cross defines epic as part of a culture’s oral past. What marks epic literature from history proper, says Cross, is that epic literature presents concrete memories of the past that give the appearance of history. Israel’s epic literature recounts events in its heroic past that give expression to its understanding of itself as people of God:

... I believe it is permissible to define epic as the traditional narrative cycle of an age conceived as normative, the events of which give meaning and self-understanding to a people or nation...The Hebrew epic recounted crucial events of developing nationhood and gave classical expression to Yahwistic religion [emphasis in the original].

Pentateuch

As one aspect of looking at the Bible as an epic story, E.A. Speiser suggests that the Yahwist (J) writer shows greater concern for people-centered stories than society for momentous events. This directs the epic story of human history around the person of Abraham. His story of obedience to God’s commands models an ideal human history:

The [Genesis] story commences with one individual, and extends gradually to his family, then to a people, and later still to a nation. Yet it is not to be the tale of an individual or a family or a people as such. Rather, it is to be the story of a society in quest of an ideal. Abraham’s call, in short, marks the very beginning of the biblical process.

For Speiser, biblical history is not necessarily a national history but the narrative

... embodiment of an ideal, that is, a way of life. A history of that kind transcends national boundaries and may conceivably be retraced to the beginning of the world.

Barry Bandstra echoes Speiser’s notion of biblical individuals representing the epic quest of Israel but places greater emphasis on the theological elements in Israel’s epic narratives. For Bandstra, the Pentateuchal material represents a theological model where the people of God move within the promise but have not yet found fulfillment. In the Torah, we find a peripatetic people yearning for home. Joshua, along with

20 Cross, 24.
21 Ibid., 27-28.
22 Speiser, 87.
23 Ibid., lvii.
the subsequent historical narratives, represents the fulfillment of the divine promise. This epic story, with its intentional break between Deuteronomy and Joshua, speaks to an exiled community:

By not including the conquest recorded in Joshua [in the Pentateuch], the hope of the people resonated with that of their forebears. Like their ancestors, they too would gain possession of the land ... someday. The structure of the Pentateuch affirms that the exilic community is essentially a community of hope.  

**Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings**

Reading the Former Prophets from an epic narrative perspective focuses on the kings, prophets and leaders. The designation of epic narrative means that the biblical author/editor judges the stories of kings and leaders on how faithfully they followed God and the covenant. Viewing later Israelite history in this way, a king is now judged according to his fidelity to God’s call. Kings and nations are measured by a criterion not necessarily established or recognized in their own time but evaluated by a later narrative authority that theologically directs our reading of history.  

This emphasis on the faithfulness of rulers relates to Israel’s national theological destiny. Solomon is the high point of Israelite history which exemplifies God’s commitment to the Davidic covenant (“But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took [it] from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you: your throne shall be established for ever,” 2 Sam 7:15-16; also repeated in 1 Chr. 3:5). Like salvation history, epic narrative in the Former Prophets reads history theologically. In particular, many of the kings who come after David are weighed against the phrase, “the acts which he did, [are] they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? “ but all wicked kings are dismissed with the phrase, “but he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him.” A king’s efficacy depends upon his ritual obedience; his legacy is his faith. According to this perspective, says Bandstra, “Israel prospered or suffered in relation to how obedient or disobedient they were to the covenant.”

This designation of epic narrative includes the perspective of the Deuteronomistic Historian, a school of compilers thought to have

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25 Von Rad, 206.
26 Bandstra, 181.
flourished under the kingship of Josiah (late 6th century BCE). These scholars gathered legends and earlier historical accounts in order to frame Israel’s story from Moses to the exile, based on Deuteronomy’s law codes, as one of devotion to God, hatred of foreign religious practices and a concern for the widow, orphan and stranger.  

As one example, the Northern Kingdom king Omri was known to be a powerful leader who ruled for Israel for more than 10 years. Ancient non-biblical documents attest to his military exploits as well as his success in negotiating foreign alliances (especially the marriage of his son Ahab to the Phoenician princess, Jezebel, thereby dynastically solidifying Israel’s relationship with Tyre [cf. 1 Kings 16]). One would think then that the peace and prosperity offered by Omri would be accounted a good thing in the Bible. Yet, in terms of his dynastic legacy, Omri, his son Ahab and his entire dynastic house is judged an abysmal failure. Omri and Ahab negotiated treaties with “foreign” (polytheistic) nations; they allowed pagan religious practices, including the cult of Baal, during their reigns; they failed to support the cult of Yahweh exclusively, calling down trouble upon God’s people (“in his sin he made Israel to sin,” 1 Kings 16.26) Thus, while modern political history tends to consider Omri a capable leader, the Bible dismisses his reign as a disaster. He failed to keep God’s precepts and for this, nothing else matters. His rule and those that follow him are wicked in the eyes of God, the final arbiter of the success or failure of a royal dynasty.

In another vein, folklorist Yair Zakovitch argues that biblical epic forms were taken and reworked in order to counteract polytheistic ancient Near Eastern literature and thus, used the same epic form to argue against foreign myths. This conscious reshaping of pagan narratives for

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monotheistic ends bolsters the claims of the Bible as an epic historical narrative but suggests that it is something far more derivative. Viewing the biblical stories from the perspective of the epic narrative school posits that the biblical compilers and redactors worked to demythologize pagan stories in crafting a narrative history. They did this by highlighting faith over feats (monarchical or heroic) and redrafting Israelite history as the special story of Israel’s faithfulness to God. In this, the Hebrew Bible utilizes epic forms in order to tell the extraordinary story of this people, which necessarily measures success or failure on their faithfulness rather than military or economic or political success. Thus, epic historiography represents Israel’s best efforts to write its own comprehensive saga, one that is far more theological and subjective.

Assuming the presence of epic forms in the Hebrew Bible implies a later hand molding the message so that an epic perspective is assured. For example, Zakovitch claims that the Samson story is a covert polemic against the original tradition concerning the Israelite hero: the Samson story in the Book of Judges was created in order to turn Samson, a mythological/solar hero, into a good Jewish boy whose strength is not derived from his own divine origin but from God and according to his will.  

Thinking about how our four stories fit into the epic narrative perspective helps focus our attention more concretely upon the women in the biblical text. The epic’s theological message is also not necessarily limited to one sex. In fact, women’s stories show some of the characterizations that Cross says marks this as oral literature. Women’s narratives in Genesis through Kings deal with the quotidian and normative lives of every day women. They do what they normally do just as the men do. To echo Bandstra’s wandering motif, the women roam along with the men: roaming in the wilderness and awaiting fulfillment is not limited to the men in the community. But we also observe that none of our four biblical women enjoy direct conversation with God. Moreover, the constraints of the covenant are not imposed upon Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth or Bathsheba (or, for that matter, any biblical women). However, salvation for the community comes through women since continued

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31 Zakovitch contrasts Samson with Hercules from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book IX; Ibid., 22.
32 We will see more in-depth discussions of this when we get to chapters 4 and 5, specifically the comparisons from Fisch, Sasson and Menn on Ruth, Tamar and Lot’s daughters and Alter and his identification of motifs like the annunciation motif, wife-sister stories, and the woman at the well.
fertility is one of the marks of the covenant. But I find that female
initiative, which is a signature mark of many female stories, is rendered
salvific:

In the near absence of God and angels…[Biblical women] are forced to act
on their own to achieve their goals… [S]alvation is achieved not through
divine initiative but human (female) enterprise.33

God works through human vessels like women. And, God works in
very gender-specific ways since pregnancy and birth can only be
accomplished by women. In this, they serve the larger aims of epic
literature where the divine interacts with the human in a normative
Israelite past to meet and fulfill the theological claims of the community.34

**Bible as Dynastic History**

It is also possible to read the material from Genesis through Kings with an
eye to dynastic information. This approach is apologetic in nature,
indicating a heavy editorial hand that intends to redirect how the story of
Israel’s kings is read and understood. Using the laws of Deuteronomy as a
guide, kings specifically are judged according to their ability to meet their
cultic obligations. Since the Davidic narratives appear in Samuel and
Kings, this perspective applies most directly to those books. However, we
will see that it pertains as well to how we read material in Genesis,
specifically the stories of his ancestor, Judah, and those that follow from
him.

**Succession Narrative**

Within the dynastic history perspective, we can narrow our focus to the
material from 2 Samuel through 1 Kings and identify this material as a
succession narrative (SN). Recognizing narratives this way means that the
stories that present the rise of the House of David and the Davidic
covenant serve as justifications for the Davidic kingship. This
interpretation prioritizes God’s hand on the House of David within the
larger story of Israel’s salvation history. Such a perspective reads the
historical narratives of David, Solomon and subsequent kings as literary
productions under the guise of history intended to justify Judah’s and

33 Linda Day, “Power, Otherness and Gender in the Biblical Short Stories,”
34 Cross, 25.
specifically David’s dynastic claims. The conclusions also serve as something of a cautionary tale. Within the Succession Narrative, David and David’s legacy through his son Solomon do not escape scrutiny for their triumphs as well as their considerable failures. Says Frank Frick, examining Samuel-Kings for the data regarding the upstart David and his son, Solomon, one is presented “a model to be avoided for those who would reform or reestablish the Davidic state.”

R.N. Whybray goes so far as to label these stories as political propaganda. He postulates that this history was composed during the court of Solomon as a signifier of Solomon’s dynastic destiny, with a mixture of eyewitness testimony and later fictive elements. He finds that public events are recorded in an objective fashion but tales dealing with clandestine meetings, character descriptions and intimate encounters are more imaginative in nature. Therefore, says Whybray, the SN should be considered an historical novel, or a novel with historical overtones based on snippets of eyewitness accounts. And its aims are political: this is propaganda whose intention is to justify and defend Solomon’s, the tenth son’s, claim to David’s throne.

**Court History**

A corollary to reading Samuel-Kings as a dynastic history comes from David Gunn. Like Whybray, Gunn identifies the Samuel-Kings material as justifying the dynastic House of Judah. But Gunn argues that this narrative’s focus is David, not Solomon. Gunn expands the sense of this dynastic narrative and views it as a Court History, a self-contained unit added later to the larger monarchical histories. Reading this as a court history (rather than a succession narrative) means that the focus is on presenting the public as well as the private life of David. Gunn claims that the Court History model illustrates the tensions between David’s family obligations, which he meets poorly, and his public kingship, which he fulfills quite successfully until his personal issues, such as his son’s civil

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35 Frick, 306.
uprising and his relationship with Bathsheba, overwhelm his public persona.  

This is not political propaganda, says Gunn, but something closer to oral literature. Identifying traditional folkloric motifs within the narrative, Gunn concludes, “how it might then relate to historical ‘fact’ is a quite separate issue ...” For Gunn, the sort of narrative realism found in the Court History should not be confused with historical writing since its task is to convey a narrative tying Israel’s fortunes and a Davidic monarchy together. Whybray might call this a historical novel; Gunn would simply say it is a novel, without the historical qualifier. Ultimately, it is the story of David’s maturation and Israel’s development as a new monarchy, which is one and the same tale.

This view of Samuel-Kings as a reworked monarchical narrative dovetails closely to our discussion of women. Several of the stories of women in the Hebrew Bible touch directly on the later stories of the line of Judah in general or the Davidic monarchy in particular. Privileging the line of David provides a justification for the story of Ruth, which reformulates foreigners (and specifically Moabites, who appear in David’s ancestral background) as faithful followers of God. Furthermore, Tamar’s pregnancy in Genesis 38 is reconceptualized as part of God’s redemptive hand on the House of Judah. Without Tamar’s craftiness, there is no Perez, and without Perez, there is no David. Even Lot’s daughters, whose heinous incest results in nations built on bastardy, are redeemed. If we see them as part of David’s dynastic history, then we understand that they are a necessary element to bring us to David and Solomon. Therefore, such horrific sexuality, while not condoned, serves the purposes of dynastic history: they are essential cogs in a larger, dynastic wheel. And Bathsheba, a woman in David’s immediate orbit, reflects David back for us. In her questionable morality, she, as well as many other women in David’s life, signify the same slippery integrity that we locate in David himself.

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38 Ibid., 220, 229.
40 Frick, 311.
41 Menn, 99-105.
Literary approaches to the Bible represent the farthest remove from objective history. Literary theories are fairly critical of historical impulses imposed upon the text. Although the Bible might impart historical information, such information is unreliable and fails to inform our understandings of the text as a work of literature. This approach deemphasizes how a text came to be and displays a singular emphasis on isolating the text in its final unified form. Historical context provides points of interest in their ability to illuminate the meaning of words. Primarily, it is the relationship between the reader and the text where the act of interpretation most fully occurs.

Tremper Longman puts it a bit more bluntly:

The Bible as literature or history is a false dichotomy. It is both and much more … [Yet] the Bible is more like literature than nonliterature… To cast truth in the form of a story leads the hearer or reader to pay closer attention to it, to be shocked to reconsider what otherwise might easily become a truism.42

Literary arguments do not seek to defend biblical narratives as a factual record. Literary approaches to the Bible seek to isolate the text as text and stay within that analytical frame to make its claims. For instance, one compares biblical texts for their formal or structural similarities rather than their historical dependence upon one another. Because of the multivalent nature of the Bible, with many voices and disparate forms of writing, it offers a variety of theological perspectives which literary theory is able to help uncover. Historical provenance holds less authority except as it helps to structure the analysis. However, as we have seen, the Bible incorporates history into its worldview. But the aim is not necessarily to impart a truthful accounting of verifiable, scientific fact. The overriding emphasis is on creating a narrative of what James Wertsch calls a usable past.43

Sumerologist Tikvah Frymer-Kensky compares early Israelite narratives from Genesis with material in other ancient Near Eastern contexts. She recognizes that the biblical narratives are doing neither history nor literature as we might understand them. Taking a comparative

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literary approach, Frymer-Kensky argues for the innovation in ancient Israelite narratives, especially in its view of women. Polytheistic goddess myths of other ancient cultures ghettoize women, she claims, creating separate and unequal spheres where female deities were relegated to domestic concerns of the household and fertility. She suggests that Israel’s monotheistic narratives offer a surprisingly egalitarian view to the ancient world where gender is included under the heading humanity. Frymer-Kensky finds that Israel’s narratives are examples of the transformation of myth where monotheism is the theological point of it all:

This view of the essential sameness of men and women is most appropriate to monotheism. There are no goddesses to represent ‘womanhood’ or a female principle in the cosmos; there is no conscious sense that there even exists a ‘feminine.’

The Bible is essentially a theological text where information about God informs notions of humanity and the world in general. Women now, rather than being viewed as inferior, are simply one (equal) version of this thing called human beings. Therefore, she finds arguments about gender disparity in the Bible to be a misreading of the narrative since it is the story of a single God where humanity (not men, not women) reflect and represent God’s designs. The difference between human beings is one of degrees—degrees of genitalia rather than character—since both are subsumed under the designation “human.” Israel has a God who lacks a female consort, fertility rights, even an embodied existence. We can in no way approach or approximate this God. Therefore, what the biblical narrative reproduces is a subtle literary narrative that reflects the fundamental similitude of humanity as a means to symbolically represent monotheism, and, by extension, God.

**History through Language**

Another literary perspective is offered by Robert Alter. Regarding biblical historiography, Alter writes:

…[F]or biblical narrative, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Chronicles, is an account of how divine word—and in more ambiguous ways, often human word as well—becomes historical fact. The constantly reiterated pattern, then, of command or prophecy closely followed by its

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45 Ibid., 118.
verbatim fulfillment confirms an underlying view of historical causality, translates into a central narrative device the unswerving authority of a monotheistic God manifesting Himself in language.\(^{46}\)

For Alter, the Bible touches on quotidian events and persons where momentous actions are realized. But the Bible is not descriptive, as one would expect of objective history. Like others before him, Alter argues for the Bible’s roots in oral literature and folklore. However, where folklorists might highlight the uses of various folkloric conventions like duplications and poetic meter, he finds that biblical narrative imaginatively refashions standard conventions for its own theological or historical purposes.\(^{47}\) The focus for Alter is on the Bible as a narrative instrument through which theology and history are communicated to God’s people:

Language in the biblical stories is never conceived as a transparent envelope for the narrated events, or as an aesthetic embellishment of them, but as an integral and dynamic component—an insistent dimension—of what is being narrated. With language God creates the world; through language He reveals His design in history to men. There is a supreme confidence in an ultimate coherence of meaning through language which informs the biblical vision.\(^{48}\)

Adele Berlin would agree that the biblical medium for communicating information is through narrative, not objective history: “Narrative is the predominant mode of expression in the Hebrew Bible.”\(^{49}\) For scholars like Alter and Berlin, modern literary approaches offer more fruitful avenues of discovery when it comes to the Bible. The historical fabric of the text, while interesting, cannot unlock the secrets of this theologically-informed narrative.\(^{50}\)

Berlin argues for the representational scope of biblical literature. “Abraham in Genesis is not a real person any more than a painting of an apple is a real fruit … It is just that we should not confuse a historical individual with his narrative representation.”\(^{51}\) What is real are the surface patterns and meanings of passages. It is the text that matters; whatever


\(^{50}\) The implication of this view is that there can be no reliable historical evidence even to be had in the Bible since the history that it purports to chronicle is itself a literary, subjective fiction.

history has to offer is secondary to the text as the site of its own meaning production:

Biblicists have flaunted evidence that ‘proves’ the Bible was, for example, orally composed, or historical, or legendary, when all that has really been proved by this evidence is that the Bible contains narrative.\(^{52}\)

These literary theories will prove essential when we look at biblical women in general and our four stories in particular. We will critique many of these in greater depth in the next two chapters. But for the moment, we can touch on a few of them, for illustrative purposes. Literary theory helps us to see motifs like the annunciation stories of Sarah and Rebekah, or with respect to Bathsheba, the motif of the woman who brings death. The literary motif of the woman at the well alerts readers to an impending marriage proposal, such as we see in the stories of Rebekah, Rachel and Zipporah. Close study of the word \textit{go’el} (redeemer) in Ruth’s story helps scholars locate who in fact is the true redeemer in Ruth’s story – some say Boaz, her husband, some say Obed, her son and grandfather of David. These, and many other proposals will form the basis of the next two chapters where we narrow our focus to biblical women.

\section*{Conclusions}

This short introduction to historical and literary theories to the Bible is by no means exhaustive. My intent is to frame our subsequent study by introducing a few of the ways in which modern scholars conceptualize the historiographical focus and purpose of biblical narrative. Several points emerge from this selective survey that I wish to highlight here:

First, it seems clear that few if any of the above scholars would recognize the Bible as a work of history in the modern sense. Clearly the writers, compilers and later redactors of this material first and foremost intended to craft a work with an exacting purpose. The content of that purpose—whether historical, theological, apologetic or literary—remains an active source of debate. And, to engage Longman, to say that one is more significant than the other is a false opposition since the Bible presents important theological, dynastic, epic, literary as well as historical information, sometimes all at the same time. The Bible may attempt to convey that information via narrative conventions or under the guise of history. But we must accept the fact that biblical narratives are theologically-informed with significant historical and narrative gaps and

\[^{52}\text{Ibid., 15.}\]
Historiography in the Hebrew Bible

ambiguities. Its richness lies in its varied compilation of narrative and historical artistry. When we plumb the depths of the biblical narratives for their God information as well as their data about the beliefs of ancient Israel, we are often handsomely rewarded. To read the Bible for objective, analytical history is not the focus of this work nor, I would argue, is that the biblical authors’ and editors’ intent.

Second, few would agree that these narratives represent eyewitness accounts of the events. This is neither objective history nor is it ethnography—but neither is it exactly literature in the vein of Milton and Dostoyevsky. What the biblical narratives offer is a generalized historical consciousness in literary form, enlightened by a theological impulse of the sort suggested by Funkenstein. Thus, the biblical compilers/redactors—whose motives we can never know for certain—brought this material together to serve larger civic and/or spiritual aims. I agree with those who argue that the Bible does indeed intend to impart historical information. That that information is less than reliable as objective fact or often fails to meet the most basic level of verifiable fact does not lessen its import.

The writers and compilers judiciously present their material in order to situate them within a larger theological message. But what makes these stories compelling is the personal aspects. As Alter asserts,

[T]he implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God’s purposes are always entrammeled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing realization. To scrutinize biblical personages as fictional characters is to see them more sharply as multifaceted, contradictory aspects of their human individuality, which is

53 One intriguing theory on this is Harold Bloom’s The Book of J (1990), where he discusses the Documentary Hypothesis and specifically, the role of the ancient Yahwist (J) writer, whom he conceptualizes as a woman of great literary artistry (first hinted at in Hector and Nora Chadwick’s The Growth of Literature [“Early Hebrew Literature,” Vol. 2, 1936]). Bloom suggests that she is a learned woman attached to the Davidic court after the reigns of David and Solomon as a chronicler of court life and intrigues, crafting a work of literary entertainment. Given Bloom’s more popular rather than scholarly approach, his J-as-eyewitness theory lacks the sort of academic architecture that put him in conversation with these other scholars. For example, he opines, “We, whoever we are, are more naive, less sophisticated, less intelligent than J or Shakespeare,”[p. 234] a charge which, while intriguing, needs greater context than is available here to be of use in thinking about the historiography of the Bible.
the biblical God’s chosen medium for His experiment with Israel and history.54

The biblical stories do include women as well as men. Our next effort is to narrow our focus to women in these biblical narratives. We will find that women in the Hebrew Bible fit the historical and literary perspectives that we have outlined above. Women can be signifiers of Israel’s salvation history. Annunciation narratives speak to the special status of women in fulfilling God’s plan for Israel as a people of destiny. Women are part of the great epic story of Israel. They, too, in their quotidian aspects, are mothers of righteousness. As part of the Succession Narrative, women play a role in helping the House of David achieve its preeminence and point the way to David, one beloved of God. And literary theories identify the overwhelming patriarchy of the text and work to liberate women from the implied misogyny both within the text and by later interpreters that reproduce those entrenched power structures. Biblical women fit well into these larger interpretive frames. However, it remains to be seen how successfully these varied strategies impart information about the women themselves. For our purposes, Genesis-Kings presents narratives replete with historical as well as literary elements which add to the texture and richness of the stories. From the patriarchal narratives of Genesis down to the monarchical accounts of 1 and 2 Kings, the stories selectively demonstrate the lives of people who walk in a special relationship with their God. The hero of these stories is the God of Israel. This added theological dimension impacts our interpretive approach. The continuing tension between the Bible’s own claims about God and divine intervention in light of our four non-theological stories provides the nexus for our continuing discussion.

At heart, the Bible is a theological text that offers a robust picture of God’s relationship with His people. However, we will come to see that that sort of overt God information is lacking from our four narratives. We can broadly infer the hand of God upon women’s efforts but if we read what is actually on the page, we are hard-pressed to presume that our four stories have anything at all to do with God or the pattern of individual religious practices for women in Israel. Whatever relationship the women in these narratives have with God, it is not communicated through their stories. This then raises some important questions about their place in the text as we journey further. It furthermore impels us to ask a different set of questions than the historical-critical approach and thus, places this work

54 Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 12.
more squarely within those literary impulses which demands something else from these stories.
CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL WOMEN: LOT’S DAUGHTER, TAMAR, RUTH AND BATHSHEBA

In our previous chapter, we discussed several approaches to the Bible and how women exemplify the struggle of Israel to survive, or how their stories highlight God’s saving actions on Israel’s behalf. However, these critical approaches rarely examine what makes the female characters so exemplary besides simply acting like men. In most instances, the word "heroine" is applied in a literary or symbolic fashion, often simply denoting the female lead character in a story. A female character’s valor derives less from anything that she does and more from her place as the main personality in her narrative. Thus, her exemplary status is tied to notions of Israel, either institutionally or theologically.¹

Monopolization and Reading Together

The “monopolization of biblical meaning” is a term used by Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn in describing a biblical reading where one infers an omniscient narrator who has a clearly evident ideological emphasis. Reading with this sort of prism, Fewell and Gunn argue, forces ensuing conclusions into established, ideological meanings: “That every resolution of [biblical] ambiguity, for example, should result in the same ideological conclusion is inherently improbable.”² In reducing the Bible to an ideological narrative, the authors suggest that scholars are no better than

¹ For examples of this, see Esther Fuchs, “Status and Role of Female Heroines,” 149-160; Rendsburg, 16-23ff; Exum, Fragmented Women; Athalya Brenner, “Female Social Behavior: Two Descriptive Patterns Within the ‘Birth of the Hero’ Paradigm,” Vetus Testamentum 36 (1986): 257-273.

ultra-fundamentalist readers who cannot suffer alternative readings even in the face of an obviously complex and ambiguous biblical narrator.3

Identifying the female heroic within the Bible provides one avenue of release from that “monopolization of meaning.” When we look for new links among these four stories, we discover alternative readings to entrenched ideological interpretations. This alternate approach has its ideological anchor in feminist perspectives on the heroic and offers the best chance for allowing the stories’ meanings to emerge without reproducing the Bible’s larger political or institutional concerns. As Fewell and Gunn argue, new readings do not claim to represent the one right reading; rather, new interpretations offer a competent, viable and underappreciated alternative response to the text.4

Several recent biblical scholars attempted to isolate and define female categories of action such as sexual agency. Some examples are Alice Ogden Bellis' Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Bible (2007), Susan Ackerman's Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen (1998) and Phyllis Bird's analysis of biblical harlotry.5 These works organize female narratives based on general motifs, developing a deeper literary-critical appreciation of the Bible's diverse female characters. For instance, Esther Fuchs argues that biblical mothers hold the most valorous position for women in the Bible. Says Fuchs, “There is a growing effort to create a causal link between [mothers'] procreative ability and their moral status …”6 Tikva Frymer-Kensky's Reading the Women of the Bible (2002) includes a chapter entitled, "Victors," where she claims that Deborah, Yael, David's Shunamite and Rahab all serve as substantial examples of this valiant identification.7 And there is Lillian Klein’s triumphalist Deborah to Esther (2003), which lionizes certain women as boundary transgressors and audacious role models.8 These and many others look especially to Ruth, Esther, Sarah, Rebekah, Deborah and even

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
6 Esther Fuchs, Sexual Politics, 31.
8 Lillian R. Klein, From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 8; 33.
apocryphal Judith as ideals of female action. Each acts independently and not necessarily through maternity alone.

In many instances, we enjoy these stories because we find that women can do what men do and achieve God’s ends or fulfill covenantal promises of land and greatness as well as fertility. But female narratives can also be exemplary simply for the things that female characters accomplish without reference to these larger theological claims. In these stories, God is tangentially present; the women are part of a larger Israelite community, but the role of religion in their stories is small at best. God never speaks to the women (either directly or through a divine agent) and they do not pray directly to God in the context of their stories. The male redactors could have removed these stories at some point or embellished upon God’s larger presence in their successes. But for whatever reason, they chose not to. These female narratives maintain a narrative presence in the Bible and that alone provides sufficient justification for considering the ways in which biblical women are exemplary.

In this chapter I will argue that the stories of Lot's daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba present evocative portrayals of feminine self-interest which fuels their ingenuity. I will first examine Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth and then address the ways in which Bathsheba finds common cause with these three.

**Standard Approaches**

What does it mean to argue that these four narratives are “evocative portrayals of feminine self-interest which fuels their ingenuity?” What is

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10 We see such a process particularly in the additions to the book of Esther in the Septuagint where later editors, uncomfortable that the Masoretic Text lacks any mention of God, intentionally adds passages with more profound religious language; see Carey A. Moore, Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions, AB 44 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 158-159 as well as Moore, “On the Origins of the LXX Additions to the Book of Esther,” Journal of Biblical Literature 92 (1973): 382-393.
evocative about their ingenuity and how does that differ from standard interpretations of these stories?

Feminist scholar Cheryl Exum claims that the traditional approach to female narratives organizes them in motif-driven ways that reflects "established notions of literary unity." Exum challenges biblical interpreters to expand upon this material by stepping outside the assumed ideology of the text in order to develop a plurality of interpretations. For example, Exum views the Bible's androcentrism in female narratives as a means to control female sexuality. I agree that there is an assumed ideology and that established interpretations often reiterate that. For example, casting women as representatives of Israel's underdog status is a powerful symbolic trope that includes women in the larger narrative of Israel's past. But such a reading does not necessarily allow for women's narratives to be read as stories of women; they become valued for what they tell us about Israel or Israel's larger ideological concerns. However, the ideology reflected in the Bible is not just a fear of female sexuality (as Exum argues) but a conscious effort by the biblical writers and editors to redeploy female enterprise for the community's dynastic or epic purposes. I see this most acutely exemplified in the ways in which traditional interpreters have understood our four stories.

When we read our four stories together, we can see that these women act in individual, non-coordinated ways to achieve their own ends without overt reference to the greater community, the religious culture or God. As I have noted previously, God’s providence is often merely implied rather than explicitly addressed. Without the biblical context, one could certainly read these stories independently of the larger sacred text. At heart, these are neither theological stories nor are they necessarily pedagogical tales on the merits of the eshet chayil, "the good woman." Rather, these four stories portray an evocative female resourcefulness where sexual politics provides the climax to their narratives and a way of understanding their actions without reference to the greater dynastic and/or institutional aims of the text. Doniger defines this as a sexual trickery as a authority exchange "that contests the intimate relationship between sex and gender, power and identity." In the biblical context, the bedtrick represents the evocative moment for our female characters.

While some might emphasize the sex vs. power differential, I want to

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11 Exum, 12.
12 Ibid., 11.
13 “A good wife (alternatively, “a worthy woman”) who can find? She is far more precious than jewels,” (Prov. 31.10).
14 Doniger, 1-4.
elaborate on another aspect of Doniger’s definition. I see the bedtrick as a gender-identity dynamic. In the biblical stories, sexual trickery is employed not as a sex-for-power ploy but rather as a graphic expression of an essentially gendered (female) metamyth. This is one of the defining moments that identifies these narratives as female stories. In the Bible, we find that the bedtrick is something that only women utilize. However, when it is used, we do not find that the women are attempting to overthrow more politically powerful men or seducing men in order to take over leadership of the clan, the tribe or the kingdom. In the biblical context, it becomes a mark of the female narrative, something that we associate only with female stories in the Bible. The bedtrick is one of the ways to categorize a narrative as specifically gendered; just the presence of a woman in a story is not enough to mark it as a gendered narrative.

Furthermore, these narratives do not necessarily highlight women developing strategies for coordinated communal acts of resistance. Rather, I find in each character a focus on obtaining a coveted resource to and for themselves. In the Bible, the bedtrick represents a power struggle fueled by individual female initiative and ambition rather than maternal desire or civic duty. Their acts represent the weapons of the relatively powerless—trickery, deception and individual self-help. In this, the bedtrick is a survival strategy that mitigates the boundaries of the prevailing patriarchal culture. In the biblical context, the bedtrick presents a complex web of associated actions and meanings that go far in helping us to unpack the gendered character of a narrative. This dynamic of initiative, ambition and independent action challenges the image of biblical women in an evocative fashion that adds to the plurality of meanings associated with these stories.

In this chapter, I present some of the standard interpretations that establish the literary unity of these stories. In this, we will see that standard approaches to Tamar and Ruth are most often grouped together under levirate concerns, with Lot’s daughters also joining the unit when the focus is on the line of Judah or the House of David. Bathsheba will come into the discussion when presenting the women in David’s immediate circle; she is also subsumed under the biblical motif of foreign wives who bring death. Previous approaches—traditional as well as feminist—typically do not consider the bedtrick vital to reading the gendered actions in these stories. My argument does not depend upon reading these four stories as part of established related cycles in the Davidic corpus or as levirate texts. I do not deny the importance of these

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15 Scott, xv-xviii, 302.
categories; I am simply using evidence from the stories themselves in order to argue for another approach. I submit that the identification of the bedtrick is what defines these stories as gendered texts.

Lot’s Daughter

Lot and his family appear in Genesis 19. Living in the land of Sodom, Lot meets two strangers (angels) at the city gate. Impressing upon the strangers the importance of taking cover before nightfall, Lot convinces them to spend the evening with his family. The motifs of nighttime and darkness foreshadow ominous and sinister events. Marauding Sodomite men eventually assault Lot's house, demanding that he turn the strangers over to them, "that we might know (yada) them" (19.5). In a stunning moment, Lot says, "Behold now, I have two daughters who have not yet known a man; let me, I pray you, bring them out to you, and you can do to them as [is] good in your eyes: only to these men do nothing; for they came under the protection of my roof" (Genesis 19.8).

Belligerent demands such as handing over one's visitors imply that this scene records a power challenge, not a sexual one. These Sodomite men mean to do real physical harm to these strangers. Raping Lot's daughters will not satisfy such bloodlust. The men demand male victims in order to physically dominate and humiliate them. As Anne Michele Tapp argues, the issue of male rape in this context "is not merely one of sex, it is more one of violence … Sex is the vehicle through which violence and hatred are expressed…".

The threshold of Lot's house serves as the locus of action, his doorway providing the only barrier between safety and violation. Lot is more than willing to sacrifice the sanctity of his household and his children for some presumed notion of hospitality among men who do not even respect him (they scoff, "This fellow came here as an alien and he would play the judge," 19.9). As Sharon Jeansonne notes, "Lot's callous offer is ostensibly motivated by his desire to protect his guests; however, it is

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17 Tapp, 162.
18Ibid.
obvious that Lot is in no position to offer protection to them." It will take divine intervention to defend Lot's wife and daughters.

The crowd turns ugly, mocking him, promising Lot worse treatment than the strangers. David Penchansky remarks that Lot's attempts at camaraderie and hospitality fall flat—even the angels reject his offer of "ritualistic male bonding, instead opting for more humanistic and individual valuation. They intervene and preserve the lives of the women." Lot's excessive show of graciousness and attempted bonhomie with neighbors who ridicule him shows his misplaced aspiration to gain the sympathies of the aggressive Sodomites. Penchansky further claims that ancient Near East culture situates male friendship in a strategically central role. Women, by contrast, are tangential. Their purpose is to serve as a manifestation of one's honor status since, as Penchansky claims, "they are objects of barter, [a] means by which the male members of society can remain secure and proud." In Lot's offer of his daughters, we find him seeking that public honor.

The strangers/angels retrieve Lot and strike the crowd blind—an interesting play on Lot's name, which roughly translates as "veil" or "covering," reflecting his own impaired vision. Lot and his family are told to leave Sodom immediately; the angels have come to destroy the city. Lot warns his two other unnamed daughters and sons-in-law; the sons-in-law only laugh at him, finding in Lot a source of derision. They stand in closer proximity to the ridiculing men of Sodom than to Lot and his family.

His sons-in-law refuse to leave so Lot takes his wife and two remaining (and still unnamed) daughters and flee. His wife, perhaps longing for the left-behind daughters, looks back against the angels' orders, and is transformed into a pillar of salt. It is interesting that she alone turns back "to see," forever frozen in that backward glance, while Lot, the veiled one, never really does see what is going on.

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20 Penchansky, 82.
21 Anthropologist Sherry Ortner echoes these sentiments in arguing that a woman’s purity (often an idealized and generally unrealizable status) becomes a reflection of the state in highly stratified complex societies; see Ortner’s “The Virgin and the State,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 3 (Oct. 1978): 19-35.
22 Ibid., 81.
Lot and the daughters arrive at the cave in Zoar, a scene replete with further maternal and sexual symbolism.\(^{23}\) The daughters fear that all the men of the world have been destroyed, evidencing a similar lack of vision that permeates Lot’s narrative. They conspire to get Lot drunk and sleep with him, "that we may preserve the seed of our father" (19.32). As Randall Bailey slyly remarks, "Lot is so drunk both nights that he knows neither their lying down nor rising up (welo yada beshikhah ubequmah). But he does perform!"\(^{24}\) The resulting sons—Moab and Ammon—are both related to Israel and yet, both are counted among Israel's traditional enemies.

Some might argue that this incestuous scene forever predisposes these unnamed girls to antiheroic status. However, the ironic turn for Lot's daughters is not the act, but the motivation behind the incest. The daughters get themselves with child in a way that mirrors the selfish and shortsighted affections of their father: they mistakenly see destruction of the entire world and thus visit a sexual violation upon the father who offered them up to the same fate. "The mounting avalanche of disaster," to quote Robert Alter, finds the tables turned in paradoxical ways on Lot.\(^{25}\) Where once he might appallingly sacrifice the children, now the children take charge and sacrifice whatever small dignity Lot has left in order to vouchsafe their own ends. The possessions now possess Lot: the exploiter is now exploited. Put bluntly, the ravishment that Lot would have visited upon his daughters is now his fate.\(^{26}\)

**Lot’s Daughters: Interpretation**

The story of Lot's daughters prompts numerous explanations, with many situating Middle Eastern hospitality at its symbolic center. Brian Doyle follows Lot from his choice of Sodom to his daughters' incest, and charting Lot's personal disintegration, Doyle finds that the lack of family integrity and specifically paternal affection results in chaotic and

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\(^{23}\) Gunn notes that *me’arah* [cave] is used euphemistically for the female sexual organ; thus the cave becomes the site where the daughters come in contact with the maternal as well as create new life; David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: an Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980), 93-94.

\(^{24}\) Randall C. Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards," 129.


\(^{26}\) Jeansonne, 128.
downright deviant female agency.27 Sharon Jeansonne also identifies Lot's actions as the narrative focal point with his drunkenness serving as the moral center of the story.28 Elie Wiesel and Rebecca Goldstein prefer to emphasize the tragic figure of Lot's wife as a means to understand Lot and the singular issue of loss and destruction.29 Ultimately, for most scholars, it is Lot—and not his daughters—who provides the narrative and analytical focus. Social/cultural taboos like rape and incest are counted as a tragic consequence of Lot's inept fatherhood rather than moral deficiency on the part of the daughters.

Weston Fields is far more interested in the interplay of light and dark and the symbolism of night and day in the Lot narrative as keys to its dynamic interpretation.30 Lot's unsolicited offer of the daughters occurs under dark of night; the mob violence also commences after nightfall. And, in the darkness of the Zoar cave, a repugnant incest takes place after an evening of alcoholic overindulgence.

Warren Kliewer situates Lot's transgressions in closer relationship to archaic fire narratives and fertility rituals than to the biblical account of the house of Abraham. Kliewer dismisses modern views that argue for this as an explanation for the misbegotten conception of Moab and Ammon. Rather, says Kliewer, what modern readers should recognize in Lot and his daughters is a grotesque tragicomedy:

It is the world of the sad, painful, bitter, beautiful Jewish jokes: I've sometimes thought the story of Lot and his desperate daughters ought to be told in a Yiddish accent, ending with, "So after all that work what happened? Their kids were goyim."31

Kliewer's criticism targets historical-critical scholars like Randall Bailey who construe the sexual deviancy in the Lot narrative as a trope for disparaging Israel's foreign neighbors. The use of deviant sexuality, Bailey argues, either via innuendo or graphic detail, supplies the means of

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28 Jeansonne, 128-129.
30 Fields, 17-32.
discrediting and shaming Israel's neighbors, justifying Israel's hatred and oppression of the "other." In this analysis, Lot is spared the brunt of blame since Bailey locates bastardy in the daughters of Lot, not Lot himself. The illicit union is plotted and accomplished by "the children of the disobedient wife." Thus, Lot is exonerated.

For Robert Alter, these disobedient daughters provide the means for future dynastic accomplishment. Their reproductive agenda, misplaced as it might be, assures that there will be a House of David. Alter considers this a reflection of group survival instincts despite the monstrous nature of the act:

As the biblical imagination conceives it, neither national existence nor the physical act of propagation itself can be taken for granted. A society that rejects the moral bonds of civilization for the instant gratification of dark urges can be swept away in a moment; the elemental desire for survival in a seemingly desolate world may drive people to desperate means, to a kind of grim parody of the primeval command to be fruitful and multiply...

More explicitly, without Moab, Lot's grandson, we do not get Ruth. Without Ruth, there can be no David. Although a defense of incest is well nigh impossible, Lot's daughters do secure for Israel the possibility of King David. And in David we find an individual as morally ambiguous and sexually opportunistic as these two ancestresses. In point of fact, David's family line is replete with incestuous liaisons.

By the end of the narrative, Lot is at the mercy of his daughters. At this point, Lot truly ceases to be a parent and becomes instead the child, a docile follower of the intents and purposes of others. When his children act, Lot is powerless to stem the tide of their misbegotten intent. In similar ways, this mirrors the chaotic family dynamics, which we see in Jacob's and David's families.

These varied interpretations on Lot's story—tragic irony, grotesque comedy, a vehicle to denigrate "the Other," or a concern for preserving David's line—focus primarily on prerogatives apart from the women in the

32 Bailey, 124.
33 Ibid., 131.
35 Many point to the interactions of Judah and Tamar as incestuous; Menn, 103-105.
36 See the slaughter of Shechem by the Simeon and Levi after the rape of their sister Dinah (Genesis 34); Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar and Absalom's avenging fratricide and public rape of David's concubines (2 Sam. 13).
text (the daughters) themselves. When scholars privilege something other than the actions of the daughters, they get swept away by the greater narrative drama of Lot's disintegration. This interpretive move ignores the impact of the daughters’ actions—actions fueled by their desire to produce children (something that the men in the story cannot do)—and thus identifies those acts as profoundly gendered deeds. By *gendered*, I mean an action which is unique to a character’s gender and thus helps us, the readers, to better see them as distinctively (male or female) characters. In the context of the Bible, we find that sexual trickery is a gendered act attached almost exclusively to women. It will become a significant part of the discussion as I make the case for a female heroic in the Bible in subsequent chapters.

Therefore, we can read the bedtrick by Lot’s daughters as a profoundly gendered act. Unlike sons, biblical daughters do not strike out physically like Levi and Simeon or Absalom to avenge some offense, real or imagined, to their prestige. The women prepare for their battle in very particular ways. Lot’s daughters do that which only women can do—and, in this case, feel they *must* do: get themselves with child. While biblical sons seem to act out in physically violent and often destructive ways, the daughters work within the household. In this domestic act, I find a uniquely feminine response to their predicament, real or imagined. Through their bedtrick, they perpetuate the family—albeit in less than culturally ideal ways—rather than destroy it.\(^{37}\)

But at this point, I simply want to note that Lot’s daughters’ advantageous ravishing of Lot is a singular act which takes the focus off of Lot and onto the daughters. By reading this as a gendered text, we clearly see that these are women of survival and invention, as heinous and disturbing as their actions might be. And by highlighting this trickery as a gendered act, we are encouraged to try and understand it in the context of particular deeds that are unique to only a handful of women in the Bible. As we attempt to read these biblical women’s narratives as gendered texts without reference to masculine paradigms, we find that our appreciation for the initiative and nerve of the women grows. I therefore submit that reprehensible or shocking acts, such as the bedtrick by Lot’s daughters, are

\(^{37}\) “Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household," (Genesis34.30). While Jacob’s family is not physically destroyed, the actions of Simeon and Levi threaten the interests of the household, specifically the ability of Jacob to live and flourish in a foreign land.
part of what makes these uniquely female narratives, however disturbing they may appear.

Yet, Lot’s daughters are not alone in committing distressing acts. Other biblical women engage in violent, albeit non-sexual, deeds in the Bible. Yael drives a tent peg through the foreign invader Sisera's ear (Jdg. 4-5). Judith decapitates Holofernes and then puts his head in her food bag (Jd.13). These women are valorized while the equally horrific incest of the daughters is reviled. Why might that be? Truth be told, the Bible does not necessarily find killing of one’s enemies repugnant—whether by men or women. Innumerable narratives recount similar acts of physical violence by Israelite men against foreign opponents. The nature of the daughters’ sexual congress itself is problematic, but overall the Bible is not prudish.38 Moving beyond this issue, we need to unpack the female ingenuity within these different stories. When we do, we find that the daughters' work for their own ends, not for the good of the community, the way Yael and Judith do (say the daughters, "...[there is] not a man in the earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve [the] seed of our father." [Genesis19.31-32], emphasis mine).

And therein lies their legacy. Commentators like Esther Fuchs conclude that female initiative rendered for the good of the community is glorified; female initiative for the good of one's self is condemned: “[t]he portrayal of women as deceptive or dangerous is the hallmark of misogynous fiction.”39 And so, stories of sexual trickery, which we find primarily in female narratives, have to be rebranded by later editors and redactors in order to validate their place in the narrative.

But why? Later editors were not required to include these problematic stories—why retain them? One epic narrative claims that the biblical story ultimately highlights the community’s relationship with their God. However, as we have already seen, God does not appear as an embodied presence in Lot’s story (except through the medium of the angels, and even then, he speaks only to Lot). Public religious performance such as prayer or fasting or extraordinary sacrifice is also not part of Genesis 19. God is credited with hailing down fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24) and for remembering His promises to Abraham (Genesis19:29). God can be construed as being active but not present. But the unnamed girls never speak to the angels nor do the angels address them directly. They do not

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38 There are many examples where the original Hebrew’s sensual language has been softened for its English readers. The best example is Song of Songs, a potent celebration of physical affection and erotic pleasure.
pray for God's intervention on their behalf nor, for that matter, does Lot.\textsuperscript{40} How then can we see this as evidence of the epic perspective?

Valorous female resourcefulness is that initiative which assists the dynastic purposes of the community. But to see this, we must know what lies ahead. That is, we can infer divine aegis in the daughters' actions because that links the reader to Ruth and Ruth gets us to David.\textsuperscript{41} To rehabilitate the line that comes out of Moab, we need Ruth. We can mend the damage done by the incest only through the redeeming actions of Ruth the Moabitess.\textsuperscript{42} But this interpretation fails to do justice to the text itself. It is an interpretation from the vantage point of later writers and redactors. We have no evidence in this story that the author intends to imply God's blessings upon the efforts of the girls or that the author knows of either Ruth or David. The text itself provides no information that would lead readers to conclude anything but that this story relates the incestuous beginnings of Moab and Ammon and their bastardy to the House of Lot. Such later interpretation glosses over any sexual politics in the rush to redeem the line of Moab (which becomes necessary in light of Davidic kingship) and utilizes the daughters for the greater epic aims of the later writers and redactors.

A more robust, focused reading narrows in on the daughters' actions. In a very real sense, the daughters reflect the same values and virtues that Lot possesses—short-sightedness and a lack of faith. Adele Reinhartz claims that their unnamed status encourages us to read them as anonymous “types”—mothers, daughters, queens, sisters, harlots—rather than as individuals with specific character traits. This is an intentional device on the part of biblical writers: it concentrates our vision on the male characters in the text.\textsuperscript{43} However, I would alter that assessment somewhat. Reinhartz argues that the daughters’ unnamed status provides the counterpoint to named male characters like Lot. To my reading, Lot’s daughters in fact do help us to see Lot more clearly but not as opposites of

\textsuperscript{40} Day, 122.

\textsuperscript{41} In the context of the narrative itself, even reading back into the text from the vantage point of Ruth or David, any claims of divine intervention in the daughters' actions will be problematic since reference to God appears nowhere in their negotiations for Lot's evenings in the Zoar cave; nor does the text evidence language of God blessing their efforts. In fact, God last appears in vs.29 and then only in the context of remembering His promises to Abraham not to destroy Lot.

\textsuperscript{42} Menn, 96-100; Fisch, 432-433.

Lot. Rather, they are ironic reflections of his potent character flaws, especially his short-sightedness. The unnamed daughters offer a mocking textual critique of Lot. They echo for the reader Lot’s ineptitude as a father, provider and moral center.

Moreover, viewing the daughters’ bedtrick as a site of sexual power dynamics lends the narrative greater resonance. That is, situating the incest at the center of the story highlights the daughters' cunning. Maternal desire fuels their choices, horrific as they are. Reading this as the story of the daughters and not only of Lot allows for the gendered elements of the metamyth to emerge—the home as metonymy for women, the cave as womb, female resourcefulness and a desire to perpetuate the family.44 Explanations that settle for dynastic or xenophobic rationales fail to elucidate the elements of gender within the narrative. Such limited analysis forces the daughters to remain utilitarian at best and at worst, invisible.

**Tamar**

Sandwiched between Joseph’s plunge into slavery and his adventures in the Egyptian Potiphar’s home, we find a pericope on his older half-brother Judah’s life in Canaan. Judah’s story begins and ends abruptly, seemingly out of place—chronologically as well as geographically.

Judah leaves Jacob’s fold to travel to Adullam, a Canaanite town near Bethlehem, where he marries an unnamed Canaanite woman. They have three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. In time, Judah obtains a wife for Er—Tamar (possibly a Canaanite, since Judah is in Canaan and we are not explicitly told that he returns to his natal land to obtain a wife for his son). Er dies early in the marriage as the Lord considered him evil (Genesis 38.7). Judah then charges Onan to “perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother” (38.8). Judah invokes the custom of levirate to order to perpetuate Er’s line as well as to secure Judah’s investment since Tamar is now the economic and social responsibility of Judah’s household.

Onan, however, has a different idea. Knowing that any child with Tamar would compete with him for Er’s inheritance (38.9), Onan practices *coitus interruptus*, "lest he should give offspring to his brother." Such withholding makes good economic sense: Er’s lack of heir means that Onan will inherit more of the birthright due to first sons. However, Onan

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44 See Exum’s references to house and home as the symbolic feminine in *Fragmented Women*, 47.
is struck dead by God, although this death is understood as just punishment for Onan’s selfish, unrighteous behavior.

Judah fears now for his remaining son, Shelah. Put bluntly, sex with Tamar has resulted in the deaths of two of his three sons. In an attempt to delay further congress with this apparent black-widow spider, Judah dispatches Tamar back to her father’s house to await Shelah's maturity.

Time passes. Tamar experiences a dawning awareness that Judah is not going to honor his responsibility to her, content to keep her “wife and not-wife.” As Tamar is technically promised to Shelah, any other remarriage is not a possibility. She exists in limbo as a resident of her father’s household. Her father pays for her daily upkeep but cannot contract another marriage for her. She remains tied by laws of kinship to Judah, who shows no interest in providing for her or honoring her with any sort of marriage.

Tamar seizes the day. In vs. 13, she hears that her father-in-law is travelling to Timnah for sheep shearing. Tamar removes her mourning garments, adorns herself as a *zonah* (prostitute) and waits by the entrance to Enaim on the road to Timnah. The justification for such provocative action is found in vs. 14b: “She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.”

Judah, newly widowed and lonely, takes notice of Tamar-as-*zonah* on the side of the road, veiled, intriguing and anonymous. He propositions her, unaware of her identity (an ironic play on the name of the place, Enaim, or "Eyes," since he does not recognize Tamar). Judah offers a young lamb from the flock as payment for services to be rendered. As pledge for the lamb's delivery, Tamar shrewdly negotiates for his signatory items: a signet ring and his staff. He agrees; they consummate the transaction. Tamar then leaves, discarding the veil of the *zonah* and again donning her widow’s garments (vs. 19).

Three months later, the widow Tamar is pregnant. As a member of Judah’s household, her illicit sexual congress calls Judah’s honor into

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45 Weisberg, 67.
48 An interesting discontinuity noted by Bird and others, when Judah’s friend Hirah the Adullumite comes to make good on payment, he asks for the place of the *qedesha* (a higher status temple worker), rather than the common prostitute (*zonah*), who sat by the side of the road (v. 21).
question.\textsuperscript{49} Judah must publicly defend himself. He calls for Tamar’s open humiliation and death through burning (Leviticus 21.9 sanctions the burning of the daughter of a priest who commits prostitution).\textsuperscript{50} Tamar quietly sends Judah his signatory items, noting that the owner of these fathered her child. He has been tricked.

Judah recognizes the integrity of Tamar's actions—says Judah, “She is more righteous than I” (vs. 26). But Judah neither marries Tamar nor visits her sexually again. Their relationship, such as it was, served its transitory purpose and focuses now on the child to be born.

Tamar gives birth to twin boys, with the younger twin superseding the elder in a tale reminiscent of the birth of Jacob and Esau. Zerah pushes his hand out first, then recedes and Perez—that is, “Breach”—is born. Thus the younger will supersede the older.

**Tamar: Interpretation**

The story of Tamar portrays a richly textured individual whose rehabilitation, as Leila Leah Bronner claims, is long overdue.\textsuperscript{51} Bronner claims that Tamar aids the dynastic needs of future generations and is

\textsuperscript{49} Ortner, "The Virgin and the State": 19-35.

\textsuperscript{50} Interestingly, both the Bible and ancient Near Eastern law codes of the time parallel some of what we see going on in this context although they deal far more harshly with the father-in-law’s transgression. Lev. 18:15 warns that a man should not uncover his son’s wife’s nakedness lest he, the father-in-law, be cut off from the community. Lev. 20:12 says, “If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death.” The Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1792-1750 BCE) states that if a father-in-law has intercourse with his daughter-in-law after his son has slept with her already, the father-in-law is to be drowned (Article 155). Or, if a father-in-law sleeps with his daughter-in-law, even if his son, her husband, has not slept with the daughter-in-law, then the father-in-law must return her dowry and allow her to marry as she chooses (Article 156). Any of these might apply to Judah, who slept with Tamar after (we assume) Er had slept with her. And since she was promised to Shelah but never delivered to him to consummate the marriage before Judah slept with her, we might conjecture that she was able to live on her own without similar interference from Judah (“He [Judah] did not lie with her again,” Genesis 38:26). See Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 106.

accorded esteem and respect as a “mother of righteousness” as her actions give rise to kings and heroes. Her harlotry stands without condemnation. Rather, she finds restoration in talmudic tradition as a selfless heroine, worthy of praise and honor as a woman of exceptional modesty, more like Rebekah in her actions than Rahab. Like others, Bronner finds that Tamar functions in the text as a conduit to the line of David.  

Eleanor Ferris Beach locates hints of ancient Near Eastern goddess imagery in Tamar’s story which powerfully connects her to Near Eastern mythical motifs:

[In Tamar we find] the woman or Goddess who brings death to her lovers; father-daughter unions; the birth and conflict of twins; the fertility implications of sheep shearing festivities; and the connection of Tamar’s name (“palm”) to fertility Goddess art.  

Focusing on Judah’s signatory items, Beach connects his ring, cord and staff to visual iconography of the moon god Nanna of the ancient Near East. These items correspond to both kingship and pastoral oversight. Discussing this symbolism, Beach finds that Judah’s gift of them to Tamar helps to restore and inaugurate Judah’s power and the eventual monarchy of his line. “Through Tamar’s mediation, Judah’s patriarchal insignia and lineage, which appeared lost, are restored and transformed into the inaugural symbols and ancestor of Israel’s greatest temple builder and administrative justice—Solomon.” For Beach and her modern readers, connecting Tamar to Near Eastern goddess imagery switches the narrative emphasis from her to the dynastic and political male heritage of her later successor—that of Solomon.

Bernhard Luther considers the Judah-Tamar a novella that depicts tribal history:

…the author of Genesis 38 ... relates the genesis of the nation up to the birth of the eponyms of the individual tribes; he has no interest in relating the origins of the subdivisions of the tribes. The author of Genesis 38 now wants to relate, additionally, how the parts of the tribes came into being and how the tribal fathers settled in the land of Judah.  

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52 Ibid., 38-39.
53 Beach, 252.
54 Ibid., 254.
For Luther, the narrative’s focal points are Judah and Judean authority. Tamar’s role as either *qedesha* or *zonah* and the function of levirate marriage within the community provide narrative motifs which encourage the larger androcentric action. The story's importance lies in emphasizing Judah’s role and his tribe’s place in the land of Canaan. Luther considers Tamar’s deception a necessary ploy in order for the reader to more fully appreciate Judah. Moreover, Judah’s character highlights the humor in the story. Luther suggests that those around Judah are there to reflect a kind of sympathetic glory that shines back upon the star of this story, Judah. In fact, Judah serves as an object of cheerful fondness: “... the catastrophe has been averted, and, in novelistic terms, ... he now has three sons again. Blessing has finally come to him. So affection for Judah is linked with the laughter.”

Another theme associated with Genesis 38 finds Tamar as an anchorless widow. John Rook interprets the Hebrew word *almanah* (“widow”) not simply as a woman without a husband but as a woman lacking significant male connections. Rook suggests that *almanah* refers to a woman peripheral to the kinship group, without male representation or guardianship. She is “un-embedded,” both within her kinship group and within the larger community. Passing from father to husband to related kinship males, a true widow is always someone’s responsibility since death does not end the obligation of a family to their daughter-in-law. Says Rook,

> The point to be made, one that is often misunderstood, is that a woman does not become an *almanah* when her husband dies; rather, she is *almanah* when she has no kin tie and is without a male guardian.

By consigning her to her biological father's household, Rook contends that Judah withholds his legally required guardianship of Tamar. Judah’s neglect renders Tamar most fully *almanah*. In fact, it is Judah who calls Tamar *almanah* (she is to remain a widow [*almanah*] in her father’s house until Shelah comes of age, vs. 11). In declining to exercise full guardianship over his daughter-in-law, he doubly shames her: not only is she sent packing to her natal home, but she arrives home degraded to wife-not-wife status. Judah fails to fulfill his responsibility to Tamar, yet he does not fully appreciate that his honor still depends upon her. With the announcement of her pregnancy, Judah experiences public humiliation, suggesting an actual kinship connection between them despite his

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56 Ibid., 114.
57 Rook, 11.
dismissal of Tamar and her almanah (unembedded, without guardianship) designation.\textsuperscript{58}

Tamar's initiative releases her from a marginalized existence as an unembedded female, that is, a woman in a family but without a family. But, rather than finding self-actualization in her agency, Rook concludes that Tamar’s trickery is motivated by a desire to honor her dead husband:

\begin{quote}
Her purpose is simply to defend the rights of her dead husband’s [Er’s] household. Her husband, she believes, is deserving of an heir ... her motive is to claim what she believes rightfully belongs to her husband.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

For her part, Phyllis Bird validates the selfless nature of Tamar's actions. But Bird also feels that Tamar’s motivation arises out of a concern for a man but not Er:

\begin{quote}
Her bold and dangerous plan aims to accomplish that end by the agency of the man that has wronged her. It satisfies both duty and revenge. It is not a husband she wants, but an heir for Judah, and so she approaches the source.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Rook and Bird agree that Tamar's actions are motivated out of a concern for preserving the masculine honor associated with her husband’s household (either Er’s or Judah’s), not her own. This assessment places female agency in a subordinate role to the honor/shame culture of ancient Israel. This argument finds its climax in Judah’s stunning role reversal when he claims that Tamar, a woman, is more righteous than he. Yet, by this analysis, we are encouraged to read this as a statement on Judah's honor, not Tamar's. The shame is one that accrues to Judah’s household even though, if we understand Rook's point, Tamar has been living a shameful non-existence—without male guardianship or kin ties—in her father's household. Tamar seeks to redeem herself through trickery yet, according to this interpretation, we are to read this as Tamar's attempt to reclaim her husband's or father-in-law's honor.

Through this type of analysis, we find ourselves looking at Tamar with masculine eyes. Some would argue that this is a prime example of the Bible's androcentrism: stories hopelessly trapped within a masculine power dynamic. Whatever roles women play textually, their value is measured against male prerogatives. As Esther Fuchs argues, the Bible projects a male consciousness, one whose vision is always cognitively

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 14.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 13.  
\textsuperscript{60} Phyllis Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 123.
directed towards the men. The impact of such a consciousness is that

... man is a more 'authentic' representative of God because God is male, and God is male because the Bible reflects a masculine construction of the divine.\(^{61}\)

All of this points to the fact that by interpreting Tamar's bedtrick as an action rendered on behalf of her dead husband or her dismissive father-in-law, we cease to appreciate her contribution to the narrative. Tamar operates within the same honor/shame culture as Judah. It is conceivable that we can read Tamar’s deception as her effort to redeem her own honor. In fact, Ellen Van Wolde argues that the levirate narratives (Ruth as well as Tamar) demonstrate the wife's effort to redeem the name of her dead husband is rather specious since the biblical evidence is ambiguous on this account:

Another similarity (between Tamar and Ruth) is that in both narratives the theme is to bring forth a son to keep the name of the deceased husband alive ... [yet] no mention whatsoever is made of the continuation of the name of the husband. The fathers replace the sons and do the work of the brothers.\(^{62}\)

A final engaging trope associated with Tamar is that of royal ancestress. This motif stands alongside other female tropes such as the barren mother motif. But, unlike the barren mothers (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel), Tamar’s fertility is not called into question. She is childless, but not barren. Tamar’s predicament consists of a lack of an appropriate sexual partner. Infertility is merely the result of this void. In fact, Tamar is without husband or partner and certainly through much of the narrative has no male protection or oversight. She is left to her own devices in her relationships as well as her childlessness.

Furthermore, unlike what we find in annunciation narratives, this account bears no divine pronouncement of a special pregnancy or child. Indeed, God’s presence finds voice only as a destructive force (in the deaths of Er and Onan) rather than a creative one. Tamar makes no supplication to God for either a husband or child or even for the softening of her father-in-law’s heart. Divine intervention on Tamar’s behalf seems absent. For the conflict to move forward, Tamar must act.

Tamar’s story exhibits the hallmarks of what Menn categorizes the royal ancestress motif:

\(^{61}\) Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 12.
\(^{62}\) Van Wolde, 24.
• absence of appropriate sexual partner
• secrecy/deception of female initiatives
• motif of mistaken identity
• female initiative leading to older male sexual activity
• no miraculous divine intervention
• foreign ethnic identity of mother
• birth of sons who stand in Davidic line
• absence of contiguous narrative—stories of the sons and the mothers end with the birth narratives

For Menn, Tamar—like all the Davidic ancestresses—forcefully connects the reader to other women in the Bible that point us to the Davidic image. Tamar acts as an audacious interloper, which represents one aspect of her legacy to the Davidic line. Like David’s dealings with Saul, Tamar’s legitimization comes at the cost of another's honor (Judah). And, to succeed, Tamar—like Ruth and Lot’s daughters—must resolutely use the people around herself to achieve her ends. As such, says Menn, Tamar foreshadows the youthful David, the slayer of Philistines and the ebullient street dancer:

... the shrewdness and resourcefulness of David’s ancestresses, their opportunism and daring, their effective control of history through unorthodox means, also corresponds more generally to the character of David’s reign. A usurper and empire builder, David, like his royal ancestresses, placed at a safe narrative distance, succeeds magnificently through the unconventional.

Tamar’s independent initiative, which fuels her duplicitous bedtrick, renders her an example of courage, “a symbol of self-directed, destiny-changing action.” Placing Tamar among the pantheon of royal ancestresses lifts her from her role of redeeming Judah or her dead husband. But now, we anticipate David through her cunning and resourcefulness. David is not just a king and a husband and father—he is also a trickster, a deceiver and a sexual manipulator. We more fully comprehend the unorthodox and complex nature of David’s kingship if we appreciate the stories of his ancestresses:

63 Menn, 96-100.
64 Ibid., 102-103.
65 Bronner, 40.
There may also be a hint at the morally problematic quality of kingship itself in [Lot’s daughters, Tamar’s and Ruth’s] birth narratives. In the three narratives, human women take the initiative reserved for God in the birth narratives involving the barren wife motif, and this may thematically correspond to the king’s usurpation of divine leadership, expressed in some strands of the tradition (1 Samuel 8). The entirely human nature of events leading to the emergence of the royal lineage may therefore implicitly comment on the human aspect of Israelite kingship.66

In this context, we are encouraged to valorize Tamar’s duplicity because we value its role in David’s life. Such analysis links her metaphorically and symbolically with David, the audacious, individualistic usurper of the throne. However, Tamar’s initiative and individuality get lost in the interpretive imperative to get to David. This analytical perspective values Tamar for what she can tell us about David or Judah. Tamar’s distinctive role as woman or daughter or wife or widow is overshadowed as she becomes thematically associated with David or kingship in general.

Menn’s presentation of the royal ancestress motif helps to organize and ameliorate tensions around David’s later, less attractive qualities (his foreign ancestry, his trickster status, and his dynastic ambitions). In this, she provides a very useful heuristic for understanding how these opportunistic women serve the larger aims of the monarchy and the text. However, what Menn’s analysis does not do is help us to see what the women actually do—how this motif informs and enriches our understanding of women. That is, does the Bible look favorably upon, to borrow Menn’s language, “unorthodox” women who presume to do God’s work (that is, achieve pregnancy against all odds)? Tamar is a singular woman who acts alone to achieve that which is rightfully hers: a son by the house of Judah. Furthermore, as Menn points out, death surrounds Tamar; so, too, Lot’s daughters, Ruth and Bathsheba. There is another motif for that—the woman who brings death. Are these our only two choices for problematic women—either read them as Davidic ancestresses (good) or harbingers of death and destruction (bad)? I say no: Tamar, as well as these other women, fulfills a positive textual function that does not depend upon Davidic associations or macabre themes. As challenging women in their own right (that is, women who employ deceptions like the bedtrick), their valorization does not require their assent to male cultural prerogatives. The challenge is to see Tamar’s actions as sexual, yes, but more importantly, as self-conscious and individual. She is a cunning,

66 Menn, note 206, 103.
resourceful woman who neither apologizes nor repents for her deeds. Waiting upon the deity’s favor or serving as an obedient and receptive vessel just is not what Tamar’s story is about. Rather, “[t]hough [she] operates for a time in the marginalized space of the harlot, [she] becomes a paradigm of courage and a symbol of self-directed, destiny-changing action.”

Ruth

The story of Ruth stands as a piece of narrative artistry, complete in four short chapters, in a period of timeless antiquity. Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion leave Israel for Moab due to famine in the land. Elimelech and his sons all die in Moab. The sons in fact have been married to Moabite women for ten years without issue, suggesting their sickly or infertile states. Upon the men’s passing, Naomi and her daughter-in-laws leave Moab for Bethlehem (literally “house of bread”), a place of nourishment and safety. Along the way, Naomi entreats the daughters-in-law to return to Moab as she can assure them of neither economic support nor the promise of future sons to marry. Orpah reluctantly decides to return to her mother’s house (bet em). Ruth, however, responds tenderly, announcing her loyalty to Naomi. Her “wherever you go, I will go” speech (Ruth 1.16-18) promises that Ruth will adopt Naomi’s god and people as her own. Her pledge concludes that only death should part them: she will continue to cleave (davqa) to Naomi, even unto death.

Ruth and Naomi, two indigent women, settle in Bethlehem. Boaz, a wealthy kinsman of the dead Elimelech, takes pity on the women and allows Ruth to glean after his reapers. He thanks Ruth for her many kindnesses to his relative, Naomi, saying, "The LORD recompense your work, and a full reward be given to you of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings (kanaf) you have come to trust" (2.12). When Naomi sees the abundance of goods that Ruth brings home, she realizes that Boaz has expressed extraordinary care for Ruth. Says Naomi, "Blessed [be] he of the LORD, who has not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead" (2.20).

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67 Bronner, 40.
68 The literary convention, “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled…” (Ruth 1.1), alerts the reader to the fact that this is not historical in the modern sense of the word.
Noami encourages Ruth to adorn herself and head down to the threshing floor, a place of revelry in the aftermath of the barley harvest. But, instructs Naomi, "… do not make yourself known to the man, until he is done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lies down, that you will see the place where he shall lie, and thou shall go in, and uncover his feet, and lay yourself down; and he will tell you what to do" (3:3b-4). All this Ruth does and when the drunken Boaz ("his heart was merry," 3:7) finds her at his feet, Ruth does not wait for him to instruct her. Rather, she speaks forthrightly, using the same wing metaphor that Boaz first applied to his care for her: "I [am] Ruth your handmaid: therefore spread your skirt (kanaf) over your handmaid; for you [are] a near kinsman" (3:9). In the morning, she is sent away full ("Do not go empty to your mother-in-law," says Boaz; 3:17), a heavily weighted impression that her threshing-floor encounter might have resulted in a fertile richness that goes beyond just barley.

Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer recognizes the rampant ambiguity of the threshing floor scene. She notes that chapter 3 of Ruth is rich in double entendre, including the use of the term eshet chayil, often translated “a worthy woman,” but which also carries overtones meaning “procreative power,” further enhancing the suggestion of possible sexual congress between Ruth and Boaz. Amy-Jill Levine remarks that the threshing floor is associated with sexual activity. Whether Ruth and Boaz completed a sexual act or not, the point is that the threshing floor scene changes the nature of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz, one of the aspects of the bedtrick. He is clearly taken with her offer, and by implication, Ruth herself (“And he said, ‘May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; you have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich,’” Ruth. 3:10). Ruth’s boldness has touched him and Boaz responds boldly as well.

Boaz serves next as the public go’el, redeeming the economic rights to the two women in the marketplace of Bethlehem. Through this, we gain some insight into the legal wranglings around ancient inheritance and property rights and the process of halitzah, especially in the absence of a male heir. But clearly, these proceedings are not normative since the

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71 “Halitzah [literally] ‘taking off’ the shoe [is] the rite by means of which a widow whose husband has died without issue is released from the bond of levirate
go’el usually is not required to serve as levir as well, which is what we see Boaz arguing for at the marketplace.\textsuperscript{72}

Boaz is recognized as free to contract marriage with her and take over a small parcel of land that remains in Elimelech's name. Ruth bears a son, Obed, named by the women of the town (4.17). She is praised by these same townswomen:

And the women said to Naomi, Blessed [be] the LORD, who has not left you this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be to you a restorer of life, and a nourisher of your old age: for your daughter in law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him (4.14-15).

Ruth’s transformation transcends simple gender categories.\textsuperscript{73} She assertively interacts with Boaz on the threshing floor, not a place for decent women. She boldly proposes a relationship with him whereas the biblical model is one of men pursuing women (Jacob and Rachel, for example). She is later proclaimed better than seven sons. This acclamation challenges biblical notions of sonship, which represent the fullness of life and household success. In the book of Ruth, Naomi claims that she is bitter and empty in part because no more sons will come forth from her, yet Ruth 4 reads, “Praise to you Naomi, a son is born…,” then is followed by the "better than seven sons" claim. One might read this wording as signifying yes, at last, Naomi has another son, but what she has in this daughter surpasses seven of those.

**Ruth: Interpretation**

The book of Ruth elicits an expansive array of interpretations. As we saw, Menn again counts Ruth as one of the royal ancestresses who redeems the Davidic line and is herself a precursor of David through her bold captivation of Boaz.\textsuperscript{74} In later Jewish tradition, Ruth is emblematic of chesed, that loving kindness thematically linked to the festival of Shavuot and the giving of the Torah. Furthermore, Ruth's return to Bethlehem with Naomi relates to concepts of beit lechem (“House of Bread,” or metaphorically, a place of sustenance and sufficiency) and meeting the

\textsuperscript{72} Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 251-252.

\textsuperscript{73} Van Wolde, 434.

\textsuperscript{74} Menn, 96-100.
needs of the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Andre LaCocque sees in Ruth the redemption of the foreign woman or the marginalized figure who personifies the image of Israel herself, that landless, captive, hopeless people in a foreign land. For Mieke Bal, to read Ruth is to enter into the biblical tension between law and legitimacy, locating in Ruth a symbolic discussion between the covenantal promises of possession of the land (go’el) and a thematized future (levirate). Similarly, Adele Berlin proposes that in Ruth the ancient covenant promises of land and redemption of the people are realized: she embodies exile and return, family and people, culminating in the restoration of the line of David.

Some have argued that this text celebrates the life and friendship of two poor women. This emphasizes the multitudinous yet anonymous face of Israel’s poor and not necessarily Ruth’s and Naomi’s status as women. Richard Bauckham claims that the importance of female narratives like Ruth’s is less the gender of Ruth than is the gendered perspective of these works. That is, socially-conscious narratives like Ruth’s clearly offer a remarkable view on life as a poor family (which happens to be comprised of women) in Israelite culture and society.

In a different vein, Phyllis Trible argues for the core of Ruth as love (’ahavah), a love which redeems both Naomi and Ruth. Closely reading Ann Ulanov's psycho-social analysis of Ruth in *The Female Ancestors of Christ* (1993), Trible writes of the transcendent commitment between Ruth and Naomi that focuses on love as the redemptive clue to this story: “Ruth's love heals Naomi's bitterness… It is the love that redeems... Ruth embodies redemptive power.”

Yet we come back again to the rehabilitation of David through his antecedents. Harold Fisch finds Ruth's story offers biblical proof for the

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76 Lacocque, 55ff.
78 Berlin, “Ruth and the continuity of Israel,” 258-259.
79 Putnam, “Friendship,” in *Reading Ruth*, 44.
80 Berlin, “Ruth and the continuity of Israel,” 255-256.
messianic line in general and the ascendency of the house of David in particular. Readers are encouraged to see important clues to the ageless character of the Davidic cycle in Ruth. For Fisch, this structural analysis provides for the recovery of the covenant story:

… the function of the story of Ruth is to “redeem” the previous episodes of the corpus… “Redemption” is the Leitmotif of the work… The Ruth-Boaz story is the means of “redeeming” the entire corpus… Ruth establishes a new kind of language for understanding what has gone before, so that a full exegesis of the stories of Lot and Judah requires reference to the story of Ruth and conversely, the story of Ruth looks back to these earlier paradigms and forward to what is to be disclosed in the story of the house of David. This is the method of “intertextuality.” It is also, we may add, a way of talking about salvation-history.

Jack Sasson finds in Ruth powerful elements evocative of heroic morphology as posited by the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp. As such, Ruth serves as the true hero of the narrative with Boaz as the “magical agent” or “hero’s helper” and Obed as the go’el (or, the one who redeems Ruth). Naomi becomes the beneficiary of Ruth’s activities since she serves in the tale as Ruth’s encourager and ultimately, her mentor. While arguing against levirate obligation as the core focus of the narrative (“this writer [Sasson] finds little satisfaction in [such] arguments”), Sasson identifies a curious twist to the book of Ruth:

… we might venture to explain why Ruth, unique in Biblical literature, actually ends rather than begins with a genealogy: From a Proppian perspective, the genealogy of 4.18-22 actually begins the tale of Obed, rather than ends that of Boaz! [emphasis Sassoon’s]

In this exceptional analysis, Sasson concludes that Ruth’s focal point is to begin the Davidic cycle, starting with the birth narrative of Obed, rather than with the saving character of Ruth. He challenges his readers to consider the fact that we can read this story another way: not as the

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83 Fisch,. 433.
84 Ibid., 435, 436.
85 For an outline of Propp’s morphology see Appendix B.
87 Sasson, 129.
88 Sasson, 213 (emphasis in original).
gradual unfolding of salvation history, but as the genealogy of the House of David, itself an embedded heroic motif.

Both Fisch and Sasson look forward textually from Ruth to David (Fisch) or to Obed (Sasson). While Fisch does deal at length with the women in Genesis 19 and 38 as well as Ruth, gender is not his focus. Instead, he emphasizes the uncovering of salvation-history. The covenantal promises made to Abraham and the emergence of the Davidic dynasty provides the analytical center of the Ruth story. This examination places men center stage, demonstrating their roles as conversational participants with YHWH and conduits for God’s special purposes. 

Fisch reproduces the gender power dynamic of the text without necessarily critiquing these issues, especially in light of a book named after a woman. His concentration never strays from the external or cultic elements of Israelite religion, most clearly personified in the covenant promises made not to Sarah, but to Abraham. There is no interpretive focus on women of ingenuity and initiative except when those traits work to bring us to greater understanding of the men in the stories.

For his part, Sasson concentrates on the heroic genealogy and the birth of Obed which places the Ruth narrative in the larger Davidic corpus. Sasson argues for a birth of the hero motif whereby the new hero (in this case, Obed) inaugurates a new family line that accomplishes great and remarkable things. 

Like Fisch, Sasson hardly notices the gendered elements of this cycle. That these are stories where women and female concerns predominate (such as male guardianship and economic security through the birth of sons) seems secondary. Sasson claims that Ruth serves as a hero in her own narrative, even though he argues that the focus and purpose is to highlight the extraordinary coming of the Davidic kingdom via Obed.

However well this explanation might enlighten the triumphant ending of Ruth (which some scholars feel is a later addition), it does not respect the book of as a piece of Israelite storytelling about a woman. Sasson’s categorizing of the Ruth narrative constricts its particularity while highlighting its universality. For example, Sasson does not necessarily elucidate anything particularly enlightening about Ruth as a daughter, a foreigner or a wife. Ruth's initiative, as with so many others, is tied to larger textual aims (in this case, alerting readers that this is a hero narrative

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89 Day, 123.
90 Sasson, 213.
91 “There is all but universal agreement that verses 18-22 form a genealogical appendix to the Ruth story and are not an original part of it;” Edward F. Campbell, Jr., “Ruth,” The Anchor Bible 7 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 172.
where Obed plays the part of the champion). We can derive no information about Ruth's motivation or the role of the bedtrick from such analysis since it depends upon viewing Ruth as of necessary utility for arriving at Obed.

Reducing Ruth to symbolically representing the covenantal promises of land, fertility and greatness enhances our understanding of Israel as a people and an emerging nation but offers little with respect to the gendered elements of her narrative. She returns to "the house of bread" (bet lechem); she achieves fertility (Obed); and through her, Israel realizes greatness via the House of David. However, what of Ruth's initiative? How do we uncover her agency in the context of the narrative without reflecting upon the dynastic or epic aims of Israel? Clearly those items are not even in evidence in the text.

As has already been stated, the attractiveness of the Ruth narrative lies in its ability to stand up to numerous interpretive strategies. Susan Reimer Torn suggests that Ruth incorporates "a highly charged, transformative field, encompassing a moral paradox of extremes."92 While its structure encompasses folklore, liturgical applications, theological dynamism and dynastic aspirations, it will also accommodate a version where Ruth offers a new robust vision of women as well.

This is an argument for reading Ruth as a story about Ruth. She is a younger female who is emotionally, financially and physically dependent upon an older maternal figure for more than just sustenance—that is to say, she is a daughter. In choosing Naomi she rejects Moab. She further chooses Boaz and in this, evokes that individuation whereby, as Phyllis Trible notes, “her actions show her as a woman pursuing the wholeness of life.”93 When the female chorus of Bethlehem claims, “she is better to you than seven sons,” we find a symbolism replete with the richness of devoted love—not unlike that between a mother and child—as well as a biblical image of maternal fecundity and richness. Ruth in her resourcefulness tells us much about the daughter and the survivor. But we can only see this when we move away from the driving impetus of dynastic interests.

**Bathsheba**

To this point, many of the scholars we have examined see textual symmetry between the stories of Tamar and Ruth as well as Lot’s

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92 Torn, "Ruth Reconsidered," in *Reading Ruth*, 337.
daughters. None mentions Bathsheba in that context. However, reading Lot’s daughters, Tamar and Ruth as related stories depends upon interpreting their actions in light of Israel’s institutional, legal or dynastic aims. Leaving those interpretive frames behind, one can read these stories in order to tease out the gender clues within—that is, what is it that they do that only women in the Bible seem to do? And: do those actions relate their story to other stories in the Bible? If we identify these relationships, what conclusions might we draw from them? How well Bathsheba’s story fits with the other three will ultimately depend upon how successful we are in leaving those traditional paradigms behind.

For example, one question to ask is: what is the relationship between Bathsheba and the other three stories? She is technically not a Davidic ancestress. She is not in the familial line of David but is one member of a large cadre of women around David. But a closer look does reveal some interesting connections to the other stories. Her narrative is intimately linked to the House of David. Her congress with the king results in an heir, Solomon, which makes her an ancestress in the Davidic line that continues after him. Furthermore, her story presents another female narrative where inheritance (that is, her role in Solomon’s accession to the throne) ultimately comes into play. Furthermore, she appears when David is young and virile as well as when the King is physically declining. Thus, she plays a vibrant role in David’s story.

There are additional motifs that link Bathsheba to the other three. The narratives of Tamar and Ruth as well as Lot’s daughters concern women without male partners. Bathsheba’s story opens with a missing male partner—her husband Uriah is away at the battlefield. Ruth and Tamar are both foreigners. Lot’s family is viewed as outsiders in Sodom. Bathsheba is not a foreigner but her Hittite husband is. Like Lot’s daughters and Ruth, Bathsheba’s story does not seem overly concerned with her lack of maternity but she does eventually give birth to a son in the line of David.

Thus, while standard interpretations of the Bathsheba story fail to associate her thematically with the prior three, her story contains some of their same concerns. These components manifest themselves in different

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94 The KJV and RSV translate gür as “sojourner,” that is, one who is transitory, but the NIV offers the stronger sense of stranger, “This one here is an alien,” (Genesis 19.9).

95 Hertzberg takes this a step further, claiming that Bathsheba appears in the New Testament genealogy among the named foreign mothers (Tamar, Rahab and Ruth), further raising the issue of her foreignness as well; see Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 310.
ways, challenging the synchronicity of established interpretive unities.

The Bathsheba story follows a simple plot line. In 2 Samuel 11, an indolent King David lounges at home alone while his troops are busy waging war (vs. 1). From across the roof, he spies a beautiful woman at her bath (we learn in vs. 4 that this was a bath of ritual purification for Bathsheba). Inquiries are made; she is identified as the daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite. David notifies her of his interest—“David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him...” 2 Sam. 11.4)—and they sleep together; she returns home later at some unspecified time. In a nice parallel to David’s initial call to her, in vs. 5 she, too, sends a simple message: “I am pregnant.”

David acts quickly. He recalls Uriah from the field, ostensibly to see how the battle goes. In vs. 8, David encourages Uriah to go home and relax (“wash your feet,” says David, a euphemism for intimate relations). But Uriah, in a state of military readiness, stays his course, sleeping at the palace rather than risking a visit to Bathsheba and possible transgression of his holy war vows. David tries to get Uriah drunk to again encourage his visit to Bathsheba and still, Uriah remains faithful to his vow.

Exasperated, David sends word to his field commander Joab, ironically “by the hand of Uriah” himself (vs. 14), to place the Hittite in the direct line of fire. Joab positions Uriah in a “place where he knew there were valiant warriors” (vs. 16). Not surprisingly, Uriah is killed in the line of duty. Bathsheba ritually mourns, then she is recalled to the palace and she and David are married and their son is born. This child though suffers illness and dies as a result of his illicit conception, causing David tremendous grief and mourning. In comforting Bathsheba, David again impregnates her and this second child is called Solomon because “the Lord loved him” (12.24).

Bathsheba next appears prior to David’s death. She and the prophet Nathan conspire in 1 Kings 1 to ensure Solomon’s ascendency by recalling a heretofore unknown promise to place her son on the throne (1 Kings 1). And in 1 Kings 2, she plays an ambiguous role in the death of Solomon’s half-brother and pretender to the Davidic throne, Adonijah. At Adonijah’s request, Bathsheba asks her son, now King Solomon, for the rights to David’s last concubine, Abishag. Adonijah’s request is viewed as an indirect threat to Solomon’s power and Adonijah is killed as a potential usurper. Like the motivation behind her revealing bath, how cognizant Bathsheba is of the outcome in making this request remains to be seen.

96 “Now she was purifying herself from her uncleanness” (v. 4). This would be a mikvah, or ritual bath marking the end of menstruation for Bathsheba; Hertzberg, 306, note a.
Although 1 Kings 2 is replete with Solomon’s purges of those who represent a direct threat to his kingship, yet this one comes to his attention via his mother Bathsheba.

### Bathsheba: Interpretation

In 1 Kings 2, Bathsheba seems to manipulate the weak and dying David; she is an opportunistic wife and mother. Yet it is her sexual congress with David that sets the stage for her later performance in the imperial venue. Once counted among the palace household, Bathsheba’s textual role expands. However, before all those things, the story begins with her exceptional beginnings with David.

One of the standard characterizations of Bathsheba is offered by R. N. Whybray, who writes that Bathsheba is a “good-natured, rather stupid woman who was a natural prey both to more passionate and cleverer men.”\(^{97}\) The Bible does not share why Bathsheba was openly bathing within clear view of the palace (as opposed to some other location), only that she was.\(^{98}\) Whybray feels justified in patronizing Bathsheba, gently scolding her for her unwitting role in her sluggish king’s voyeurism. Her innocent bath eventually results in the death of her husband, a valiant warrior, her infant son and later, a bloody succession that does not end until all of Solomon’s brothers and competitors are either dead or vanquished.

Bathsheba also plays the innocuous ewe lamb in Nathan’s moral parable on David’s transgression (2 Samuel 12).\(^{99}\) Daniel Boyarin argues that this powerful metaphor is incredibly evocative for the pastoral milieu of its time: “the story ... performs as narrative its ideological and cultural function of female subjugation... The biblical text encodes a very vivid picture of an ideal marriage as ‘like the love of a shepherd for his only

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\(^{97}\) Whybray, *The Succession Narrative*, 40.

\(^{98}\) The text suggests that this ritual bathing occurs not at a ritual or communal location but in Bathsheba’s home. Archaeological evidence for public baths is not found in Israel until the second century BCE. At this point (the time that the action of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings purports to occur, roughly 1100-1000 BCE), the nature of ritual immersion is not established by the Bible. Judith Baskin notes that the word *miqveh* does not even appear in the Bible; see Judith Baskin, “Miqveh,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., vs. 9 (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 6046; King and Stager, 69-71.

\(^{99}\) Nathan characterizes David as the rich man who steals from “the poor man [Uriah, who] had nothing but one little ewe lamb” (2 Sam. 12.3).
ew-lamb. The woman, in need of guidance and direction, cannot be faulted for her mistakes since it is the shepherd who must gently guide and direct. Like the ewe lamb, Bathsheba is small and innocent; she is also clearly benighted and a tad dim-witted when it comes to the wiles of men.

Female nakedness, says Michael Satlow, represents a robust challenge to male fortitude rather than a moral reflection upon the woman herself. Since a female cannot be blamed for failing to realize the consequences of her actions, it is incumbent upon men to safeguard female propriety. Patriarchal societies must reinforce female modesty less to protect women and more so that men will not lose control. Speaking of the later rabbinic culture, Satlow argues:

Female nakedness is understood by rabbis entirely within a context of female modesty or propriety before men ... The rabbis frequently exhort (rather than prohibit outright with a legal ruling) men not to look at women in any state of dress or undress for fear that they will be led into sexual misconduct.

Satlow further notes that such male sexual misconduct is not so much a matter of sexual sin as it is a loss of self-control, a virtue of great value. Thus, another frame through which to interpret Bathsheba’s bath emphasizes David’s lack of discipline rather than offering any sort of insight into the motivations or machinations of Bathsheba herself.

As with the ewe lamb metaphor, Satlow suggests that nakedness indicates a woman’s vulnerability, her need for guidance, direction and perhaps, protection. Such vulnerability could also point to a lack of honor or respectability but again, without proper guidance, no more could be expected from a woman. Read in this context, the transgression lies with David, who fails to recognize the inherent defenselessness of Bathsheba’s nakedness. David recklessly acts on a moment of stolen voyeurism, demolishing Bathsheba’s modesty and/or virtue.

A third motif associated with Bathsheba is the woman who brings death, a distinction noted by both Joseph Blenkinsopp and David Gunn. Following designs from myth and legend, Blenkinsopp and Gunn tie Bathsheba to the agent of death, a common figure in ancient literature.

100 Daniel Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 151, 152-3.
102 Ibid., note 44, 441.
103 Ibid., 451.
104 Blenkinsopp, 52-56; Gunn, “Traditional Composition”: 222-223.
Beginning with Eve, through whom transgression enters the Garden, the Hebrew Bible is replete with women associated with death and destruction—Delilah and Samson, Rizpah and the death of Ishbosheth and Abner, Tamar, David's daughter Tamar (2 Sam. 13) and the death of Amnon. Due to Bathsheba (either directly or indirectly), her husband Uriah and her unnamed infant die, and later, Adonijah as well. She is a force of destruction rather than domestic tranquility, an agent of chaos instead of political harmony or cosmic order.

On her status as a woman who brings death, I agree with Blenkinsopp and Gunn. Given the number of male deaths when Bathsheba is around, she clearly is a problematic character. And in this we find resonance with our other females under consideration. In Genesis 19, we find many men (and women) dying while Lot and his daughters survive. Tamar also can be considered in this light since two husbands die while married to her. While Ruth bears no direct responsibility for her husband's death, her story begins with the death of three men—her father-in-law as well as her husband and his brother. Reinhartz picks up on this death trope through her argument on named and unnamed women in the Davidic cycle. She argues that the contrast between the named wives of David and the unnamed wives and concubines of Solomon allows us to see the fruitfulness of David’s kingship in contrast to Solomon’s folly, which eventually leads to the destruction of the kingdom. Thus, female naming allows us to see David’s successes more clearly; female anonymity marks the destructive nature of Solomon’s kingship.

On the other hand, a further interpretive reading of Bathsheba turns her from an agent of chaos into a site of victimization. Cheryl Exum, like Satlow, views David as the more responsible member of the relationship. However, Exum locates in Bathsheba’s story an account of forcible sexual assault. This violation is effected not only by David, but indeed, by all later writers, redactors and commentators who perpetrate this offense by continuing (and failing to note) her literary victimization in the context of the Davidic material:

The rape of Bathsheba is something that takes place not so much in the story as by means of the story. When I refer to ‘the rape of Bathsheba’ in what follows, I use it as a metaphor to describe Bathsheba’s treatment at the hands of the androcentric biblical narrator, whose violation of her character consists both in depriving her of voice and in portraying her in an

105 Gunn, “Traditional Composition”: 223.
106 Reinhartz, 48-55.
ambiguous light that leaves her vulnerable, not simply to assault by characters in the story but also by later commentators of this story.\textsuperscript{107} 

For Exum, Bathsheba is a function of the Davidic redactors’ misogyny, whose use for Bathsheba is limited to highlighting the House of David. Bathsheba’s silence and ambiguous motivations leave her prey to all manner of editorial flights of fancy. Without voice, claims Exum, Bathsheba’s void is filled by myriad masculine ploys.

One consequence of Exum’s interpretation is that Bathsheba’s bath represents an example of David’s dominion over all his subjects, including women, rather than anything to do with Bathsheba’s motivations or ingenuity. Furthermore, Bathsheba’s silence in the text is deafening witness to all the survivors of those who treat sex as a form of power or possession. And the issue of Bathsheba’s naïve or youthful culpability allows commentators to further trivialize her character in a manner that Exum views as a violation.

The stridency of Exum’s invective against Bathsheba’s biblical ambiguity leaves little room for alternative interpretations. In a chapter entitled, “Raped by the Pen,” Exum argues that not only is Bathsheba unloved by David but she suffers a physical assault at his hands since she is textually silent in rooftop seduction account.\textsuperscript{108} Exum is speaking directly to commentators like H.W. Hertzberg and George Nicol, both of whom leave open the possibility that Bathsheba purposely bathed knowing that David was watching from his rooftop or else, at the very least, she is guilty of “feminine flirtation.”\textsuperscript{109} Exum writes:

> The narrator who disrobes Bathsheba and depicts her as the object of David’s lust is the real perpetrator of the crime against Bathsheba, and commentators like Hertzberg, who imply Bathsheba may have desired the king’s attentions, perpetuate this crime.\textsuperscript{110}

It remains unclear whether Bathsheba’s initial relations with David were consensual or coerced; how one reads that passage will determine whether one views her as Whybrey’s ewe lamb or as Exum’s unloved rape victim or Hertzberg’s flirtation. However, Exum's charge that Bathsheba is silenced by the text fails to resonate. True, she is silent as to the nature of her initial encounter with David, so there remains latitude to construe

\textsuperscript{107} Exum, 171.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 175.
\textsuperscript{110} Exum, 174.
this as a forcible sexual encounter. However, unlike other rape victims in
the Bible—whom we never hear from again—Bathsheba does not remain
textually silent. In fact, she seems to find her voice on behalf of her son
and is shown conspiring on his behalf with the prophet Nathan.

Bathsheba’s story does contain other significant voids and silences. In
mourning Uriah, we are not sure if Bathsheba is just going through the
motions until she is free to pursue David or if she is actually despondent
and, if so, if she really yearns to marry the king or not. The story of her
request to King Solomon on behalf of his half-brother Adonijah seems
intentionally vague regarding whether Bathsheba fully realizes the
consequence of her request or not. Exum sees ambiguity in Bathsheba’s
story only as a negative, an opportunity for misogynistic fantasies. To my
way of thinking, Bathsheba’s ambiguity opens the door to a multitude of
ideas, not all of which necessarily reproduce patriarchal power
arrangements.

In contrast to Exum, Randall Bailey offers a counter argument with
political overtones. In analyzing the Hebrew of the David-Bathsheba
affair, Bailey asserts that Bathsheba responds to David’s invitation in full
knowledge of herself and her authority. His language analysis
demonstrates that the use of the verb shelach (to send) is used in
conjunction with female power and influence—Rahab in Joshua 2:21;
Deborah in Judges 4:6; Delilah in Judges 16:18; and Jezebel in 1 Kings
19:2. Bailey finds that this verb is also used by Bathsheba when she sends
word to King David that she is pregnant (2 Sam. 11:5). Concludes Bailey,

Thus Bathsheba is placed within a highly select number of powerful and/or
devious women through the use of this verb ... [it] raises the possibility that
this unit ... is one of political importance in which a woman is the prime
mover.”

Bailey affirms that Bathsheba is the granddaughter of Ahithophel,
daughter of Eliam and therefore, from a prominent political family. For
Bailey, Bathsheba’s bath then becomes a bedtrick with the intent to lure
the king into a politically advantageous alliance not only for Bathsheba,
but for her family as a whole. David’s alliance with her is one of political

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111 Other biblical rapes include the unnamed concubine of Judges 19 (who never
speaks); Tamar and Ammon (2 Sam. 13); and the interaction between Dinah and
Shechem, where the issue of consent is also somewhat unclear (Genesis 34).
112 Randall Bailey, David in Love and War: the Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-
12. JSOT Sup 75 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 86.
113 Ibid.
importance, especially in light of Ahithophel’s treasonous defection to Absalom, which Bailey places chronologically before the Bathsheba affair.  

Bailey concludes:

... perhaps we should rethink whether this unit is a narrative primarily concerned with “sexual lust gone awry” or rather with a story of political intrigue in which sex becomes a tool of politics. In other words, is this not really a story of “political marriage”? 

Thus, Bathsheba is now a politically motivated woman, trying to find a means to reestablish her disgraced family. The bath becomes a public act intended to renegotiate the power differential on behalf of the stigmatized house of Ahithophel. 

On the other extreme, George Nicol contends that Bathsheba is without political agenda. For Nicol, Bathsheba is simply a resourceful, cunning female who manipulate the situation to her advantage. Nicol celebrates the rampant ambiguity present in Bathsheba's actions, noting, “Although the presentation of the character may be ambiguous, and that ambiguity ultimately precludes dogmatic solutions, once it has been noted it may be necessary to attempt to press beyond it and to consider which of the possible interpretations is to be preferred.”

In pressing beyond, Nicol clearly identifies Bathsheba as a self-conscious, intentional woman, wife and mother. In contrast to Exum’s characterization, Nicol considers Bathsheba a woman of action, especially in light of her machinations on behalf of Solomon. Concludes Nicol:

She appears to be depicted as a resourceful woman rather than one who is used, and the resourcefulness which she clearly displays in 1 Kings weighs the balance in favour of an interpretation of character which pays due attention to her as a clever woman, sufficiently calculating to see every political opportunity and resourceful enough to bring each opportunity to fruition.

By pushing the ambiguity in the Bathsheba stories, Nicol argues for Bathsheba’s more robust characterization based upon motifs like the bedtrick and her later handling of David in Solomon’s ascendency. Nicol opines that in the end neither David nor Bathsheba come out particularly

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114 Ibid., 90.  
115 Ibid., 88.  
116 Nicol, 362.  
117 Ibid., 363.
well in the story. Unlike the Bathsheba of many other commentators, Nicol's Bathsheba is free from outside political or social accretions and can be viewed more responsibly as a self-conscious agent of action than as any sort of political pawn. However, Nicol fails to consider that Bathsheba, as David's subject, could hardly refuse his offer. Her response, like Dinah's or the unnamed concubine in Judges 19, is not recorded. Perhaps she is a clever, resourceful woman—but perhaps Bathsheba’s later ingenuity came as a result of her forced encounter with David, not prior to it. The text will clearly allow both interpretations but unlike Exum's charge against ambiguity, is loathe to settle on one or the other.  

While Bathsheba cannot be read under the rubric of levirate or dynastic aims, her story carries many of the same motifs of Lot's daughters, Tamar and Ruth. Like them, Bathsheba is a vulnerable woman. Her husband is not only away at war but he is a foreigner, a Hittite. There is a scene of possible sexual trickery and a later scene of outright manipulation fueled by ambition for her son. All four of these stories lack overt signs of the religious cult of the time. Nor are we privy to the interior motivations behind their actions. Individual initiative and female inventiveness in this context seems to be for their own ends and not for the good of any communal or religious purposes. Thus, while Bathsheba may be a cunning, resourceful woman, the question becomes, to or for what end? Is her possible seduction of the king fueled by personal ambition? Or, having been seduced by the king and finding herself with a problematic pregnancy, does she decide to make the best of it? Is that the true measure of a resourceful woman? Nicol fails to answer these questions but perhaps we can if we continue to ask what we might make of resourceful women in the Bible and suggest what sorts of claims we might make for this motif.

The Woman in the Text

Interpretations situate these women in service to any number of purposes that ultimately fail to unearth anything new about the women in the stories. For the most part, we read them as fulfilling larger communal aspirations rather than any ends of their own. The women distinguish themselves in important ways: as signifiers of Israel the underdog who makes good, or the redacted valorization of the Davidic line through their efforts, or even

the aegis of God working to achieve His ends for the chosen people, even though God fails to appreciably appear in any of their stories.

While those hermeneutics might be useful and appropriate, they fail to fully inform our reading of these as female narratives. These are stories where women play substantial roles. Yet, in many of the standard interpretations we have considered, the women remain mere literary devices, pointing the way to the larger textual aims rather than offering anything noteworthy as gendered texts. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that scholars must be suspicious of the rampant and unexamined androcentrism that looks at women, finding them in every way (socially, economically, politically and sexually) liminal, or marginal, with respect to men. Bynum suggests that looking at women from the perspective of the men in the text assumes an unvoiced symmetry where women are in some sense rendered as equivalent to men, desiring the same ends or the same goals but in some sort of corollary or inversely gendered way. There exists a tacit assumption that female inferiors are exact inversions of their male superiors: “If the superior in society generate images of lowliness in liminality, the inferior will generate images of power.”

For Bynum, gender does not operate that way. True gender symbols are not the mirror-image of one another or examples of women existing in inverse correspondence to men. True gendered texts allow us to see with women, rather than looking at them as near-men or inverse-men. When scholars stand with women textually—rather than viewing them from the standpoint of their utility to larger external aims—they find not symmetry or correlation but uniqueness. Reading and understanding the women in the stories this way enhances our understanding of female social drama rather than reinforcing our appreciation of male ones.

These four stories defy easy interpretive categorization as simply narratives of Davidic ancestresses or levirate concerns. In situating the bedtrick as a site of sexual politics at the center of these narratives, I find symmetry and intertextual links among the four stories. We can better grasp the gendered components within these stories by viewing female intrigue as the central plot device to these narratives. These incidents of sexual maneuvering represent an intensely gendered power struggle, undertaken and achieved in ways that overturn the established power hegemonies in the text.

120 Ibid., 33-34.
121 Ibid., 32-33.
How might we interpret these sexual politics beyond reductive female sex-for-power arguments? We need to progress outside of established arguments and even beyond standard biblical criticism itself. These four stories, when not read in levirate or dynastic contexts, contain similar motifs—including the bed trick. In addition, critical approaches prove useful in helping us to read and interpret these four stories together. Folkloric methodologies offer other avenues for organizing stories and tales. Structural methodologies from folklore group narratives with female characters together in dynamic ways that emphasize and categorize women of enterprise and independence. It is to that approach that we now turn in order to make a more definitive argument for the female heroic in the Hebrew Bible.
CHAPTER FOUR
DEFINING THE FEMALE HERO

The Woman in the Text

We have seen how standard biblical interpretations often reproduce hegemonic discussions of power already encoded in the text. In this analysis, biblical women metaphorically or historically communicate much about Israel. For instance, mothers are salvific in their child-bearing because they serve the higher aims of salvation history. Or we understand that stories of turnabout by the powerless speak mightily to an exiled diaspora people. Reading the stories of women as prefiguring David and his ensuing line conveys a good deal about later kingship.

There is no doubt that the study of women often results in enlightening our appreciation of men. Theories about women—literary or historical—cannot stand if they fail to contemplate basic gender dichotomies—either as biological or a culturally defined reality. However, most of the scholarship that we have considered thus far results in thoughtful, measured ideas about institutional Israel or men or both. Female characters are either valorized for their service to the institutional aims of the text or because they can do what a man can do by being a trickster or an underdog. But when looking at women’s narratives for what they tell us about the men or the nation in the stories, we invariably fail to see the women. Folklorist Joseph Mbele noted the same problem in African epics. Mbele refers to the way in which women are acclaimed as “real heroes” when they accomplish roles established for men in their societies:

It would satisfy many of us if women were recognized and celebrated as women, and not on the basis of how they accomplish male roles as defined by their respective societies. The kind of heroism bestowed on women for playing male roles is problematical, since it entails the alienation of women from their identity. The irony, still, is that the societies involved do not see this as problematical: the women's assumption of male roles and their subsequent accomplishments mark these women as real heroes according to the standards and expectations of their societies. In other words, these
societies accept, idealize, and celebrate the very process we might consider alienating.¹

Put another way, heroes are usually men. In effect when women become like men they are celebrated as heroes. When women do what (male) heroes do—when they meet the expected standards of their societies—then they are accorded valorous status. Mbele’s criticism asks that “heroism” be redefined beyond this broad honorific category.

I believe that Mbele’s point rings true. Standard notions of female heroism match or at least approximate an expected pattern of heroic imagery. Figures such as Joan of Arc, Boadicea, Brunhild of The Niebelungelied or the biblical Deborah and Judith fit society’s expectation of the heroic. These militaristic-type heroines exemplify the same quantities of robust bravery, strength of arms, shrewd cunning and action as their male cognates. Joan of Arc bests the English at the siege of Orléans; Judith beheads Holofernes to save Bethulia. These female characters reproduce the universal experiences of the hero. But there is nothing truly gendered about their actions. These characters present no unique traits that would identify them as uniquely female heroes; all we have here are examples of women who successfully act like men. Nothing remarkably female attaches to what they do; they simply imitate masculine characteristics. Joan even adopts male dress, one of the significant cultural transgressions for which she gives her life. In effecting military victory for the good of the community, we idealize and celebrate these women as heroes because they do what we think (male) heroes ought to do. Or, in the words of Mbele, I would argue that these female figures are celebrated for how well they play the man.

A fuller conception of the heroic must take gender more seriously. This requires different questions and an altered set of assumptions. I do not deny the power of the (implied) masculine model. But we should act with greater awareness. First, distinctive gender issues deserve consideration within a specific narrative context. By “gendered context,” I am referring to narratives where the gender of the protagonist becomes a deciding factor in the narrative as a whole. Female narratives can be read, analyzed and codified in the context of and with reference to other female narratives or their male analogues. A female narrative informs and reinforces a characters’ quintessential “woman-ness” by reflecting a gendered reality—for instance, a world of limited choices and limited freedoms. A true female narrative does not seek to overcome gender by

symbolizing women emulating men or adopting male attitudes in dress and action. Rather, these tales follow a specific typology in affirming their protagonist's essential femaleness via a remarkable individual independence of thought and action within their limited narrative confines.

In addition, we should more vigorously interrogate the androcentric assumptions behind our reading and interpretation of female narratives in the Bible. When faced with universal concepts such as heroism, the addition of gender as a classification potentially enriches the discussion. It follows that the sort of vibrant enterprise exhibited in our four narratives can be labeled in ways that have nothing to do with Israel, royal succession or David.

Therefore, this chapter reads biblical narratives of women and puts them in conversation with other, non-biblical female narratives. Alternative meanings more readily emerge when the Bible’s ideological stance is deemphasized.

This process of reading different stories together is common in folkloric studies. In reading women’s narratives from other contexts, several folklorists have remarked upon the identifiable similarities among female stories. These commonalities include women manipulating men, and often conflicting ideas about the female character’s morality. We find these motifs in some of the female narratives in the Bible. A folkloric method therefore might provide another lens through which to understand these biblical stories. Our four narratives can possibly find common cause with female narratives outside the biblical context. Obviously, female narratives from other historical and social contexts have nothing to do with Israel and its institutional and/or theological agenda. Thus, a folkloric approach offers another reading on these stories, a reading that highlights gender rather than theological tropes. Furthermore, such a method might lend itself to hypotheses regarding the beginnings and original intent of these female narratives, with the caveat that any conclusions are only conjecture at best since we lack original source materials.

This new brand of heroic designation presents an opportunity to consider the women of the Bible in a novel way. This is an argument for not only reading the narratives of biblical women together but also using a broad range of narratives to make claims for the female heroic in the Bible. This method means that we are not comparing them to male narratives nor are we asking our female characters to say or do things that symbolize the religious and/or institutional aims of the Bible. Rather, we are isolating these stories to see how women negotiate their restricted choices and narrow freedoms in non-coordinated and subversive ways.
The customary imposition of a male paradigm works against the hope of deriving anything new or insightful from legends and narratives of female characters. Gender becomes immaterial when we look at women in order to discover something about men. My task is to reverse that process.

### Semantics and History

One of the first problems encountered in this analysis is one of semantics. When I apply the term *hero* or *heroine*, I am applying it to literary characters who serve as the main focus of a narrative. For this study, a hero refers to narrative characters who embody specific, demonstrable traits.

Furthermore, this work samples a series of narrative genres in order to make its point. For instance, England’s Henry V, the hero of Agincourt, as well as Joan of Arc and Boadicea were real historical people. King David might have existed; his verifiable reality is still debated. The Bible’s Judith and Esther exist only as narrative figures. This raises important questions: can a lived figure be a hero, or must a hero be only legendary or fictional? Are the traits of historical figures different enough to require their own heroic category? Do we damage our heroic standard by mixing historical and legendary figures? Or, for the purposes of this study, are heroes textual?

For the moment, let us consider Joan of Arc. Joan’s actual accomplishments can be historically verified. She bested the Burgundians at Patay. She was tried by the English and burned at the stake as a heretic in Rouen in May 1431. However, proper documentation and authentication

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3 The inscription on fragments of a stele, dated roughly from the 9th-8th centuries BCE, found in northern Israel between 1993 and 1994 refers to *bêt Dawid*, or the house of David. For some archaeologists and historians, this is proof that a Davidic dynasty existed. However, most are reluctant to see this as proof positive for an historical king over a united monarchy named David. See Eugene H. Merrill, “Archaeology and Biblical History: Its Uses and Abuses,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. David M. Howard and Michael A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 90; Walter C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 225; Biran, Avraham and Joseph Naveh, "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment." *Israel Exploration Journal* 45 (1995): 1-18.
of her actions are primarily the concerns of the biographer, not the folklorist. Yet, the illustrious literary accretions since her death make for rich textual fodder.\footnote{Marina Warner, \textit{Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism} (New York: Knopf, 1981), 3-10.} For the historical biographer, Joan’s mythic embellishments detract from historical reconstructions of her life. However, for literary analysts and specifically folklorists, these heroic embellishments demonstrate an artistry that scholars refer to as life stories being made to fit a heroic pattern.\footnote{Jezewski, 56.} The question of a character’s historical reality neither adds to nor detracts from her narrative’s depiction of her heroic character.

All we know about biblical women comes to us via texts. The concept of the heroic is a textual category and all heroes are textual. Therefore, I will employ a literary method to get at the gendered elements within the narratives. In this, I will reproduce the interests of a folklorist, not a biographer. My purpose is to apply a folkloric analysis to narratives of female characters that live on in oral or written accounts. The historical authenticity of these female characters contributes no advantage (nor disadvantage) to their literary exploits. Rather, these narrative bona fides provide ample scholarly justification for most folkloric work and are therefore sufficient for this study.\footnote{Concerning the historicity of real or fictional heroic characters, see Alan Dundes, \textit{Interpreting Folklore} (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980); Raglan’s more limited vision, FitzRoy Raglan, "The Hero of Tradition," \textit{Folklore} 45 (1934): 212-231; and, Jezewski's discussion of Raglan and Dundes' approach to this, 55-56.}

**Who is a Hero?**

Like the oft-repeated Supreme Court definition of pornography, we know a hero when we see one. Traditionally, heroic literature presents the hero as a martial champion, one who excels at arms in the masculine arena of male camaraderie on the field of battle. Gilgamesh, king of ancient Uruk, is such a hero. Arjuna, the unrivaled archer of the \textit{Mahabharata}, is such a hero as well. Both prove their superiority in the fight; courage and ferocity serve as their essential battle characteristics as well as their primary aristocratic virtues.\footnote{Jackson, 12.} A hero is an extraordinary human being who emphasizes the individual’s alienation from ordinary humanity through
Defining the Female Hero

dangerous pursuits and unusual endeavors. In psychological terms, he overcomes, to the acclaim of all, by rejecting what has come before and succeeding the previous generation. In besting others as well as himself, he achieves transcendence. The hero’s unique task, says folklorist Heda Jason, is to “demarvelize” the world: through his intervention, the extraordinary individual allows for a human resolution to problems.

Hero narratives fulfill a diverse array of social functions. For example, tales of successful underdogs help to ameliorate social tensions between elites and subordinates. Heroic tales also provide a means to standardize group values and communal identification. Furthermore, legendary tales render the world less capricious: the tales normalize a society’s sense of personal belonging while leaving readers comfortably within a permissible sphere of operation. The heroic quest becomes one’s own—even though one need never leave the comfort of home.

Universal Heroic Motifs

Common parallels exist between male and female narratives, suggesting that there are aspects of a universal heroic that are not gender-specific. Surveying these many motifs and narrative models, several patterns emerge:

- The hero experiences conflict through dissociation from the known;
- The hero overcomes difficult or lower status to reach a more secure, socially successful position;
- There is an inversion of reality—the lowly heroes disguise themselves as elites or vice versa;

12 Ibid., 139-140.
A hero symbolizes a positive view of change and human success in a fundamentally benevolent universe.\textsuperscript{13}

Both male and female narratives are replete with conflict that requires resolution. Male heroic figures tend to resolve conflict through military and martial prowess. Their combat tends toward the public sphere of the battlefield, the court or the marketplace. Achilles, Siegfried and biblical heroes like Joshua and David make their name in feats of arms. By contrast, for every martial character like Joan of Arc or Amazonian warriors, there is a figure like Scheherazade or Esther. That is, one aspect of female narratives highlights conflicts concerning a more feminized field of battle—inside the home, the palace, or the bedroom. The tales of Andromeda and Medea both focus on obtaining a higher status male for their own purposes. Cleopatra takes first Caesar then Marc Antony for similar dynastic and political aims. Queen Esther’s private chambers provide the setting for her appeal on behalf of her people to Ahasuerus as well as Haman’s fall. Thus, the field of combat for female heroes often moves along domestic relational lines, tying them to the home or family.

Another heroic trope for both genders centers on destiny. Male and female narratives exemplify an individual realizing some greater imperative. The heroic moment focuses on the hero’s advancement toward fulfilling that unique destiny.\textsuperscript{14} In \textit{The Song of Roland}, the hero Roland only blows the Olifant at Roncevaux so that others know where to find his dead body, his destiny fulfilled by exposing the treachery of others.

The core quality for female narratives shows a similar individual enterprise toward destiny. The female hero, like the male hero, is motivated by a sense of destiny, or is compelled to act in accordance with the irresistible course of events. These events can include achieving a higher status or securing her economic well-being, or, through her example, pointing others to a higher, transcendent truth. Perpetua, a martyr of the early church, actively seeks martyrdom by steadfastly


\textsuperscript{14} Jan de Vries, \textit{Heroic Song and Heroic Legend} (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 220-229.
declining a pagan marriage and a comfortable domestic existence. She chooses to enter the lion’s den for her faith.

The quest or the journey plays a large role in heroic narratives. Victor Turner and Joseph Campbell argue that the heroic moment is the quest itself rather than the realization or the culmination of the journey. The quest in male heroic tales often requires movement out and away—geographically as well as physically and emotionally—from the place of birth or upbringing. This all-encompassing quest serves as the driving force behind heroic literature’s remarkable impact. Victor Turner describes the heroic quest as one of inhabiting a space that is neither here nor there, not in the world but certainly not out of the world either. This represents a boundary experience, a circumstance where a man can remake himself and establish a name for himself. This powerful social marginality beckons to each individual; however, only the truly heroic will answer the call. Heroes then are valiant men who move into this fringe of paradox and ambiguity, embracing marginality for a season. Having once undertaken this journey, these champions reenter their community with greater authority, insight and wisdom.\(^{15}\) The biblical Jesus travels into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights to wrestle with conscience and evil before he can truly undertake his destiny as an itinerant preacher and teacher. In \textit{The Once and Future King}, young Arthur must leave his adoptive home with Sir Ector in the “Forest Sauvage” in order to fulfill his destiny.\(^{16}\) Marginality, alienation and finally, reintegration (dissociation from the known to the unknown and then back again) mark male stories.

But, for male heroes, because of the arduous and life-changing nature of the journey, the return from the quest often renders social reintegration difficult if not impossible.\(^{17}\) One of the best examples of this is Frodo in the last installment (\textit{The Return of the King}) in \textit{The Lord of the Rings} trilogy. After completing his quest to rid Middle Earth of the last ring, he returns to his home in The Shire only to discover that, unlike his boon companion Sam, he can no longer live the simple life he once knew among the hobbits. He leaves his natal land forever to live among the Elves, for he says,

\[\ldots\text{ I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in}\]


\(^{16}\) T.H. White, \textit{The Once and Future King} (London: Collins, 1958), 552-553.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 4-11; Campbell, 51; 59-60; 391.
danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.  

Like male heroic tales, a female hero’s quest provides the energy that fuels the action. However, female stories emphasize geographical stasis. Female narratives rarely demonstrate the sort of physical movement marked by the male hero’s radical leave-taking. In fact, women have limited ability to move freely outside the domestic sphere. Thus we find that female characters work within their context—both literally as well as textually—to bring about the realization of their objectives. Judith, in her striving to best the foreign invader Holofernes, moves only to his encampment outside of her besieged Bethulia. Boadicea, the Iceni queen who revolted against Roman occupation in the 1st century, never travelled far from her Norfolk territories.

But, the female character’s achievement of her goal, while important and significant, marks the beginning of the end of her narrative. The female hero fades from the narrative once her goal has been realized. Scheherazade’s fantastic storytelling, part of her quest to stay alive, carries readers through the thousand and one nights. Once her king is pacified, her journey is over. It is not marriage to the king which motivates the action but Scheherazade’s efforts to forestall forced mortality.

Finally, Mark Levon Byrne identifies a further trope within the heroic metamyth. He claims the West emphasizes the heroics of men who overcome death by besting other men. In death-defying heroics

[the hero becomes the ideal of manhood by defending the society against its enemies, to the extent that a god … reflect[s] the warlike nature of most European cultures.  

This valorization of the defeat of death is responsible in the modern context for a one-sided masculine heroic expression. By contrast, Byrne concludes that the drive towards fulfilling one’s individual needs is the immature expression of the heroic:

Perhaps we can speak of two kinds of heroes. The first is immature, driven by the need to assert his individual needs and desires in the world… What distinguishes these two kinds of heroes is their attitude to death: the former

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defends against it, while the latter has in some way surrendered to it and is
more “alive” as a consequence.\textsuperscript{20}

Byrne argues that the masculine hero of classical history and literature
is one who overcomes death. However, a look at female characters in the
Bible shows that they in fact do assert their individual prerogatives.
However, their value often arises from their ability to reproduce life.
Their single minded focus on producing a child against the odds fuels their
trickery. And having achieved that child, they are remarkable as well for
the fact that their child usually earns a significant role after them in the
Bible. Their heroism owes not to their military might nor a violent death
on the field of battle. Rather, female heroes in the Bible overcome death
by reproducing life through their sons.

Taken all together, we find that none of these universal aspects works
against establishing unique traits for female narratives. Instead, the
commonalities between male and female heroic narratives suggest that
there are universal heroic values that transcend gender. Thus it might
indeed be possible to argue for a truly universal and genderless heroic
narrative (that is, one that does not assume that female figures will
accommodate themselves to male standard or vice versa). However, for
our purposes, these general features—the quest, the role of destiny and
conflict, the field of battle—represent broad heuristic categories that
certify the heroic authenticity of a narrative. As we focus on how the
gender of actors influences the contours of these motifs, we will develop a
new perspective on the heroic metamyth.

\textbf{Characterization of the Male Heroic}

In the early part of the twentieth century, psychologist and philosopher
Otto Rank identified significant parallels among stories of disparate
cultural heroes like Gilgamesh, Cyrus of Persia, Romulus and Remus,
Siegfried, Moses and Jesus based on a comparison of traits and actions in
their narratives. He simplified these down to a few salient points:

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 36.
1. The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king.
2. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles.
3. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative).
4. As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box (meaning, set afloat in a body of water).
5. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by a humble woman.
6. As an adult, he finds his parents.
7. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other.
8. Finally he achieves rank and honors.

Rank identified within these narratives structural similarities such as an overriding interest in the hero's parentage, access to power and personal privilege. For Rank, these correlations represent not character traits but rather psychological truths: they symbolize the individuation of the adult and the child's nostalgic longing for the safety, comfort and innocence of childhood. In Rank's somewhat circular argument, these psychological universals reflect the human longing to identify with something outside one’s self but, is in the end, the self:

The true hero of the romance is, therefore, the ego, which finds itself in the hero, by reverting to the time when the ego was itself a hero, through its first heroic act, i.e., the revolt against the father … Myths are, therefore, created by adults, by means of retrograde childhood fantasies, the hero being credited with the myth-maker's personal infantile history.22

In a similar fashion, an Austrian philologist and diplomat named Johann von Hahn (late nineteenth century) also developed his own hero trait list in an attempt to isolate what characteristics attached to heroes:

21 Rank, 61.
22 Ibid., 85.
1. The hero is of illegitimate birth
2. His mother is the princess of the country
3. His father is a god or a foreigner
4. There are signs warning of his ascendance
5. For this reason he is abandoned
6. He is suckled by animals
7. He is brought up by a childless shepherd couple
8. He is a high-spirited youth
9. He seeks service in a foreign country
10. He returns victorious and goes back to the foreign land
11. He slays his original persecutors, agrees to rule the country, and sets his mother free
12. He founds cities
13. The manner of his death is extraordinary
14. He is reviled because of incest and he dies young
15. He dies by an act of revenge at the hands of an insulted servant
16. He murders his younger brother

More recent folklorists depend look to methods and conclusions developed in Vladimir Propp’s *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1927; translated into English in 1958). Propp reduced Russian heroic folktales down into "morphemes," the simplest and least reducible linguistic elements from the basic sentence structure of the tales. From these morphemes, Propp isolated what he considered the most essential components in folktales, identifying thirty-one typologies or basic elements. These then could be utilized as a guide for recognizing heroic narratives across cultural and historic situations. While not all tales will include all thirty-one traits, Propp argued that when a trait did occur, it would follow the same order in all stories. Thus, a predictable sequence defined the essential structural component of heroic literature. The order of the heroic is as follows, although, again, not all the elements will appear but the sequence will remain the same regardless:

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Figure 3. Dramatis Personae (The Hero; Propp) 25

1. A member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced);
2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero (“don't go there”, “go to this place”);
3. The interdiction is violated (villain enters the tale);
4. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (either villain tries to find the children/jewels; or intended victim questions the villain);
5. The villain gains information about the victim;
6. The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of victim or victim's belongings (trickery; villain disguised, tries to win confidence of victim);
7. Victim taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy;
8. Villain causes harm/injury to family member (by abduction, theft of magical agent, spoiling crops, plunders in other forms, causes a disappearance, expels someone, casts spell on someone, substitutes child, commits murder, imprisons/detains someone, threatens forced marriage, provides nightly torments); Alternatively, a member of family lacks something or desires something (magical potion;
9. Misfortune or lack is made known, (hero is dispatched, hears call for help / alternative is that victimized hero is sent away, freed from imprisonment);
10. Seeker agrees to, or decides upon counter-action;
11. Hero leaves home;
12. Hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, preparing the way for his/her receiving magical agent or helper (donor);
13. Hero reacts to actions of future donor (withstands/fails the test, frees captive, reconciles disputants, performs service, uses adversary's powers against them);
14. Hero acquires use of a magical agent (directly transferred, located, purchased, prepared, spontaneously appears, eaten/drunk, help offered by other characters);
15. Hero is transferred, delivered or led to whereabouts of an object of the search;
16. Hero and villain join in direct combat;
17. Hero is branded (wounded/mark, receives ring or scarf);
18. Villain is defeated (killed in combat, defeated in contest, killed while asleep, banished);

25 Propp, 25-64.
19. Initial misfortune or lack is resolved (object of search distributed, spell broken, slain person revived, captive freed);
20. Hero returns;
21. Hero is pursued (pursuer tries to kill, eat, undermine the hero);
22. Hero is rescued from pursuit (obstacles delay pursuer, hero hides or is hidden, hero transforms unrecognizably, hero saved from attempt on his/her life);
23. Hero unrecognized, arrives home or in another country;
24. False hero presents unfounded claims;
25. Difficult task proposed to the hero (trial by ordeal, riddles, test of strength/endurance, other tasks);
26. Task is resolved;
27. Hero is recognized (by mark, brand, or thing given to him/her);
28. False hero or villain is exposed;
29. Hero is given a new appearance (is made whole, handsome, with new garments);
30. Villain is punished;
31. Hero marries and ascends the throne (is rewarded/promoted).

Propp insists that the traits present themselves in this particular order and that, taken together, provide the key to heroic identification. However, few scholars slavishly adopt Propp’s rigid chronological dictates. Most find greater richness in his structural methodology as a means to teasing out the ample mix of identifiable traits. As such, Propp’s methods find wide application across studies of heroic literature. 26

Applying Propp’s modified method to her reading of folk narratives, Israeli folklorist Heda Jason presents her own trait chart based upon a cross-cultural comparison:

Figure 4. The Hero’s Biography (Jason) 27

1. Prologue/genealogy of protagonist
2. Complications at conception
3. Unusual birth
4. Celebration of hero's birth

26 Unlike Heda Jason, who knows and refers to Propp in her work, Alan Dundes has pointed out that von Hahn, Rank and Raglan all worked in near isolation without reference to or seemingly even knowledge of others doing essentially the same sort of structural work on hero narratives; see Interpreting Folklore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 229-231.
27 Jason, “King David”: 87-106.
Each folklorist attempts a comparable trait patterning approach and each produced their own set of traits and characteristics that fits their reading of heroic narratives. Thus, the efficacy of trait patterning as a methodology seems firmly entrenched in folkloric research.28

However, whatever success trait patterning realizes in establishing a hero’s attributes soon fades in the face of gender distinctions. Gender is not a defining category for these studies. What invariably becomes evident is that female narratives are limited in their ability to evince universal equivalency with male-oriented narratives. For example, few female characters achieve victory in battle or pass laws the way standard male heroic characters do. In fact, few women inhabit the same conceptual and cultural universe as their male counterparts; by and large, their stories sequester women within domestic spheres of influence. So, at best, the imposition of male categories on female narratives realizes only modest success in establishing anything new or noteworthy with respect to women and the heroic. Clearly such a method tends to measure a female character’s ability to fit androcentric notions of the heroic. Therefore, when the rare female character matches the established heroic ideology, we basically celebrate her success in acting like a man. This hardly makes her a female hero.

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Female Heroes

Propp’s structuralist methods continue to influence present scholarship. For example, Ilana Dan has developed a structural analysis that focuses on the persecuted heroine, a cross-cultural trope identified earlier in the twentieth century. She applies Proppian categories to her texts (as well as some material from Russian folklorist and morphologist Aleksandr Nikiforov, who, Dan argues, anticipated Propp's work by at least a year).²⁹ Dan focuses on four types of stories of the innocent or persecuted maiden.³⁰ This maiden experiences trials and conflict first in her birth home, then in her married home. Away from family and friends, she must find resolution within herself rather than in her circumstances. Dan conjectures that this female character inhabits a broad range of cross-cultural tales.

Figure 5. The Innocent Persecuted Heroine (Dan) ³¹

1. Heroine is persecuted or threatened in her family home
   a. Family gives heroine over to villain
   b. Villain harms heroine
   c. Family banishes heroine, or heroine runs away from family

2. Rescue of heroine and meeting of future husband
   a. Helper aids heroine in her distress
   b. Agent connects heroine with future husband
   c. Future husband meets heroine

3. Prince marries heroine
   a. Heroine bears child(ren)


³⁰ She identifies these motifs as the innocent slandered maiden; a variant of Snow White; a persecuted stepdaughter tale; and the black and white bride tale.

4. Heroine separates from husband
   a. Husband temporarily leaves home; heroine thereby exposed to to villain's intrigues; OR husband sends her on journey, entrusting her to villain
   b. Villain intrigues against heroine; OR villain actually harms heroine
   c. Husband banishes heroine (or she runs away from husband and his family); OR heroine simply wanders off

5. Heroine rehabilitates herself
   a. Heroine temporarily changes her identity in order to approach her family
   b. Benefactor helps heroine
   c. Heroine works to attract attention of others

6. Heroine is rehabilitated and villain punished
   a. Husband discovers villain's treachery
   b. Husband and others set out in search of heroine
   c. Heroine recognizes husband/family/villains.
   d. Heroine reveals identity to others
   e. Heroine tells her story to others
   f. Benevolent other(s) punish villain(s)
   g. Husband reinstalls heroine

Says Dan, "The heroine is depicted as particularly virtuous: she will not be seduced, even in the most horrible circumstances, and is charitable. The villains, in contrast, are sinners: seducers, slanderers, murderers, and misers."\(^{32}\)

Although Propp's work did not concentrate on gender or feminine characters, Dan uses Proppian analysis to tease out the persecuted maiden and establish the elements of this particular gendered trope. But, like many who employ Proppian analysis, Dan’s work is limited to the analysis of the structure and order of the narratives and an unpacking of the unique identifiers within those narrative elements. However, this method does allow for the identification of some gendered elements within the heroic literature genre.\(^{33}\) While Dan is concerned with gender, she focuses

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{33}\) For a passing critique of Dan's analysis, see Steven Swann Jones, "The Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre: An Analysis of its Structure and Themes," *Western Folklore* 52, no. 1 (Jan., 1993), 14. Jones argues that Dan's efforts are limited
Defining the Female Hero

exclusively on folkloric or fairy tale heroines (whose stories usually end in marriage) rather than biblical women.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, Dan considers one particular type of heroic narrative: the innocent persecuted heroine. More tropes than this exist for women, especially women in the Bible.

Despite this, Propp continues to exert influence—including influence upon current biblical scholarship. For instance, Pamela Milne finds that Propp’s approach hold great relevance for biblical studies. Propp’s methodology, says Milne, furthers the sort of linguistic analysis developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, contributing to the ongoing structuralist analysis of biblical stories.\textsuperscript{35} Some significant examples of this type of Proppian biblical structuralism are Jack Sasson and Harold Fisch, both of whom applied Propp's methods to Ruth's story.\textsuperscript{36} For example, invoking a Proppian analysis, Fisch claims that the constitutive elements of Ruth’s story find typological resonance with levirate tales such as Genesis 38. This, Fisch argues, provides a "totalizing" reading of biblical material that reveals previously masked structural linkages between seemingly different narratives. He proposes that Israel’s salvation history lies embedded within those linked narrative structures. While most consider Proppian analysis ahistorical, in this instance, Fisch does not. He suggests that these shared constitutive elements results in an encompassing historical chronicle that cannot be fully discussed or understood without reference to its grammatical others (Genesis 19; Genesis 38).\textsuperscript{37} Without Propp’s structuralist approach, claims Fisch, these links would not be textually visible.

**Heroic Trait Patterning: Raglan and Jezewski**

This structuralist approach is not unique to Propp. Lord FitzRoy Raglan, an amateur British folklorist working in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, applied this comparative method to various tales in order to elucidate a

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\textsuperscript{34} Dundes argues that the fairy tale genre usually ends in marriage, not death; *Interpreting Folklore*, 231.

\textsuperscript{35} Milne suggests that Saussure’s lectures between 1906 and 1911 predate *Morphology of the Folktale* and further contribute to the general argument that structural work helps identify “internally coherent systems” within narratives; see Pamela J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 23-25.

\textsuperscript{36} Sasson, "The Issue of Ge'ullah,” 52-64; Fisch, 425-437.

\textsuperscript{37} Fisch, 428; 435-437.
common set of heroic characteristics. For Raglan, taken together, hero tales represent ritual incidents transformed over time into heroic legends. Thus, heroes exist outside anything that we would call historical reality. An heroic epic or legend is simply a secularized myth:

… the story of the hero of tradition is the story not of real incidents in the life of a real man, but of ritual incidents in the career of a ritual personage … [I]f they really did exist their activities were largely of a ritual character or else their stories were altered to make them conform to type.38

Raglan's method therefore traced these various “types” as they presented themselves in unrelated heroic tales. Like Propp, Raglan distills culturally and historically diverse hero stories down to basic, identifiable characteristics. But, unlike Propp, Raglan confines himself primarily to Greek mythic heroes (rather than Propp’s Russian folktale heroes).39 Furthermore, Raglan feels that the precise order of events carries little weight Looking at different stories across a range of cultures and eras, Raglan develops a system of 22 traits for deducing a character's heroic standing:40

**Hero Traits (Raglan, 1934)**

1. His mother is a royal virgin
2. His father is a king, and
3. Often a near relative of his mother.
4. Birth circumstances are unusual.
5. He is reputed to be the son of a god,
6. At birth, attempt is made on his life, often by his father, but
7. He is spirited away, and
8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.

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38 Raglan, "The Hero of Tradition," 220.
39 These include Oedipus, Theseus, Romulus, Heracles, Perseus, Jason, Bellerophon, Pelops, Asclepios, Dionysos, Apollo and Zeus as well as Semitic heroes such as Joseph, Moses and Elijah, the Norse Sigurd and Britain’s mythic Arthur and Robin Hood, among others.
9. Little information about his childhood.
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
11. After a victory over the king and/or giant, dragon or wild beast
12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
15. Prescribes law, and
16. Later he loses favor with the gods and his subjects, and
17. Is driven from the throne and the city.
18. He meets with a mysterious death,
19. Often on a hilltop.
20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless
22. He has one or more holy sites/sepulchers.

In Raglan’s schema, Oedipus, Theseus and Moses rank high on the heroic scale since they embody a majority of these traits. By contrast, Elijah, Sigurd/Siegfried and King Arthur are only middling examples; their exploits fail to fulfill the full range of Raglan’s identifiable heroic behaviors.

This method has proven profoundly important in comparative literature and folklore studies. As a successor to Raglan, folklorist Mary Ann Jezewski takes Lord Raglan’s heroic model and applies it to female narratives from a variety of cultural and historical settings.41 She looks at an array of historical as well as legendary figures but with an eye to the gender within the narratives as their defining feature. Jezewski finds that most female figures fail to rank with any success in Raglan's system. Few

41 These include both historical as well as legendary and mythic women such as Aphrodite; Helen of Troy; the Polynesian fire goddess, Pele; Cleopatra; Brunhild of the Niebelungelied; Brunhild, the Merovingian Queen; Guinevere; Eleanor of Aquitaine; Mary Queen of Scots; Empress Wu Chao of 7th century China; Pocahontas; and the Arabian princess, Al Zabba, among others; see Jezewski, 55-73.
have the sorts of military exploits common to male stories. There are almost no instances of foundling infancies or mistaken identity in stories of female heroes. Few female narratives carry the record of a glorious death or a celebrated burial that one expects in heroic literature. Jezewski then takes Raglan’s method of comparative reading across a wide range of legends, myths and narratives but does so with tales where female characters figure prominently. That is, she compares female stories to other female stories and finds a unique pattern of female heroism that presents itself across culturally dissimilar texts.42

Jezewski illuminates some remarkable deviations from the accepted male model. For example, she finds that:

 o The death of the female hero is rarely emphasized;
 o Female heroes have more morally conflicted stories due to their amorous affairs, jealousies or revenges;
 o The Andromeda theme dominates: a female hero who attaches herself to a stronger/higher status male, seemingly for the purpose of becoming pregnant by him, and then distancing herself from that stronger male when he has served his purpose(s).

Because male heroic standards have been the de facto norm, Jezewski posits a different standard. First, a female hero is like a male hero in her exemplary personal characteristics of courage, power or magic. However, a female character’s heroic value accrues not from her death or her battle prowess but from the ways in which she negotiates basic female concerns of economic, domestic or reproductive security. Significantly, the content of a character’s virtue, purity or piety often fails to enter into the heroic definition. Jezewski found that many of these female heroes are morally ambiguous figures, using whatever means they have at their disposal to secure their objectives. This includes an instance of sexual intrigue characterized as an instrument of the weak. Overall, heroic female stories seem to celebrate remarkable women as women—and not for how well they act like men.

Below is a comparison of the two trait systems, Raglan's male-based classification and Jezewski's gendered approach:

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42 Ibid.
Figure 6. Raglan and Jezewski’s adaptation of Raglan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hero Traits (Raglan, 1934)</th>
<th>Female Hero Traits (Jezewski, 1984)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. His mother is a royal virgin</td>
<td>1. Her parents are royal or godlike, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. His father is a king, and</td>
<td>2. They are often related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Often a near relative of his mother.</td>
<td>3. There is mystery surrounding her conception and/or birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Birth circumstances are unusual.</td>
<td>4. Little is known of her childhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. He is reputed to be the son of a god,</td>
<td>5. She herself is a ruler or goddess.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. At birth, attempt is made on his life, often by his father, but</td>
<td>6. She is charming and beautiful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. He is spirited away, and</td>
<td>7. She uses men for political purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.</td>
<td>8. She controls men in matters of love and sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Little information about his childhood.</td>
<td>9. She is married, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.</td>
<td>10. She has a child or children</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. After a victory over the king and/or giant, dragon or wild beast</td>
<td>11. She has lovers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and</td>
<td>12 Her child succeeds her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Becomes king.</td>
<td>13. She does a man’s job or deeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and</td>
<td>14. She prescribes law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Prescribes law, and</td>
<td>15. There are conflicting views of goodness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. Later he loses favor with the gods and his subjects, and
16. Her legend contains the Andromeda theme.43

17. Is driven from the throne and the city.
17. The subsequent resolution of this theme is by treacherous means which results in an untimely death, exile or incarceration of the male.

18. He meets with a mysterious death,
18. Her death is uneventful and may not even be mentioned in her legend.

19. Often on a hilltop.

20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.

21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless

22. He has one or more holy sites/sepulchers.

Through her metric, Jezewski provides an essential method for locating and identifying heroic women. She notes that “[t]he concept of hero trait patterning is, in itself, a controversial subject but one that has not been vigorously applied to the female hero.”44 With this in mind, it is clear that her particular set of traits remains untested with respect to biblical women.

**Biblical Women and the Heroic Model**

If we take Jezewski’s list of female heroic traits and apply them to female biblical narratives—including Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba—we develop a new perspective that liberates these characters from their embedded institutional context and allow us to recognize the gendered elements in these narratives. Such trait patterning methodology does not depend upon the larger theological framework of the Bible to inform our reading. Instead, we analyze characteristics within the stories

43 **Andromeda Theme:** female hero is “rescued by stronger male, often saving her from life with a less-suitable mate; resolution though requires the rescuer’s passing since he is now rendered less attractive,” Jezewski, 58.
44 Ibid., 69.
in isolation from the larger narrative. This approach does not ask how the stories fit into the later redacted aims of the Bible; rather, it puts biblical women in metaphoric conversation with other female narratives both within as well as outside the Bible, enriching our sense not only of the female heroic but of female inventiveness across diverse cultural and historical settings.

I cannot completely divorce these stories from their context. Therefore, in subsequent chapters, after unpacking the heroic credentials of our female narratives, we will reinsert the stories back into the Bible and offer some ideas for their inclusion. But, before we need to expand upon some of Jezewski’s categories and offer a few caveats to her claims.

In order to be included in her survey, Jezewski says that female narratives that 1) continue in a stable written form and 2) present a woman as valorous in the context of that narrative. As I argued in chapters 1 and 2, biblical women tend to be valorized because they are included within the larger interpretive stories of salvation history or political propaganda or dynastic histories. But since I want to look at them without those glosses, I cannot assume that women are valorous just because they are in the Bible. The stories themselves, without the larger theological imprint, do not necessarily present the women that way. A further question is, do these stories approximate the female heroic as established by folkloric standards, which stand outside and apart from biblical norms? Are the stories heroic without the biblical context? What, if anything, about the stories ties them to heroic motifs of women? I want to understand the characters in the context of their own stories and not as constituent stories within a larger sacred narrative.

By definition, these women meet Jezewski’s first requirement for inclusion of a narrative: these are stories of women that continue on in a written form. However, Jezewski argues that the selection sample should represent as complete stories as possible in order to cut down on

\[\text{45} \text{ Jezewski considers a female character worthy of consideration as heroic if “her life story and her heroism live on in various written forms,” including encyclopedic entries, biographical references, books or written portrayals that present her or her actions as valorous; ibid., 55, 59.}\]

\[\text{46} \text{ However, the women may in fact be valorous in the context of their stories: Tamar is proclaimed more righteous than Judah; Ruth is celebrated as better than seven sons, a celebration of her heroic chesed. But it seems to me that what Jezewski is arguing for is a female character’s presumed heroic character simply because she appears as the main character in a narrative that has been preserved in written form. On that count alone, then, these biblical women are worthy of consideration.}\]
unknowns and in order to adequately test the confluence of heroic traits. Because I am limiting myself to a single work—the Bible—I choose not to include snippets of stories, such as the rape of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19 or the story of Dinah and Shechem, which is only a single incident in the life of Dinah (but part of the larger narrative of the Jacob clan). Therefore I will test our four stories first and I will also include Esther and Judith since they, like Ruth, have book-length stories. Deborah will be included since she is often cited as the premier example of the heroic biblical female. I will also submit a literary motif—the barren mother—to this process as well. While there is no sustained narrative entitled, “the barren mother” in the Bible, this trope often valorizes the women under consideration. For our purposes, this theme appears across at least three narratives in Genesis (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel). In these tales, fertility depends upon God’s direct intervention into the lives of the patriarchs and their families. Abraham is assured by God that he will be a great nation and that fertility will come to his family through his wife Sarah (Genesis 17-18). Isaac entreats God on behalf of his barren wife Rebekah and she conceives (Genesis 25:21). In Genesis 30:22, we are simply told that Rachel’s infertility ends because “God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb.” Furthermore, we have sustained stories of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel beyond simply their infertility problems. Therefore, I include these

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47 Jezewski, 59.
48 I include the deuterocanonical book of Judith for several reasons: 1) like Esther and Ruth, she has a book-length work in her name; 2) she continues to merit scholarly biblical interest (biblical commentaries such as the Anchor Bible and the Interpreter’s Bible both offer volumes dedicated to Judith) as well as current academic interest (see Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lahnemann, eds., *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, published papers from the Sword of Judith conference at New York Public Library, 2008 [http://nyarc.org/arcade/ebooks/702115347.pdf]), and, 3) most significantly for this study, she is often mentioned as a biblical heroine; see especially Bellis, 198-210, where she concludes, “Judith is one of the strongest heroes in all of Jewish literature. She combines traditional piety with feminine beauty and masculine daring to accomplish what no other leader could,” 210.
49 Klein, 33; Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 49-50.
50 This motif also appears in the story of Samson’s mother (Judges 13) and Hannah, Samuel’s mother (1 Sam. 1-2) where the promises are made to the women not to their husbands. However, we have more information about Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel than we do of Samson’s mother (whose name we never learn) and Hannah. Therefore, following Jezewski’s charge, I will stay with more complete stories than less complete ones in order to more fully test this process.
women because, as Robert Alter argues, their narrative similarities are intended to link the stories together not as a sustained narrative but as an example of “a beautifully interwoven wholeness.”

**Jezewski’s Categories**

Many of Jezewski’s categories require little explanation but I will mention some of Jezewski’s clarifications here before applying the traits to our biblical narratives. Furthermore, when necessary, as I discuss each story, I will expand upon a trait in the context of that particular narrative. Several of Jezewski’s categories I accept with some clarification and/or alteration (trait numbers in brackets):

- [7] she uses men for political purposes,
- [8] she controls men in matters of love and sex,
- [10] she has a child or children,
- [13] she does a man’s job or deeds,
- [15] there are conflicting view of her goodness and,
- [17] resolution of the Andromeda theme by treacherous means resulting in untimely death or exile or incarceration of the male.

Following this discussion, I offer my own trait list specific to female biblical heroes (see Figure 6).

Trait 7 (*she uses men for political purposes*) has implications far beyond ambition for political command in the context of our stories. Jezewski applies this trait primarily to women who hold positions of leadership or political power or royal rank. In the biblical context, the chosen stories do not concern women who have political power or authority (queens, empresses, princesses, leaders in their own right or wives of leaders of clans or tribes). Many of the stories that we will be looking at concern subaltern women: widows or women who lack adequate male representation. Only Esther is a queen. Furthermore, only Deborah, Esther and the barren mothers have husbands for the bulk of their stories. The rest are the stories of women who are struggling to

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52 Even this is a somewhat problematic claim. Deborah is identified as “the wife of Lappidot,” with absolutely no further information given about him or even any scenes that include him in Deborah’s story. Klein suggests that he in fact fulfills the role that most biblical wives do—he is in the background, without a voice (33). Bathsheba has a husband when her story begins, but we never see them speak to
survive on their own. Their efforts reflect the harsh economic realities of life for unattached women in patriarchal societies. They need men for legal representation as well as economic security. And while God’s saving presence is implied behind the scenes, we do not find these God actively blessing these women or their efforts (save for Judith, who bluntly prays that God will bless her deception).

These biblical women reflect actions that avoid direct confrontation but rather represent individual acts of resistance that mitigate prevailing economic or social structures. In this way, the political dynamic within their stories highlights individual strategies that erode established power structures which deny these women access to economic well-being. By expanding upon our sense of the word political, we find that biblical women use men for political purposes in ways that often have nothing to do with royal administration or civic leadership (although, in the case of Deborah and Judith, it certainly can take on a more politicized meaning). Rather, the sense that we see is biblical women using relationships with men in order to secure their economic well-being or legal rights. This aspect of the term “political” focuses on the dynamic at work in everyday social relationships involving authority or power. This is how I apply this designation: situations where a woman uses relationships with men to gain authority or power. In the biblical context, however, that authority or power is not blind political ambition but rather personal security or legal standing.

Trait 8 refers to instances where a female character controls a man (or men) in matters of love and sex. In the biblical context, this is where I locate the bedtrick, or a place of sexual deception where gender identity and power dynamics come to the fore. As I have previously noted, the bedtrick can be an incident of sexual congress, where a female character tricks a male character into having sexual intercourse with her. However, the bedtrick need not culminate in sexual intercourse. As Jezewski notes, it can be Hera’s tricking Zeus into handing over his mistress or Aphrodite’s ability to evoke love and lust in men or Helen of Troy’s insinuating herself back into Menelaus’ good graces after the Trojan Wars via her enchanting beauty. The bedtrick presents an instance where the

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one another, they appear in no scenes together and Uriah never even refers to her by name, even declining to sleep with his wife while the Ark of the Covenant as well as David’s men are camped out in warfare (2 Sam. 11:11). On the other hand, Esther’s husband is remote and buffoonish, in his regal aspects more like an Oriental potentate than a mate, but her uncle Mordecai more than fulfills the role of male protector and benefactor on Esther’s behalf.

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53 Jezewski, 60-61.
gender dynamics in the story emphasize the feminine: a woman takes charge and through deception, trickery or even the promise of sex yet to come, gets a man to do her bidding. This can result in sexual intercourse, but at its heart, the bedtrick is the moment when the balance of power is challenged or reversed. Completing the sexual act is not an absolute requirement for identification of the bedtrick. Thus, we will find that the ambiguity in some of our biblical stories fits this trope. In the biblical context, it is through the ingenuity of particular women that the balance of power switches in their favor. However, the completion of the transaction is sometimes left to the imagination.

Jezewski’s Trait 10 simply states, “she has a child or children.” Jezewski does not make a distinction between children born prior to the action of the story, adoptive children or children acquired as a consequence of the narrative action (specifically, the bedtrick). However, in the Bible, these stories overwhelming highlight biological sons born as a consequence of the female character’s actions. Particularly in the stories that we are considering, none of these women have biological sons prior to the beginning of their stories (Sarah and Rachel have only non-biological sons through their maid servants and these sons subsequently take secondary roles once a biological son is born). Where there are children, we find that sons are born as a consequence of the mother’s actions in the course of the narrative (barren mothers, Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba). Deborah, Esther and Judith do not have children before their narratives begin and we are not told that any children come after the focus of their story passes.

Jezewski explains Trait 13 (she does a man’s job or deeds) as “activities that were deemed the domain of males at the time the female hero lived or her legend was popularized.”54 In this instance, I want to clarify how I am isolating these narratives from the larger biblical context and specifically how I am reading them without reference to the Bible’s overriding theological explanations. In order to understand a female character’s actions, this trait requires that we recognize when her actions cross gender lines for her time and place. Such a recognition does not necessarily valorize or condemn those actions (see fuller discussion of trait 15 below), nor does this identification depend upon the larger biblical context in order to justify the place of these female narratives. Rather, it is simply an acknowledgement of the culture out of which a narrative arose and identifying when a female character is credited with male-dominated actions or responsibilities. There are several examples of this: Judah

54 Ibid., 58.
travels to his sheep shearer’s (Genesis 39:12) and Boaz winnows barley at his threshing floor (Ruth 3:2). Both are male-identified activities. However, we also find that righteousness in the Bible is a male responsibility: for example, Tamar is acclaimed more righteous than Judah although such righteousness was his job. Ruth, in her exemplary devotion to Naomi, is acclaimed “better than seven sons” (Ruth 4:15). Ruth, the daughter-in-law, fulfills the sons’ duties by her dutiful devotion to her mother-in-law.

Trait 15 (conflicting views of her goodness) collects interpretations around a female character’s misdeeds and actions such as sexual liaisons or malicious retribution. Jezewski does not offer any more explanation for this trait except to say that heroes possess many admirable attributes but female hero tales include activities which are also viewed as ambivalently:

The heroes possessed many attributes that were admired by the folk but the female hero’s legend also tells of misdeeds (affairs, jealousies, revenges) that are condemned by those recounting the legend.55

I want to expand this identification beyond misdeeds to include the moral ambiguity regarding women in female narratives. Overall, we find a penchant for complexity and polyvalence in many of the Bible’s narratives and not just in the women’s stories. This seems to be an intentional plot device since the aim of the text is not to convey a journalistic account of what happened but rather what Alter calls “historiated prose fiction,” which reflects

a remarkable range and flexibility in the means of presentation, [that is] utilized to liberate fictional personages from the fixed choreography of timeless events and thus … transform[s] storytelling from ritual rehearsal to the delineation of the wayward paths of human freedom, the quirks and contradictions of men and women seen as moral agents and complex centers of motive and feeling.56

Based on this expanded sense of a woman’s “misdeeds,” I would include implicit editorial judgments as well as exterior responses to female actions in the story. I believe that the ambiguity in biblical stories argues for including both these perspectives. Biblical analysis, as we saw in the move from standard biblical interpretations (chapter 3) to feminist perspectives (chapter 4) is an ongoing and rich tapestry of ideas. Furthermore, many of our biblical texts offer little or no editorial judgment

55 I am assuming her use of the term hero, which appears here without gender qualifier, means that she is referring to narratives of male heroes, in contrast to female heroic tales; 58.
on a female character, leaving open a definitive assessment akin to Alter’s choreography of quirks and contradictions that liberate our characters from a fixed truth. Limiting ourselves to only judgments that a narrative offers is not only terribly restrictive, but often misleading. For instance, a story might make assessments regarding someone’s character that no longer hold true in the modern context (for instance, Joan of Arc was labeled as heretic for wearing men’s clothing, a charge that carries no weight anymore). Then again, we tend to view sexual manipulation in all times and in all places as problematic—dressing as a prostitute and sitting by the side of the road like a common sex worker is clearly something that one might mark as a moral misdeed. But in Tamar’s case, her manipulation of Judah is eventually accounted by the text as righteous and just. So, as Wendy Doniger claims,

we must consider both the ways in which, within the text, the trickster manipulates the ambiguity that hedges the truth or falsehood of the sexual act and the related ways, outside the text, in which the storyteller manipulates the ambiguity of the truth or falsehood of stories about the sexual act.57

Thus, I identify this “goodness trope” in biblical narratives, based on information both within the story itself as well as exterior analysis of the story. The interior editorial assessment as well as reader response regarding a female character’s actions provides evidence of the continuing debate over the moral integrity of many of the Bible’s female characters. As with the above discussion of trait 13, I am identifying narrative tropes in isolation from the larger biblical context. But the ambiguity that surrounds various aspects within the stories and fuels much of the continued scholarly interest in biblical narratives compels me to reflect on the larger discussions of how these women have been read, especially in their historical context. The ambiguity surrounding female trickery in the Bible certainly moves me beyond the established readings of these stories. For example, Tamar taking on the guise of the harlot is acceptable because Judah proclaims her the more righteous. Ruth goes down to the threshing floor, a place Levine claims no nice girl should go (based on the culture of the time—a point that might not be apparent to most modern readers but perhaps plainly understood in its own time).58 Bathsheba’s ritual bath is clearly visible, if to no one else, at least to the king from his apartments. Are these actions ever acceptable or are do we grant them exceptions

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57 Doniger, 11.
because they are in the Bible? Or, more to the point, are we willing to say that harlotry and nakedness and sexual assertiveness, while questionable activities, can provide an agreeable means to a righteous end?

Trait 17 refers to resolution of the Andromeda theme, where the female hero “may think twice about spending the rest of her life with [her male rescuer].” Jezewski defines this trait as actions which lead to the removal of the male rescuer through the female hero’s treachery. In the biblical context, the emphasis is not necessarily on the treachery of the female hero. Rather, we find a more nuanced statement on the removal or de-emphasis of the male character’s role in the narrative. The motivation or presumed treachery of the female character is not the point: what is clear is that the male figure fades from the scene once he has served his purpose and the female hero has achieved her goal. He is instrumental only insofar as he is able to help her with her singular task.

At this point I want to apply Jezewski’s traits to our four female stories as well as some other female narratives in the Bible. As mentioned above, Deborah, Esther and Judith are often singled out as biblical heroines so I will include their stories in our analysis to test this claim. I will also apply this standard to the barren mother motif which includes the stories of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel in Genesis. Their stories contain similar actions by women as well as a concern for the continuity of the household in the face of female infertility. Where there are differences or distinctions, I will note them. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, I include Judith because of her strong characterization as a named female, her piety and devotion and the profound gender elements in her story. Further, while Judith’s story is chronologically later, her story parallels some elements in the Deborah and Esther stories, marking it as also worthy of consideration here.

The application of Jezewski’s trait list to biblical female narratives follows. I do this to challenge our notions of women in the Bible as well as our ideas about the heroic. That is, while we might hold a generalized concept of heroism, applying Jezewski’s categories to biblical women will

59 Jezewski, 58.
60 Klein refers to Deborah and Yael as "audacious female role models" as women inhabiting positions of unusual power; 33; Frymer-Kensky counts Deborah and Yael among the female victors in the Bible; Reading the Women of the Bible, 58-63; on Esther's heroism, see Esther Fuchs, "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative," 77-84; on Judith, see Amy-Jill Levine, "Sacrifice and Salvation: Otherness and Domestication in the Book of Judith," in Women in the Hebrew Bible, 367-376.
require us to think more concretely about heroic narratives, especially in the context of the Bible.

**Application of the Female Heroic to Biblical Narratives**

**Barren Mothers: Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel (Genesis)**

Little is known of their childhoods [4]. All are noted for their beauty [6]. Sarah controls Abraham in sexual matters; he goes in to Hagar at Sarah's behest (Genesis 16.3). Rachel has middling control over Jacob. And she barters with Leah for her fertility-producing mandrakes, gifting Leah with a night with Jacob for the plants. Jacob is neither mentioned nor consulted. But Rachel is unable to coerce fecundity. She storms, "Give me children or I will die!" Jacob replies, "Am I God, that I have withheld the fruit of your womb?" (Genesis 30.1-2). All are married [9]. All eventually have children [10]. Their sons continue on in the toledot of Genesis and beyond [12]. If trickery is the purview of men in the Bible, then Rebekah can be said to do a man's job or deeds. Although Jacob is named "Trickster," it would seem he learned his craft from his mother [13]. Regarding trait 15, conflicting views of their goodness: all three matriarchs have moments of sexual duplicity (Sarah and Rebekah have wife-sister stories where they tell a foreign king that they are their husband’s sister instead of their wives; Rachel is replaced by Leah as Jacob’s first bride although it is not clear whether Rachel had any say or control over this). Since each instance of this duplicity is engineered by their husbands or father, we cannot count this against characterizations of the female character’s goodness. Trait 18 says that a female hero’s death is uneventful and may not merit mentioning in the narrative. By contrast, we see that Sarah's death, while uneventful, does merit mention. Rachel's death in childbirth is eventful and also merits telling. Rebekah's exact cause of death is not mentioned.

**Lot’s Daughters (Genesis 19)**

Nothing is known of their childhood [4]. Lot, as the girls’ father, is responsible for contracting marriages within his clan in order to provide for his daughters as well as to keep his property and holdings in the family. When it appears that he is not able (or willing) to do so, the

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61 The number in brackets refers to its corresponding category in Jezewski’s list.
daughters take this particular issue into their own hands and use Lot to secure their future status in some presumed community [7]. In this, they control Lot in matters of sex (but not necessarily love) [8]. They have children—Ammon and Moab [10]. Moab and Ammon succeed their nameless mothers in their continuing biblical and historical relationship with the Israelites long after Lot and his daughters fade from the scene [12]. The daughters do a man's job or deeds in securing the next generation for the family (“Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.” Genesis 19:32), a task that normally falls to the family patriarch. Lot, in his inebriation, is either too drunk or too despairing to do so [13]. There are conflicting views of their goodness; commentators find the daughters horrific examples of incest or benighted children who have lost their moorings [15]. The Andromeda theme is present: the daughters attach themselves, metaphorically as well as physically, to Lot for the purpose of providing themselves with sons and saving themselves from a life of barrenness. Once that is accomplished, Lot is exiled from the narrative and seemingly, from history [16, 17]. Their deaths are not mentioned [18].

Tamar (Genesis 38)

Nothing is known of her childhood [4]. Inference from the text suggests that whatever Tamar’s physical attributes, she is able to exude a certain charm (she successfully entices Judah despite being veiled and “wrapped”; Genesis 38:14) [6]. She seduces Judah for her own political/economic purpose—having a son will secure her economic and social status in the community as well as provide for herself financially. Any son will be the heir of her dead husband, the first son of his father, denied to her in her childless state but available to her through the convention of levirate marriage [7]. She controls Judah in matters of love and sex—duped and we presume somewhat lonely (his wife dies in vs.12), he comes willingly to Tamar's bed [8]. She is married to Judah's first son Er and has a levirate marriage with his second son, Onan, who also dies [9]. She has twins, Zerah and Perez via her relationship with Judah [10]. She has lovers since Judah is not a husband but rather a liaison [11]. Her child succeeds her since Perez is a named ancestor of both Boaz and David as well as in

62 For negative analysis of the daughters, see Bailey, "They're nothing but incestuous bastards,” 121-138; for daughters as plies in larger issues, see Jeansonne, 123-129; Ilona N. Rashkow, "Daughters and Fathers in Genesis… or, What's wrong with this picture?" in New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible, ed. Cheryl Exum and David Clines (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 250-265.
genealogical recitations of the Davidic line [12]. Righteousness in ancient Israel is often viewed as the purview of men. In this regard, Tamar acts as a man: Judah himself notes that she is more righteous than he is (Genesis 38.26) [13].63 The conflict regarding her goodness has to do with the perception of her roadside subterfuge: socially and morally, prostitution significantly reduces one’s status, but harlotry in service to a higher cultural (levirate) or moral (dynastic) good renders Tamar less compromised by her actions, but compromised, nonetheless [15].64 The Andromeda theme applies here: Tamar aligns herself with the more powerful and wealthy Judah merely for the benefit of her reproductive prerogatives. Once she finds herself pregnant with Judah's child, the text notes that Judah "knew her no more" (Genesis 38.26). While Tamar fades from the scene, so does Judah in terms of his role in her life (“He did not lie with her again,” 38:26) [16, 17]. Her death fails to merit mention [18].

Deborah (Judges 4-5)

Little is known of her childhood [4]. She is a named prophetess to whom the Israelites come for judgment (Judg 4.5); thus, she acts as a local ruler or elder in the time before the monarchy [5]. She definitely uses men to achieve God’s goals, not her own. And in fact, she shames the men around her by proclaiming that their glory will pass to a woman (“...the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will

63 Provs.21.21: "He that follows after righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honor," and "The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him," Ez. 18.20. Honor, justice and righteousness are the purview of men; women can aspire to righteousness but the one who is right with God counts as part of the minyan, can appropriately pray in the Temple and the prayer houses, offers the sacrifices—that is, circumcised men. See Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica entry on ‘Righteousness’ which claims that a tzaddik is a righteous man and that 36 perfectly righteous men (‘lamed vav’) are required for the maintenance of the world; Dan Cohn-Sherbok, s.v. “Righteousness,” The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 458; see as well ‘Righteousness’ as the purview of the Israelite nation, especially men of Israel and their covenantal obligations tied to righteous acts and thoughts; Szubin, H. Zvi and Louis Jacobs, s.v., "Righteousness," Encyclopaedia Judaica, Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, ed. Vol. 17. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 307-309
sell Sisera into the hands of a woman," 4.9) [7]. She is the wife of Lappidoth [9] but no children are mentioned. Her role as a judge marks her as doing a man’s job or deeds since judgesship is typically limited to men in the Bible [13]. Her story does not detail any elements of her domestic relationships with men or even make mention of children. Her death is not recorded [18].

**Ruth**

Little is known of her childhood; she is only introduced in reference to her marriage to Chilion, son of the widow Naomi [4]. Ruth's goodness charms Boaz and eventually, all the women of Bethlehem. To her question of why he might take notice of her, a poor foreign widow, he remarks that he is aware of her kindnesses to Naomi, implying that her fidelity is worthy of his favor (2.11). In the end, all the Bethlehem women proclaim her "better than seven sons" owing to her fidelity and chesed (loving-kindness) towards Naomi (4.15) [6]. One interpretation sees Ruth using Boaz for economic purposes. As widows, both Naomi and Ruth lack the economic security of a husband's family. In addition, two unattached women need the political and legal security that comes from a male relative’s ability to speak for them in public matters (as in the marketplace discussion regarding Elimilech’s property and the disposal of Ruth the widow of Mahlon [Ruth 4]). It is therefore politically expedient for Ruth, as the younger, more attractive female in the household, to pursue a relationship with a financially secure male. Her willing choice of Boaz, which he recognizes in 3:10 (“you have not gone after younger men, whether poor or rich”) suggests that Ruth is purposely selecting Boaz for her purposes [7]. Ruth controls the situation more so than Boaz the benefactor. While working at the behest of Naomi, she purposefully cultivates her relationship with Boaz who has shown her kind concern: "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace" (2.2). Later, Boaz remarks that in choosing him, Ruth showed a kindness greater than that on behalf of Naomi (3:10) [8]. She was first

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65 Indeed, Klein asks if this is possibly the feminization of a masculine paradigm; 33.

66 In Ruth 2, the wealthy kinsman of Naomi's husband is identified as Boaz and it seems by happenstance that this is the field that Ruth lands upon. While the issue of divine providence lurks about the edges of this story, such godly oversight is never explicitly stated or affirmed. We are therefore left to conjecture in this ambiguous space whether it is God's providence or Ruth's and Naomi’s machinations of Boaz's kin obligations that bring about this initial meeting.
married to Mahlon. A second marriage follows after Ruth's bold proposal that Boaz should take her under his wing (3.9) [9]. She bears Obed [10]. Obed continues on after her in recitations of the line of Judah (Ruth 4:22; 1 Chr. 2:12) [12]. With respect to doing a man's job or deeds, Ruth's fidelity—like Tamar's righteousness—is analogous to that which a son would do for his widowed mother. In gathering up the remains from the reapers, she sustains herself and Naomi, providing for their welfare in a way that a male relative would (or should) have. Ultimately, the text celebrates Ruth as the daughter who is better to Naomi than seven sons [13]. There is no conflict regarding Ruth's goodness towards Naomi; Ruth's ambiguous role at the threshing floor, however, is another matter. Is her threshing floor interaction a seduction—an example of Doniger's bedtrick—or is this simply an opportunistic ploy on Ruth's part to catch Boaz after an evening of revelry and impress upon him his obligation to serve as the redeemer? The narrator does not say. For her part, neither does Ruth; she quietly acts of her own accord rather than reproducing the exacting plan that Naomi has laid out for her. Instead of remaining quietly at Boaz's feet and awaiting his instructions, Ruth says, "I [am] Ruth your handmaiden: now, spread your cloak over your handmaiden; for you [are] a near kinsman" (3:9). Ruth now, it seems, directs Boaz. Ruth's bedtrick—her uncovering of Boaz's "feet," a common euphemism for male genitals—is further marked by the fact that Ruth must not only identify herself in the dark to Boaz, but alert him to her desired relationship with him. And the ambiguity continues when Boaz says, "Go not empty unto thy mother in law" (3:17). Again, as Amy-Jill Levine

67 In fact, this point is thrown into counterpoint by the chalitzah scene in the public square where “Mr. So-and-So” (Amy-Jill Levine’s translation of pelony almony) is publicly identified as not serving as yabum; see Frymer-Kensky, Reading the Women of the Bible, 251-252.

68 Ruth 3:4 reads, “[Naomi says], ‘But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.’” Ruth does all of this but does not sit quietly at his feet awaiting instruction but rather informs him of his obligations.

69 This obligation, Nehama Ashkenasy notes, is technically incorrect but Ruth is appropriating the spirit of the law of yibbum to her advantage; see "Language as Female Empowerment in Ruth," in Reading Ruth, 120-121.

70 Ashkenasy discusses this as a seduction scene based on the euphemistic use of the term “feet;” see Reading Ruth, 121; for biblical examples, see 2 Sam. 11.8 where David suggests that the war-weary Uriah return to his wife and "wash his feet" (raglayim, or male genitals); Hertzberg, 310; Isaiah 6.2 where feet refers to genitals on the seraphs of God's heavenly court; Isaiah 7.20 where we are told that prisoners are shamed by shaving the hair on their "feet."
notes, perhaps she left with her womb as well as her apron full.\footnote{Levine, "Ruth," 89.} Levine implies that while Ruth is credited with great chesed towards her mother-in-law, she is also a capable woman who takes full advantage of the situation before her. Thus her goodness carries an element of ambiguity to it: she possibly works for the good of Naomi, but also uses the situation to her benefit as well \footnote{Randall Bailey’s contention is that Bathsheba is the granddaughter of Ahithophel, daughter of Eliam and therefore, from a prominent political family. David’s alliance with her is one of powerful political importance; David in Love and War, 90.} [15]. The Andromeda theme follows: she and Naomi are rescued from a life of crushing poverty and low-status by her marriage to Boaz \footnote{Adele Berlin notes that Bathsheba not only exploits the men around her—David as well as Nathan and Solomon—but creates trouble for women as well. Berlin} [16]. Boaz quickly fades from the scene while Ruth’s status is further elevated and celebrated through the birth of Obed. The village women declare Ruth’s chesed and honor Naomi’s new child ("A son has been born to Naomi," even though it is actually Ruth who gives birth to Obed; 4:17). Boaz’s role in this is not mentioned at all and in fact, is not mentioned again until the recitation of family history in 4:21. His instrumentality is completed. Boaz fades from the scene once Ruth has secured her family’s well-being \footnote{She is married first to Uriah, then to David.} [17]. Her death is not mentioned \footnote{Steel Miller 1978, 26.} [18].

**Bathsheba (2. Sam. 11, 12; 1 Kings 1)**

Little is known of her childhood \footnote{Little is known of her childhood [4]. As noted in Chapter 3, Bailey hypothesizes that she came from an elite family in Israel. If so, we can credit her with coming from a ruling class [5]. Her nakedness prompts David's invitation [6]. Bathsheba's actions are ambiguous: they can be considered an intentional political ploy to align herself (or her family, if we accept the theory of their political aspirations) with the king. If so, her bath becomes as a seductive manipulation of David for her family's purposes. But her later efforts on behalf of Solomon’s ascendency are clearly an exploitation of David for political ends [7]. Given the ambiguity surrounding her bath, again one might conjecture that Bathsheba is intentionally profiting from David’s wandering eye. Later, Bathsheba and Nathan conspire to place Solomon on David's throne after the old king's death, recalling a long-forgotten promise to that effect which the Bible itself fails to record (1 Kings 1). Her personal influence over the dying David seems to arise from whatever romantic or sexual relationship they once had [8].} [4]. As noted in Chapter 3, Bailey hypothesizes that she came from an elite family in Israel. If so, we can credit her with coming from a ruling class [5]. Her nakedness prompts David's invitation [6]. Bathsheba's actions are ambiguous: they can be considered an intentional political ploy to align herself (or her family, if we accept the theory of their political aspirations) with the king. If so, her bath becomes as a seductive manipulation of David for her family's purposes. But her later efforts on behalf of Solomon’s ascendency are clearly an exploitation of David for political ends [7]. Given the ambiguity surrounding her bath, again one might conjecture that Bathsheba is intentionally profiting from David’s wandering eye. Later, Bathsheba and Nathan conspire to place Solomon on David's throne after the old king's death, recalling a long-forgotten promise to that effect which the Bible itself fails to record (1 Kings 1). Her personal influence over the dying David seems to arise from whatever romantic or sexual relationship they once had [8]. She is married first to Uriah, then to David [9]. She...
has Solomon as well as possibly three other sons (1 Chr. 3.5) [10]. Solomon's royal story continues on after both Bathsheba's and David's [12]. There are conflicting views of her goodness [14]. She continues the Andromeda theme insofar as David "rescues" her from widowhood after the orchestrated death of Uriah the Hittite [16]. This resolves itself through David's old age and death, although she remains seemingly fresh and vibrant even in her duplicity before the king [17]. Her death is not noted [18].

**Esther**

Little is known of Esther’s childhood or birth except that she was orphaned and taken into the household of her cousin Mordechai to be raised [4]. The text remarks that she is “fair and beautiful” (Esth 2.7) [6]. Esther uses men for political purposes although, according to some, uncle Mordechai deserves to be celebrated as the star of this story and not Esther. In fact, she is used by Mordechai (or God) for their purposes, not her own. In fact, Esther is only compelled to act when Mordechai chastises her, saying,

> For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this (4. 14).

Mordechai's challenge carries political overtones, yet his concern is for the preservation of the Jews as a whole. The text implies that Esther has been put in proximity to the hapless Ahasuerus in order to ensure the continuity of her people [7]. Once Esther gains access to the king, she realizes greater influence over Ahasuerus, especially in orchestrating the complete removal of Haman from the court [8, 9]. No mention is made of children, the content of her marriage or what her life looks like after Haman’s death. Her death merits no mention [18].

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[74] On this point, see fuller discussion of Bathsheba in Chapter 3.

Judith

Little is known of her childhood [4]. We are told, “She was beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold” (Jdt 8.7) [6]. Her eventual seduction and beheading of Holofernes is for the protection of her town, Bethulia, and not for her own personal gain [7]. Judith controls the action by setting up the parameters of the seduction—her stroll into Holofernes’ camp, her need to eat her own (kosher) foods, her prayers in the evening, her flirtatious drinking party that ends with the foreign invader’s death [8]. She is the widow of Manasseh who died during the barley harvest [9]. She takes no more husbands or lovers and leaves no children. Judith fasts all the days of her widowhood; she is devoted to God alone (8.6, 8). She does a man’s job or deeds; she outlasts the general Holofernes at drink as well as slicing his head off after he has passed out [13]. However, there are conflicting views of her goodness: while she is pious, chaste and God-fearing, the introduction in the *Oxford Annotated Bible* notes that “she showed herself to be a shameless flatterer, a bold-faced liar, and a ruthless assassin.”76 Twice in Chapter 9 Judith asks God to bless her guile:

By the deceit of my lips strike down the slave with the prince and the prince with his servant; crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman. (9:10)

Make my deceitful words to be their wound and their stripe, for they have planned cruel things against your covenant… (9:13)

Judith’s story adds to Israel’s salvation history narrative; she is included in the company of women who practice deceit for the good of the nation.77 Sidnie White Crawford and Toni Craven suggest that Judith’s lesser canonical status is a result of her autonomy in the context of her narrative: she is a threat to the system of patriarchy that puts personal wealth and control of women into the hands of men, not women. [15].78

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78 Toni Craven, “Judith 2,” in *Women in Scripture*, 105; Sidnie White Crawford, “Esther Not Judith: Why One Made it and the Other Didn’t,” *Bible Review* 18 (February 2002): 45. Claudia Rakel argues that Judith’s power must conform to established hegemonies of power: “A woman, whose beauty gives her such great power that she can bring about a man’s death (even if it is the enemy commander), should not have unlimited use of this power. [Judith] must be made to return to the...
While Judith does seduce then dispatch Holofernes, she fails to evoke the fullness of the Andromeda theme of a female attaching herself to a stronger male to save herself from a life with a less-suitable male. Judith does not seek a child to further her husband's estate. Judith’s concerns are not for herself or driven by any ambitious or romantic desires—they are for her town and her people. Judith merely feigns interest in Holofernes in order to bring about his death and not for the realization of her reproductive potential or for a more advantageous alliance. In addition, we have a remarkable mention here of a woman distributing her property to her kin and being mourned by the community for seven days (Jdt 16.23-24). Finally, despite her place in the community, her passing hardly merits mention except to note that she frees her faithful maid before dying.

**Interpretation: Female Heroic Models in the Bible**

Jezewski’s method provides a standardized pattern for female heroism and this process allows us to locate this trope within several narratives within the Bible. These narratives show significant coherence to the model of the female heroic. With that in mind, we can make certain claims for women’s narratives in the Bible, particularly Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba and, to a lesser extent, Lot’s daughters.

For the purposes of this study, I believe a baseline for what is considered more than a nominal ranking on this scale requires at least a 50% (or 9 out of 18) trait match for any character to be considered minimally heroic. Four of the stories (Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba) demonstrate at least 50% of Jezewski’s characteristics and three of these—Tamar, Bathsheba and Ruth—rank even higher on Jezewski’s trait chart: Tamar has a 72% match (13/18), Bathsheba and Ruth have a 67% match (12 out of 18 traits). Jezewski suggests that this better than 50% demonstration of traits represent a significant match, justifying recognition of these characters as examples of the female heroic. 79 Remarkably, the rest of the narratives score far lower on Jezewski’s scale (well below 50%) than Lot's daughters, Bathsheba, Tamar or Ruth. Deborah, Esther (both 6 traits) and Judith as well as the barren mothers (7 traits) demonstrate behaviors that are often touted as traditional role of women in her society so that she does not threaten continuance of the patriarchal hierarchy,” Claudia Rakel, “‘I Will Sing a New Song to My God’: Some Remarks on the Intertextuality of Judith 16.1-17,” in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2nd Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), note 94, 47.

79 Jezewski, 70-73.
valorous. Yet, if we adopt Jezewski’s model as our standard, we see that they cannot be considered true female heroes.

What do these results mean? Does this standard impart anything new or insightful other than condensing these narratives to a set of standardized traits? What nuance to our understanding of "hero" does it provide? Might this be a mere semantic shift—are we simply reducing these stories to stock characterizations without fully considering the context and richness of each tale? What justice—or injustice—do these tactics do to these stories?

Let us begin with the barren mothers of Genesis. While they are certainly intent upon their individual reproductive prerogatives, their stories fail to illustrate a strong individual agency or traits like the Andromeda theme that we find in Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba. Further, Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel lack scenes of a woman doing a man’s job or deeds. What is clear is that their particular narratives are intimately tied to the larger saga of the patriarchs with whom they share center stage. Does that mean that Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel are not heroes? No, but in the context of this discussion, Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba fit cross-cultural female heroic models far better than the barren mothers do. Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba reproduce the attributes of female heroic narratives in a way that the barren mothers do not. These biblical women can therefore be identified as heroic characters based on their similarity to this cross-cultural female heroic standard.

Judith and Deborah appear more closely aligned with male models of heroism since their concerns are not reproductive but military in nature. Are Deborah and Judith therefore unheroic? Not at all—their valor is firmly established by the text. But, in context, they fail to resonate as female heroes. Deborah’s and Judith’s stories focus on urging men to fulfill their masculine responsibilities and protect their communities. When the men fail to act, the women do, for the good of the community. Thus, Judith’s and Deborah's heroism is not individualistic but public and political in nature. These female characters highlight a civic dynamic

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80 One might even argue that Isaac plays the woman since he is the one that prays to God to open Rebekah’s womb, not the potential mother herself (“And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived,” Gen. 25:21).

81 We will discuss this in greater depth in a later chapter but I am referring here specifically to claims of anthropologist Sherry Ortner who argues that the public domain of these sorts of civic concerns is associated with men. Thus, public political/ institutional life and concerns can be gendered as the masculine culture of the polis (and, in a corollary argument, the domestic concerns of the household can
where their good efforts work to effect God’s protection over the community. For the purposes of this argument, the female heroic includes similar aspects of women doing a man's job. However, it moves alongside the public sphere and includes aspects of marriage and children, matters profoundly associated with women. Judith and Deborah do not exhibit enough of the other traits to merit their inclusion in the female heroic standard. There is no mention of lovers or children in their stories, both very personal and female issues. And although both clearly manipulate men for their purposes, their reasons are not individualistic. They undertake their exemplary actions for the greater good of the community, something that seems more common to male heroes but less prevalent in female heroic stories.

Esther's story chronicles court intrigue and the concerns of a community in exile while turning a blind eye to the problems of a Jew marrying a non-Jew. She is noted for her beauty, one of the marks of a female hero. But whatever treachery she conceives, whatever intrigue she contrives, these are not for her own ends but, like Deborah and Judith, on behalf of her community. Like Deborah and Judith, Esther’s actions place her more firmly in the pantheon of national heroines rather than gender heroines. Esther is valorized for her efforts on behalf of her people in exile. The gendered aspects of her story—lovers, reproduction, desire for or birth of children—do not appear. While gender plays a role in getting her into Ahasuerus’s company, it is at the behest of others that Esther acts. Carey Moore even wonders if Esther would have shown any independence for herself without the person he considers the true hero of the story, Mordechai.

Thus we find that independent action, a mark of the female heroic, is one of the elements clearly identified in our four narratives. Lot’s daughters, who only demonstrate 50% of Jezewski’s heroic characteristics, present an interesting study in extremes: they act on their own behalf but through incest. That incest adds to the discomfort that we have with arguing for their valorous character. Yet they demonstrate initiative and independent action, marks of the female heroic. In Tamar’s and Ruth’s case, later interpretation will recast their initiative as important to Israel’s self-identity as the underdog, the outsider or the chosen one. Bathsheba is another woman of initiative. But her story is generally understood as

be gendered as feminine, and, for some, of lesser importance); see Ortner's “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” Feminist Studies 1, no. 2 (Autumn, 1972): 5-31.
throwing light on the picture of David as a crafty schemer as well as drawing attention to the problems of the monarchy without considering her role as a woman of agency. In contrast to Deborah, Judith and Esther, here we find individual women acting alone to achieve their own “rescue.” The Andromeda theme: once they achieve the goal of their trickery (a man to provide them with a child), the man fades from their story. Therefore, their own small goals—not the goals of the community, the nation or history—are their focus. These are not women of audacious ambition. Nor do they do not look beyond themselves for help. But, when reading these stories for the female heroic, we find that men become utilitarian textual instruments in helping women to succeed. Thus, a female hero is her own best defense against the limitations that are placed upon her. By that I mean: a female hero’s martial array is upon her body, her battlefield is the metaphoric bedroom and victory lies with her alone.

Significance

Lot's daughters, Ruth, Bathsheba and Tamar find common cause with this gender-specific heroic trait motif. This motif in large measure highlights a female character’s personal issues unlike the more nationalistic stories of Judith, Deborah and Esther. And in this identification, our four narratives find confluence with other female narratives outside the biblical milieu. This particular gender symbolism moves these biblical female characters outside their role as informing our ideas regarding Israel's nationalistic or dynastic plot and into more dynamic roles that enlighten and expand our sense of the female heroic.

These women are agents of their own destiny, limited only by the choices offered within the narrative confines in which we find them. Their valor lies in achieving; in this case, the means to that end simply supplies the mettle for the heroic feminine. Heroism emerges in their resourcefulness and their individual initiative. Their battle implements lie within themselves.

There is an interest in casting these gender comparisons as power studies—what Nehama Aschkenasy calls "uncovering the voice of the

83 These are common explanations; examples include Berlin, “Ruth and the Continuity of Israel,” 255-260; Menn, 35-71; Susan Niditch, Underdogs and Tricksters: a Prelude to Biblical Folklore (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); Day, 109-127; on Bathsheba, see previous comments by Randall Bailey.

84 Berlin, "Characterization," 73.
marginalized by deconstructing a reading from the exclusive point of view of the ruling class...⁸⁵ For example, Judith’s narrative exemplifies the power of the underdog who triumphs. Judith, a mere woman, overcomes a far superior enemy not by force of arms but by drink and guile. We want Judith to be a gender hero. And in some sense, she is: she does something that the men of her Bethulia either cannot or will not. She slays the beast and returns again, like Cincinnatus, to take up her widow’s weeds in perpetuity, claiming no status or glory for herself. Other than the mere hint of sexual promise, she is secure in her role as a national hero, but not as a female hero. This process tells us that her story does not exhibit that cadre of female traits that places her among cross-cultural female heroic characters.

What then is the significance of these findings? Does this process improve or enrich our understanding of these texts? Are we gleaning new information or new appreciations that have not previously been realized?

First, I would argue that we have reclaimed a method for reading women’s narratives as a thematic group. By comparing women’s stories to other women’s stories within the Bible, we discover parallels and coherence without reference to larger discussions of power or authority encoded by the Bible. This approach frees our interpretation from reiterating ideological notions of what the later interpretation claims women are doing (that is, serving God or institutional Israel’s larger purposes).

This new perspective also significantly enhances the textual polyvalence of the Bible. The identification of the female heroic is simply one meaning among many meanings that we find in the Bible. This process is not intended to overwrite or supersede previous meanings. The female heroic metamyth stands alongside ideological and theological readings and suggests that a gendered approach offers a more comprehensive array of meanings. In that regard, the identification of the female heroic robustly embraces the textual ambiguities of the Bible. The symphony of interpretations works together and presents a multidimensional, multilayered text, adding to the contested meanings that we locate in the Bible.

Finally, if the addition of the female heroic adds to the polyvalence of the Bible, then the neglect of this heroic typology impoverishes our view both of the Bible and of women. Locating a female heroic in scripture deeply enriches our appreciation of these narratives. To leave this

typology aside is to once again reduce these female characters to stock figures, with no independent identification beyond that which is assigned them by later editors, redactors and interpreters.

Thus, I offer here a chart for identifying the female heroic in the Bible. This is modified from Jezewski’s list and based upon a cross-cultural comparative method established by Propp and others. But unlike Propp, it simply identifies traits without a concern for chronology or sequence:

Figure 7. The Female Biblical Heroic (Collins, after Jezewski)

1. Little is known of her childhood.
2. She can be charming or beautiful.
3. She is widowed or otherwise abandoned by men.
4. She uses men for her own purposes.
5. She has lovers.
6. Her story includes the bedtrick, an instance of individual initiative focused on trickery or deception, in order to secure what is rightfully hers.
7. She fulfills a man’s job or obligations in seeking her due.
8. She has a son as a result of the bedtrick.
9. Her child’s story continues on in toledot, or recitations of family history.
10. Removal or de-emphasis of the male figure after the birth of the son.
11. Her death is hardly ever noted.
12. Her actions are morally ambiguous and there are conflicting views of her goodness.

Now that we have firmly isolated these stories and identified heroic elements in the stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba, I want to read these stories together and pose new questions specific to these narratives. It is not my intent to make any sort of wide, universalistic claims regarding the valorous nature of their sexual intrigue, instead, I wonder if we can say more about its unique presentation in these four stories. How does the Bible’s heroic model uniquely represent this trope? What differences or qualifications do our four stories offer on this model, and if there are differences, are they significant? Ultimately, are there enough similarities between our four stories to argue that there is an authentic biblical female heroic, distinct in some way from cross-cultural models? And if so, what does that mean?

Our next step is to read these four stories together in order to find patterns of language and action that enhance the typological heroic
relationship between them. Through charting the narrative structure, plot elements and language down to particular words, we find a related thematic cycle to the stories. Certain common themes, such as the lack of men or the presence of words like *agunah* and motifs of cleaving, argue for their linked character. This related cycle also does not necessarily rely upon chronological order or textual dependence: instead, in the context of the four narratives, we find individual ingenuity and action emerging as one of its defining themes. The symbolic links between the narratives propose that we can deepen our appreciation for these as gendered narratives by reading them together. The next phase of this discussion will intends to further enrich the discussion of women. Through reading these four stories together, we can uncover a heuristic device unique to the Bible’s depiction of women and can thus argue for a distinctive female heroic in the Bible.
CHAPTER FIVE
READING THE STORIES TOGETHER

Introduction
In this chapter, I will place these four stories side-by-side without reference to outside texts (including other biblical narratives). This comparison takes a two-pronged path. First we will identify parallel actions and relationships. Other scholars have noticed some similarities, such as moments of trickery and leave-taking. Other overlooked but equally significant tropes—like negotiation and its more emotional equivalent, bargaining, for or by these women—emerge more fully through this comparison. Through this process, I find significant thematic similarities between the women characters. Furthermore, identifying these parallel textual events while also plumbing the depths of these themes raises intriguing questions about textual meaning.

Typology
My analysis looks for patterns of similarity in action, motivation or theme—in a word, typology. I am not using typology in the Christian sense—that is, I am not reading Old Testament figures as symbolically _______________

1 We will discuss this in detail below but to clarify: instances of negotiation refer to impersonal transactions of a more businesslike nature. These would include Judah and Tamar’s working out payment for her sexual services or Boaz’s marketplace negotiations for Elimelech’s land and Ruth. Bargaining entails a more emotionally-charged personal drama. In these interactions we find a boundary experience, a place where a character’s fate depends upon the outcome of a sensitive transaction even though that character might not even be present for the interaction. Examples of this are David’s efforts to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba or Ruth cleaving to Naomi on the border between Moab and Bethlehem. The difference between them hinges upon fate: the fate of the narrative’s plot depends upon a successful outcome to the negotiations. The stakes are higher when bargaining occurs since a character’s fate (in some instances, their life or their death) depends upon how the instance of bargaining goes.
prefiguring New Testament characters. For example, I do not see Old Testament women as symbolically foreshadowing any of the women around Jesus, which is how this term is often understood in biblical contexts. Instead, I am looking for structural or thematic patterns of language and action without reference to future or past biblical history. By identifying symbolic relationships, I hope to discover meanings that exist between texts that might otherwise escape notice.

This idea of reading texts in isolation from larger contexts arises in part from the language theories of literary critics Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, who find that "text intersects with other texts," creating mosaics of meaning. Symbolic relationships, repetitions and similarities can be isolated and analyzed for what they allow the reader to observe. Identifiable textual markers serve as signs—and, according to Kristeva, these signs prompt potentialities of meaning that lie not outside the text but rather between the text and the reader. I favor this approach because I feel that the “potentiality of meanings” have not been fully exhausted, particularly with respect to these biblical women.

I am adapting some of this approach but I am not completely embracing intertextuality’s methodologies or claims (thus my reluctance to fully embrace that term in this context). As I read Kristeva, intertextuality refers to the intentional shaping of a later text by an earlier one or the ideational dependence of a later text upon earlier ones. I am not arguing for or against literary dependence in these four narratives. Nor do these heroic designations depend upon historical dependence in composition. Rather, I am simply isolating them and reading them together in order to identify similarities in focus and action.

Take, for example, a comparative discussion of Ruth. As I have already discussed, her story serves as the lynchpin for structural comparisons between Genesis 19 and Genesis 38 for Harold Fisch and Jack Sasson. Looking closely at their meticulous analyses, I find that both Fisch and Sasson isolate texts and compare them side-by-side. Their conclusions range among the standard interpretation of these stories, including levirate marriage and redemption of the Davidic line,

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4 I say this although the literary critic William Irwin claims that the term intertextuality has become so muddied it has lost much of Kristeva’s original meaning and power; see William Irwin, "Against Intertextuality,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28, no. 2 (October 2004): 227-242.
reproducing that monopolization of meaning decried by Fewell and Gunn.\(^5\) Furthermore, because their concern is salvation-history and/or dynastic antecedents, the gendered elements of these stories have been overlooked. In their defense, Fisch and Sasson do not read these as gendered texts (that is, texts that tell us something about women) and therefore, many of the behaviors or characteristics that adhere to the women in these stories are glossed over or unrealized in their analysis.\(^6\) By comparison, gender is the primary lens through which this project reads and interprets these texts.

An intertextual approach, such as the modified one offered here, adopts Fisch’s understanding of the term. According to Fisch, such a “reading together” approach finds texts in dynamic conversation with one another. As such, it does not engage historical processes of textual development or authorial intent; this sort of intertextuality is not an effort to establish how one text came to be in the corpus or how one text successfully influenced another. Here is Fisch defining for his readers (and, for this work as well) what the intertextual process is:

This is the method of “intertextuality” … We are not here doing historical criticism in the orthodox sense; we are not speaking of the priority of sources, or disentangling documents reflecting different historical periods from which the text is thought to be constituted… We are talking rather about a dynamic of relationships between texts by means of which time and history may be seized with any aid from archaeological or other extratextual evidences.\(^7\)

Thus, I will build on this structural method, but will privilege gender as my overriding concern in reading these stories. This accomplishes several things: first, it will allow us to see distinctive thematic parallels between these four stories and, in particular, the female characters. Second, these parallels raise questions about meaning and purpose that we might not otherwise realize—questions about the meaning of the women themselves and what we see now that perhaps was not previously evident. We will ask additional questions about the role of deceit and how we are to make

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\(^{5}\) Fewell and Gunn, 194.

\(^{6}\) As previously stated, I define a gendered text as one that is read and mined for what it tells us about women through their unique characterization, actions, words or impact. Therefore, stories where women abound may not necessarily be gendered texts (since there may not necessarily be enough characterization and actions in the text to inform our notions of women) but many stories where women play significant roles can be analyzed for their gendered elements—these are gendered texts.

\(^{7}\) Fisch, 436.
sense of that. Furthermore, the symbolic issue of redemption is addressed—that is, this heroic identification ultimately redeems whom—or perhaps, what? All these questions add to a new appreciation of an identifiable, authentic female heroic in the Bible.

**Ruth as Starting Point**

Since Ruth has already been mentioned, we begin with some of the elements of her story as a way to find affinity with our other narratives. In Genesis 19, the daughters of Lot are significant as the ancestresses of Moab and therefore, Ruth. Yet, they are nameless; in fact, their only identifying moniker is that of daughter. In Genesis 38, we find another daughter (more specifically, *kallah*, or daughter-in-law) in Tamar. Like Ruth, she lacks identification as anyone's particular daughter or wife or mother (although she is her father-in-law Judah's economic and familial responsibility). Tamar as well as Ruth also experience events—like Bathsheba and Lot's daughters—that suggest an affinity between the stories: scenes of bargaining and negotiation, the lack of available men, deception and sexual intrigue resulting in an unconventional pregnancy. Furthermore, together these four accounts offer a non-traditional view of biblical women: unconventional daughters who demonstrate loyalty, righteousness and loving-kindness. For these women, laboring as have-nots is valorized: they become “haves” through the realization of their own ends. These are women of initiative who work within their social and economic system to find solutions. In fact, even foreign-born daughters can become children of Israel itself. As a result, reading these four narratives as stories about biblical women who are also identified as daughters can work to alter the reader’s ideas about female children in a world of abundantly patriarchal values.

Consequently, we see that both Ruth and Genesis 19 present the account of a particular family line and demonstrate remarkable symmetry and parallelism. Additionally, we discover that the Bathsheba and Tamar narratives also include some of the same characteristic motifs and actions that Fisch and Sasson uncover in their structural analysis of Ruth and Genesis 19. Thus, we begin our typological study by briefly revisiting

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8 *Strong’s Concordance* gives bride as the first meaning of *kallah* and daughter-in-law as its secondary meaning. Interestingly, *kallah* is used seven times to refer to Naomi’s daughter-in-law, Ruth; *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. “3618. נָּהַל קָאָל*.

9 These includes instances of disaster and abandonment as well as the bedtrick: see Fisch, 425, 427 and chart, 430-431.
Fisch and Sasson’s work. Their categories prompt us to expand our reading beyond Ruth and Genesis 19 to include Tamar and Bathsheba as we move towards uncovering the distinctive picture of the female heroic in the Bible.

A Structural Approach

To briefly reiterate, Fisch offers a structural outline for the confluence of similarities in what he calls “the Ruth corpus” (Lot’s daughters, Tamar of Genesis 38 and Ruth). He also provides some profoundly instructive categories that illuminate the narrative action, such as descent, disaster, the ‘agunah’ theme (abandonment), redemption, bedtrick, and the birth of sons.10 Starting with the destruction of Sodom and ending in the birth of David, Fisch concludes that these structural affinities provide clear genealogical proof for the messianic line in general and the ascendency of David in particular.

Jack Sasson also applies a structural method to analyzing Ruth by applying the heroic motifs of Vladimir Propp.11 Through his investigation, Sasson finds little satisfaction in levirate explanations for Ruth. Instead, he also locates in Ruth the beginnings of the Davidic cycle. He concludes that Ruth’s story is merely the protracted birth narrative of Obed. While Ruth is instrumental to this process, ultimately this is the story of the Davidic dynasty, inaugurated by and focused around the birth of Obed.12

While these structural methodologies reap rich textual rewards, especially as utilized by Fisch and Sasson, they also deemphasize the agency of the women in the narratives. Such eagerness to accentuate the Davidic dynasty must as a matter of course overshadow other concerns. Both result in a splendid presentation of close textual analysis, but neither necessarily looks at these female characters on their own merits.

Ultimately, the result is that one can clearly see that Ruth, Tamar and Lot’s daughters are profoundly connected to one another by the structural similarities of their stories. The categories of agunah/abandonment, deceit, the bedtrick and unconventional pregnancies all manifest themselves in some way among our four female narratives. I intend to adopt those designations as well. Yet, we will not be guided by the standard tropes associated with these narratives, such as heroic genealogy, salvation-history, the ascendency of the House of David and covenant. The guiding

10 Fisch, 433-436.
11 Sasson, Ruth, 201.
12 Ibid., 129.
principle to this study is to identify instances of power, initiative and ingenuity among the women in the stories. This power dynamic serves as the mark of the female heroic which is profoundly located in these biblical stories. I intend to further extend this analysis to Bathsheba as her narrative also exhibits marks of the female heroic that persuasively links her as well to these stories.

Lot’s Daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba: A Structural Approach

What follows is an outline of the textual parallels between all four of our texts, with a special emphasis on gender. In addition, I borrow two of Fisch's categories—bedtrick and *agunah* motif—as illustrative categories for my purposes in constructing a comparison of shared narrative elements across all four of these narratives.

The bedtrick we have discussed elsewhere but the *agunah* theme requires a bit of explanation. Fisch defines *agunah* thematically as:

… the theme of the woman abandoned or widowed and unable, as a result, to continue the line of the generations. And the solution in each case is along the same lines. A father or father-figure becomes responsible for the perpetuation of the family, although the initiative in all three narratives is taken by the widow/daughter herself who secretly or by guile offers herself to the ‘father.’

This theme expands beyond a narrow understanding of a woman who is not technically allowed to take another husband. Rather, this includes male abandonment as a motivating factor behind their eventual trickery/guile of biblical daughters and widows. Their unmarriageable status is understood; the term *agunah* encompasses the fact that their husbands are either dead or have abandoned them. But this theme takes in the secondary emotional reality that there are also men who could or should be providing for these women but are not. Thus, the *agunah* theme incorporates a deeper sense of the strict legal as well as emotional limitations placed upon marriageable women as the decisive motivating factor in their later deeds. For our purposes, this category is expanded into two identifiable elements: abandonment as well as a *This makes their guile/trickery all the more remarkable since it is the women who are contriving to actively work around their abandonment.*

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13 Fisch, 429.
My charge therefore is to identify and label significant shared elements across all four narratives. I have identified seven significant points of similarity between the four narratives. By focusing on these significant similarities, we will be able to clearly confirm the female heroic metamyth in the Bible (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Parallels between Lot’s Daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot’s Daughters</th>
<th>Tamar</th>
<th>Ruth</th>
<th>Bathsheba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave-taking</td>
<td>Leave-taking</td>
<td>Leave-taking</td>
<td>Leave-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot leaves for Sodom</td>
<td>Tamar leaves home for Judah’s household</td>
<td>Ruth and Naomi leave Moab for Bethlehem</td>
<td>Bathsheba leaves her home for the palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot negotiates with the mob regarding his daughters</td>
<td>Tamar negotiates terms of sex with Judah</td>
<td>Boaz negotiates for land and Ruth in marketplace</td>
<td>Bathsheba negotiates with David for Solomon’s succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of three</td>
<td>Death of three</td>
<td>Death of three</td>
<td>Death of three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two daughters and wife die in Sodom</td>
<td>Husbands Er and Onan die; Judah’s wife dies</td>
<td>Mahlon, Chilion and Elimilech die</td>
<td>Uriah, unnamed baby, and Adonijah die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot bargains with God outside Zoar</td>
<td>Tamar bargains for her life; sends Judah his personal effects in response to his outrage at her pregnancy</td>
<td>Ruth pleads with Naomi outside Bethlehem, pledging her devotion</td>
<td>Uriah and David bargain over Uriah’s return home to Bathsheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>Abandonment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daughters think there are no men left after Sodom’s destruction</td>
<td>Tamar sent home to father’s house to live as a widow; Shelah not forthcoming as husband</td>
<td>Naomi and Ruth both widows</td>
<td>Bathsheba’s husband is off at war but she is quickly widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedtrick</td>
<td>Bedtrick</td>
<td>Bedtrick</td>
<td>Bedtrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine and incest lead to sex with Lot</td>
<td>Tamar entices Judah</td>
<td>Ruth goes to Boaz’s threshing floor</td>
<td>Bathsheba bathes in David’s sight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth of son(s)</td>
<td>Birth of son(s)</td>
<td>Birth of son(s)</td>
<td>Birth of son(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth of Moab and Ammon</td>
<td>Birth of Perez and Zerah</td>
<td>Birth of Obed</td>
<td>Birth of Solomon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Seven Similar Narrative Events**

We find seven events that link all four of our stories together. I believe these events are neither coincidental nor generic; they are too specific and too numerous to be either. For instance, all our characters are taken out of their known situation and put into a new environment; all are vulnerable in some way; all experience deaths close to them. And, most importantly, all characters make choices to act in order to secure something for themselves. This cannot be overstated: rather than being seen as passive characters or simple devices in service to a larger plot, these women are active participants in their destiny. Therefore, it is not by chance that their stories share elements since they stand in league with the female heroic metamyth.

First, a definition of terms: *Leave-taking* refers to the physical movement of our characters from one geographic place to another. Two other closely related events occur in all of our stories: *bargaining* and *negotiation*. I intend to make a distinction here between these more detached operations (negotiation) and more emotionally-charged, strident personal dealings, which I call bargaining. Bargaining in this context focuses on personal dramas fueled by emotional concerns for intimacy, affection, paternity and survival. By contrast, I define negotiating as strictly business-type transactions—an impersonal, straightforward exchange of property, persons or money, often with attendant concerns for public prestige. These interactions can be initiated by either the men or
the women in the stories and tend occur at practical junctures. Both bargaining and negotiation occur in the context of our stories. The *agunah* motif (here understood as an unmarriageable state brought about in this context by male abandonment) and *almanah* (widowhood) motif also appear in all four stories as well as the deaths of three persons, the bedtrick and the birth of son(s). Analysis of these various structural elements finds us looking at these stories in new ways as we seek to uncover the women within these shared events.

Leave-taking

Both Lot’s family as well as Elimelech and Naomi leave Israel for foreign climes, suggesting their alienation from Israel. For her part, Ruth leaves her natal home (Moab) to settle in her mother-in-law’s hometown, Bethlehem. Tamar leaves her natal household for Judah's to be married, and leaves her father’s home to go to the entrance to Enaim in order to entice Judah (Genesis 38.14). Bathsheba also leaves her household at David's request twice—first, at his summons after he espies her at her bath (2 Sam 11.4); second, after the death of Uriah (2 Sam. 11.26).

Negotiating

This refers to public business/commerce interactions intended to preserve or enhance the male prestige or status with little apparent emotional investment. Negotiating is different from bargaining, a more emotionally-charged personal exchange involving persons or financial items. Negotiating is a type of commerce which includes property issues as well as securing one’s rights or maintaining one’s public reputation in the community. Often this negotiation appears at a practical juncture in the story.

Lot’s experience with the mob provides an example of this. He leaves his private home and steps out into a public space, offering his daughters to the violent crowd (“let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof,” Genesis 19:8). He shows himself to be shortsighted (a play on the meaning of his name, “a covering” or “veil”) by failing to recognize the two men within his home as angelic visitors.\(^\text{14}\) Despite this, the crowd

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\(^{14}\) Admittedly, Abraham also fails to recognize his angelic visitors (Genesis18), a necessary requirement for the folkloric motif of hospitality to a magical stranger (see Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publications, 2006),
mocks him and his aspirations to be one of them (“This fellow came to sojourn, and now he would play the judge!” Genesis 19.9). He is saved only by divine intervention, not because of anything that he does, but presumably because of Abraham’s entreaties in the previous chapter. Lot therefore is the anti-go’el: he redeems no one. His negotiations prove pathetic at best and shameful at worse. He will find one rape substituted for another as the narrative unfolds.

In Tamar’s account, we find a commercial transaction between a man and a woman for her sexual favors. It is a business-like encounter, as one would expect with a roadside prostitute. In this, Tamar risks much—unbeknownst to Judah, the terms as well as the outcome could decide her very life. Tamar agrees to have sex with him but as part of the negotiation, Judah must provide Tamar with some tangible pledge of future payment. He promises to later deliver a kid from his flock, secured by his ring, staff and signet. In a single verse, they both agree and, without much fanfare, the sexual transaction takes place (Genesis 38.18). As promised, Judah keeps his side of the deal: he later sends his friend the Adullamite to deliver the negotiated kid to the non-existent sex worker (Genesis 38.20).

In Ruth, the public negotiations unfold in honorable ways. The unnamed kinsman of Elimelech intends to redeem the land of his dead relative. Boaz, as arbiter of these transactions, takes slight advantage of the situation, insisting upon marriage to Ruth for the unnamed male relative when normally such a thing might not be expected. The kinsman is unable to fulfill this added obligation; to do so might impoverish his estate. Boaz, in this instance, serves as the public go’el, the one who redeems Ruth and Naomi through these proceedings.

In 1 Kings 1, Bathsheba conspires with the prophet Nathan and negotiates with David in order to secure Solomon’s place on the throne. At Nathan's urging, she publicly presents herself before the enfeebled king, reminding David that he swore by the Lord his God that Solomon should reign after him (1 Kings 1.17). She negotiates with David for her son’s ascendency, citing his promises on Solomon’s behalf. In this, she appears at one and the same time innocent as well as clever, her interior thoughts and motivations unavailable to us.

However, in this instance, given the descriptive connotation behind Lot’s name, his failure to grasp that these mysterious strangers are powerful divine messengers provides additional and significant insight into his character (beyond simply alerting the reader to the folkloric convention).

Judah refers to her as a common harlot (zonah, 38:15). Hiram the Adullamite refers to her as a cult prostitute, orqedesha (38:21).
Death of Three

This trope appears in all four stories. In the Lot narrative, we find two of Lot’s married daughters perishing in Sodom as the hellfire rains down. Lot, his unnamed wife and the two unmarried daughters are forcibly sent from the city by angels whereupon—despite warnings—his wife looks back; she becomes a pillar of salt, preserving forever her backward gaze. Thus three women die and Lot and his two remaining daughters depart.

In Tamar’s story, husbands Er and Onan die early on—Er for some unnamed wickedness, Onan for spilling his seed. Later, Judah's unnamed wife also dies. After her death—and perhaps spurred by loneliness—Judah, on his way to the raucous sheep-shearing festivities, contracts with the faux harlot Tamar.

In the Ruth tale, the death of three comes after the family’s leave-taking from Judah. These named men—Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion—all die in Moab. The sons in fact have been married to Moabite women for ten years without issue, suggesting their sickly or infertile states (since Ruth clearly can bear children).16

During the course of Bathsheba's tale we also find three deaths. First her husband Uriah dies; then, the unnamed baby from her illicit relationship with David. Finally, Adonijah, the contender that threatens her son's place on the throne, is killed. She in fact inaugurates the process (deliberately or not—it is unclear) that ends with Adonijah's death at Solomon's hands by asking for David’s concubine Abishag on his behalf (1 Kings 2). In an indirect way, she is connected to all of these deaths. She does not order Uriah’s death; David does. She plays a role in the unnamed baby’s conception but God appears only to David to foretell of the infant’s impending death (2 Sam. 12:14). Finally, she does not seek Adonijah’s death but that is the result of her request on his behalf to Solomon.17

16 Mahlon translates literally as “to blot out” and Chilion as “to perish.” These names serve as markers to alert the reader to the shadowy, feeble nature of these husbands.

17 More than the other three women, Bathsheba remains an ambiguous character. Scholars are hard-pressed to remain ambivalent regarding her place in the text and her motivations. For example, Irene Nowell feels the biblical narrator is far more concerned about David’s moral presence than Bathsheba's role in any of this although is it Bathsheba who pays the price: "The narrator focuses the story on David; Bathsheba remains a mystery … Nonetheless, she suffers for David's sins: both her husband and her baby die;” see Irene Nowell, "Jesus' Great-Grandmothers: Matthew's Four and More," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 70:1
Bargaining

In this context, bargaining is a more emotionally charged transaction than the businesslike, public negotiating. Here we find interactions that focus on personal dramas involving intimacy, survival, affection and paternity. This is also an essential part of what I will later identify as the core narrative undergirding all four accounts.

For the Lot narrative, a melancholy boundary bargaining occurs on the Zoar plains, where Lot balks at going up to the mountain. Instead he bargains with God for a different place of safety. Lot asks, “...Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake (dbq) me, and I die” (Genesis 19.19). This is a desperate exchange: Lot stands on a poignant precipice between destruction and the unknown. Lot hides in a cave outside of Zoar and will not enter the city out of fear that some unknown evil (ra’, or evil, misery or unhappiness) will cling (dbq) to him. Lot fears for himself: he anxiously seeks release from further harm. Whether Lot pleads for liberation from either physical or emotional hurt is unclear: that which clings to Lot at this moment could be the fear of further destruction or an emotional plea for no more personal misery. It could be both.

Tamar’s evident pregnancy represents a high-stakes public gamble that she now bargains will turn in her favor. Judah's honor has been sullied by the report of Tamar's pregnancy. He calls her out (presumably from her father's house as she has been sent from Judah's household) to a public place for her punishment. She plays her trump card—Judah's personal effects—maneuvering not for a place of physical safety but for her very life. In this situation, not unlike Genesis 19, the men emerge as less righteous than the women. She successfully risks all; Judah spares not only her own life but that of her unborn children. Tamar achieves for them a place of honor denied to them by Judah.

For Ruth and Naomi, bargaining occurs at the boundary to safety, the land of Judah. At Naomi’s insistence, Orpah reluctantly decides to return to her mother’s house (bet em) rather than the conventional father’s house, a signal to the feminized nature of this discourse. Following this is Ruth’s

(Year 2008): 8. And, I would argue, Bathsheba also plays a role in Adonijah’s death. Her entreaties to Solomon spell death for Solomon’s older half-brother.

18 We will spend some time looking at this word and its nuances in depth later in the chapter. For the moment and in the context of Genesis 19, dbq carries the sense of a causative: to cause the LORD’s disaster to adhere or cling to him in an entirely undesirable way.
moving “Entreat me not to leave you ... for where you go I will go” speech (Ruth 1.16-18) where she vows her willingness to adopt Naomi’s god, Naomi’s people and even to die with Naomi. Unlike Lot, she declares affection like a child for a parent: I will be what you are, do what you do, go where you go, believe what you believe. In a moment of literary artistry, Lot fears that some unknown evil or misery adheres (dbq) to him; Ruth’s narrator employs clinging (dbq) to express Ruth’s emotional connection to Naomi. She will remain steadfast to this Israelite mother-in-law, even unto death. Ruth’s affection impels her towards attachment; Lot’s fears cause him to shun connection.

For Bathsheba, bargaining takes place between David and Uriah, with Bathsheba as the indirect pawn of these dealings. She inhabits an uncomfortable social boundary insofar as she is married and pregnant but we, the reader, know that she is not pregnant by her lawful husband. We, the reader, also are privy to this bargain on Bathsheba’s behalf. The text is silent as to whether the pregnant mother knows anything about this. Ultimately, the transaction settles who will claim paternity for Bathsheba’s unborn baby even though Uriah, like Judah, is unaware of the stakes. Thus, David bargains with certain desperation, Uriah less so. But in this tale, it is Uriah who will prove the most righteous, not David and not Bathsheba.19 Over several evenings, the king urges the soldier to visit his wife for conjugal pleasures. Uriah does not openly defy the king but neither does he visit Bathsheba. Despite David's considerable efforts, Uriah remains constant. As a result, David's bargaining is unsuccessful. By this act of military loyalty, Uriah seals his fate, the fate of his wife's unborn child and David's later conviction of his sin (2 Sam. 11.6-26).

Abandonment (Almanah/Agunah motif)

The agunah (literally “chained”), or unmarriageable woman, motif is closely related to the designation of almanah, or widow, two awkward social states. As previously noted, the designation agunah refers to a wife who has been abandoned or lacks proper evidence of her husband’s death

19 In Genesis 38 as well as Ruth, both the women are acclaimed as the “righteous one” in her story. In Genesis 19, there seems to be no one who is righteous. It would be difficult to argue that there is anything righteous about the efforts of Lot’s daughters unless one conjectures that they represent young, innocent girls who feel that they are in desperate circumstances. Despite this, they more fully reflect their father’s dimness rather than any moral corruption or righteousness for themselves.
and is thus unable to remarry. The true widow, or *almanah*, inhabits an equally socially unembedded status.

Carolyn Leeb expands upon this distinction and claims that a widow enjoys a precarious existence, one that is not socially controlled, circumscribed, restricted or protected by a husband, son, father or uncle. For Leeb, to be *almanah* specifically refers to a woman’s diminished economic and social status: “[She has] no secure attachment to a household headed by an adult male, in which she can be protected and represented.”

Dvora Weisberg further clarifies:

The death of a childless man has very different consequences for his widow... Her ties to her husband, or to his family, are not severed by his death... She is no longer a full member of her husband’s family, but she is still bound to his family in some way.

To modern sensibilities, this might seem liberating: finally free from male oversight, a woman can at last claim her life as her own. However, for ancient women, to be either *agunah* or *almanah* means trying to survive within a meager social support network by depending upon the charitable impulses of their tenuous family connections or neighbors. Such a life often results in a desperate existence, especially since she is without issue. In such a situation, families are sometimes less inclined to feel responsible for her.

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22 And yet, the Bible (and the book of Deuteronomy in particular), is filled with exhortations for the community to care for the widow, orphan and stranger and provides an elaborate charitable social network for its poorest and least protected citizens. For example, Ex. 22:22 says, “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child;” Deut 24:17 says, "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge; Deuteronomy 26:13, “Then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all the commandments which you have given me...”” However, these are not politically legislated social services but rather theologically driven. One is to care for the indigent because the Lord God cared for Israel and brought them out of Egypt for they were once strangers in a strange land (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19). Such charity depends upon the
Such would seem to be the case with our women. Three of our women are childless widows—Tamar, Ruth and eventually Bathsheba. Bathsheba is also *agunah*—her husband is off at war. He is not missing in action during her liaison with David, but eventually, he will be dispatched, making Bathsheba *almanah* before long. In all instances we find that it is either male indolence or the lack of men which motivates these women to act. Yet, we will find that *agunah*, or one who is chained or abandoned, is a more comprehensive designation for our women than *almanah*.

However, Leeb notes, Bathsheba is never called *almanah*, even after Uriah's death. Neither are Tamar, Ruth or Naomi. Interestingly, Tamar is commanded by Judah to live *as if* she were a widow in her father's house, even though in fact she *is* a widow twice over and Judah still has economic responsibility for her.²³ Leeb claims that the truest expression of biblical widowhood is a post-menopausal woman without clan ties to a supportive social and economic network. This is Naomi.²⁴ However, young and reproductively viable widows such as Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba do not seem to inhabit this role. And while all three women live in households without a male present, it would seem that they live in proximity to an abundance of men. Therefore, they suffer more acutely from a lack of *available* males (or, available males who are either unable or unwilling to act) rather than from their status as widows.

This then provides the thematic impetus to action within these four narratives: unembedded women who have been abandoned by their significant male protectors. How this abandonment comes about is of less import than the realization by these women that they must seek their due on their own. It will be their response to this social and cultural rejection that serves as the fuel for their bedtrick.

Interestingly, Lot's daughters find themselves in a situation that closely mirrors *almanah*—they are pre-menopausal women without potent family connections. They live ostensibly in a household headed by a male but without the necessary social moorings. That is, their father has recently offered them up to a violent, brutalizing crowd in Sodom. Their city has been destroyed and now they find themselves alone with their father in cave outside Zoar and for all they know, their world has been annihilated. All they know—all they can see—is what is true for the other three: if a male is to be had, they must secure him for themselves, thus leading to the bedtrick.

²³ Leeb, 160, 162.
²⁴ Ibid., 161.
Agunah, the inability to marry due to abandonment or lack of available men, provides another essential component of the core narrative and is responsible for setting the action in motion. Specifically, beyond widowhood, what all our stories’ women lack is available men. The Lot story encounters this abandonment motif in the cave when the daughters finally speak. Concluding that no men survive to help them raise up their father’s seed, they act to remedy the situation.

For Tamar, her abandonment is evident: two husbands have died and although there are many men around her in the narrative (she is the only living woman in her story), none are available to her. She is sent to her father's house to languish. Then, "She saw that Shelah was grown up and she had not been given to him in marriage" (Genesis 38.14). Furthermore, she is living as a widow in her father's house, yet her father cannot contract another marriage for her. Only Judah can do that. She has been promised Shelah but that situation shows no guarantee of resolving itself.

In Ruth, Naomi alerts the reader to the dearth of men. She has no husbands for Orpah and Ruth; she has no husband herself and she has no more sons to give them. She says even if she were to become pregnant that night, she could not ask them to wait for that child’s majority for these two to forestall marriage for themselves. Unlike Lot’s daughters, she frees them from their obligations to her in order to secure marriageable men for themselves.

For Bathsheba, her unembedded status comes about because her husband is off at war. And while we might conjecture that this represents not a lack of men but merely a temporary absence (like Lot’s daughters). She has been abandoned to the wiles of others, specifically David. Furthermore there also appear to be no children in Bathsheba's life. Thus, like all of our women, she lacks not just a husband but sons as well. Like Tamar, she is wife-not-wife; married but with a husband who is textually absent for much of the action. Her social status and economic standing are ambiguous at best.

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25 One might conjecture here that Naomi’s lament is for herself as a marriageable female as well as for the daughters-in-law and her realization that probably no man will present himself to her as potential husband or lover. Yet she, for her part, expresses her grief in terms of the daughters-in-law (“Are there yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?” Ruth 1.11), a reversal of the Lotan situation.

26 In fact, we never even see Uriah speak with Bathsheba. All his interactions are with David alone (2 Sam. 11.7-12).

27 Weisberg, "Levirate marriage and halitzah," 67-68.
Bedtrick

Lot’s daughters enfeeble their father with wine and trick him into having intercourse with them on two successive evenings. Lot is silent and presumably has no memory of these events since we hear nothing from him again. If he figures this out, if he feels shame, we simply are not told. In effect, he is ravished, a stunning ironic play by the daughters who nearly suffered the same fate because of their father’s blind allegiance to a notion of “hospitality.”

Tamar's trickery includes her zonah disguise in order to entice the one person who has responsibility for her, gaining some concrete assurance to later use against him and completing her seduction. Her duplicity rests less in her sexual deception than in her premeditation: she wants a child, not just by anyone, but by her husband's family. It would seem that this is the only way to earn what she deserves.

Ruth, at Naomi’s insistence, heads to the threshing floor, a place of drunken revelry in the aftermath of the barley harvest. She undertakes a certain seduction of Boaz in order to win his heart—or at least his commitment. Ruth’s initiative is not viewed as untoward but is reckoned to her as chesed by Boaz, who calls her “my daughter” twice in the context of his declarations for her. In the morning, she is sent away full, perhaps a biblical double entendre expressing an economic as well as sexual surety.

Bathsheba's adulterous pregnancy comes about as a result of David’s rooftop vision of her bath as well as the king’s late-day languor. As we have already noted, much of Bathsheba's character is uncertain; her bedtrick raises similar questions of intention. Did she purposely aim to entice David with her less-than-modest bath? Once summoned, could she have declined his invitation? Did she intend to get pregnant by the king as means to entrap him? Was she aware that David recalled Uriah after she announced her pregnancy to him? Did she know that David seemed to wish to cover up—or even outright deny—paternity of this baby? Again, the only person who emerges honorably in this sordid affair is Uriah. (Even the prophet Nathan and King Solomon are tainted by proximity to David and Bathsheba.) There exists an opportunity to question the integrity of Bathsheba's actions, which includes license to view her bath not unlike Tamar’s roadside temptation: that is, as a prelude to the bedtrick.
Birth of son(s)

The successful birth of sons occurs in all four narratives. But, unlike the barren mother birth narratives, no special birth announcement precedes these births. The intent is not necessarily to alert readers to the special nature of these boys. Rather, these children are specially begotten through the initiative of their mothers. It is the mothers that we notice; the birth of these sons merit special attention because of the ingenuity of their mothers.

The mothers’ barrenness, such as it is, arises not from any physical impairment or emotional dysfunction (such as Rachel, who bears the blame for her infertility [Genesis 30:1-2]). The void stems from a type of abandonment or a lack of appropriate males. Once those men are obtained (by some highly irregular means), pregnancy occurs quite naturally.

Typology and Themes

This chapter started by reading these four texts together in order to categorize the identifiable parallels between these biblical narratives. Their commonalities speak to a recognizable connection between the stories, one which takes on a richer sense of the relatedness between these female characters as women abandoned and left to their own devices, who find a way to make the situation work for them despite their ill-use by the men around themselves.

These thematic commonalities (leave-taking, negotiation, the motif of three deaths, bargaining, abandonment, trickery and the eventual birth of sons) now prompt us to ask important questions about what this all means. That is to say, having identified these parallels, our next issue is to consider the potentialities of meaning regarding these textual women—specifically, questions about the role of deceit as well as what is or is not literally and metaphorically visible in these narratives. Secondarily, we ask as well: can we discern any meaning behind the essence of daughterhood in these stories? Looking at these four stories together, we recognize themes that might have previously escaped our notice. Therefore, now we move into meanings that are prompted by the text but are also more symbolic in nature.

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28 Once they are born, we really hear nothing more about them, save Solomon, whose birth narrative is not part of the bedtrick of Bathsheba.
Boundary Dwellers

For example, as already noted, one thematic association between all four stories is the motif of daughters. Lot’s daughters and Ruth are clearly identified as daughters in their stories. Tamar is Judah’s daughter-in-law. Bathsheba is recognized as the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam. 11:3). Certain actions seem to arise from their roles as daughters (rather than mothers or wives) in the text. Looking at their motivations and concerns as daughters, we can build a more nuanced picture of how these four stories portray biblical daughters. This is especially significant. Now we find that the categorization of daughter is linked to motifs of deception, which offers further insight into the gendered nature of these stories.

For biblical daughters, the marriage of gender and deception makes perfect sense. As Karla Shargent notes, “[t]he insecurity of biblical daughters can be said to operate at least partially because their textual world is one that positions them on the boundaries.” For Lot’s daughters the emotional core of their narrative hinges on their father’s concern lack of concern for them and his almost singular focus on himself even though they, too, are travelers with him on this disastrous road. They inhabit an emotional boundary outside Lot’s immediate circle. The word *dabaq* (to cleave, cling or stay close to) is instructive here. Understood in this context as Lot’s fear of being consumed by some unknown disaster, this action comes as Lot cries to the angels, “I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me (*tidabagni*), and I die,” (Genesis 19:19). Lot eschews the directives given to him by God’s emissaries and, in a broader, thematic sense, he also disavows any emotional intimacy for himself and consequently, for those around him. Neither his wife nor his daughters are named, nor does he voice concern for them or see them in loving ways. He appears blind to emotional intimacy, either with his god or his family. His daughters therefore resort to deceit in order to release themselves from their marginalized existence. They represent boundary characters. Metaphorically as well as textually, Lot’s daughters realize no secure place of their own and live as dwellers on the edge of the text, struggling to survive.

Tamar’s deceit depends not upon intimacy, per se. As one who is left vulnerable by the deceit of others, she also inhabits a boundary not of her

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30 Ibid., 29, 30.
31 Shargent, 42.
own making, living not only like a widow, but in actuality as a widow in her father's house. She must resort to her own wits to bring about her desired end. She tricks Judah based on his own weakness and need. In this context, deceit is vindicated by the text itself when Judah declares Tamar's righteousness above his own (Gen. 38.26).

In the Ruth narrative, Naomi and Ruth negotiate new boundaries, boundaries that are both geographical and devotional. Like Genesis 19, cleaving and emotional intimacy provide the expressive core of this plot, but in ways never dreamed of in Lot’s story. On the border of Judah, Ruth pledges to cleave—both physically as well as emotionally—to Naomi. However, unlike Genesis 19, here we find a character embracing intimacy, acclaimed for her role in Naomi’s life and her emotional sufficiency rather than declaring panic and dread and hiding in a cave to forestall such cleaving or physical closeness. Where the daughters of Lot are textually frozen out and Lot eschews emotional connection, in Ruth we find the rehabilitation of devotion between a parent and child. This finds later expression in her praise as “better than seven sons,” a numerical expression of exaggerated intensity. Whatever deceit or trickery adheres to Ruth is ameliorated by her abundant chesed.

Bathsheba's story—like all those above—inhabits an indefinite boundary. The narrator hides Bathsheba's motivations from us; our interpretation of her runs the gamut from innocent pawn to designing manipulator. While her story is ostensibly about David, we find in Bathsheba an actor left purposely elusive by the text. Her ingenuity is later revealed—her influential skills become more marked as her narrative progresses. We find her realizing a place in the text in quiet yet demonstrable ways. Our perception of Bathsheba as the docile ewe lamb is challenged since her ambiguously characterized trickery indirectly results in death for those around her. No one declares Bathsheba righteous. No one celebrates her chesed. Yet neither is she vilified (like Jezebel), nor is she seen as in any way cautionary, like Proverb’s Lady Folly.

We can now turn to the symbolic motifs common to all four: seeing and knowing, deceit, daughters and cleaving/emotional intimacy. Once these themes are determined and explored, we can more fully engage a

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32 See note in Yairah Amit, “‘Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?’ (1 Samuel 1.8): Male and female interpretations,” in A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings,” 71.
question regarding who (or what) is redeemed by this process and what effect does that have on our heroic interpretation of these narratives.

Seeing But Not Knowing

All of these accounts showcase some aspect of those who see but fail to fully recognize those around them. This "seeing but not knowing" takes on a particular poignancy since the individuals who are most clearly overlooked are the women. In Genesis 19 this failure to see takes on appalling import; in Ruth, we see the reassignment of that signification in adept and artful ways.

In Genesis 19, Lot proves himself lacking in vision in innumerable instances. On the threshold of his home, Lot symbolically closes the door behind himself and steps outside. He transgresses the boundary between the sanctity of his domestic sphere (the feminine) and approaches the external (masculine) chaos of the public. He offers his two virginal daughters, failing to see on two levels: either that angelic messengers have come within his midst as well as failing to see his two daughters as anything more than a means to a misplaced end. Whatever concern he has for his daughters is veiled (a play on Lot’s name, which means covering or veil) behind his own self-concern.

In addition, we find in Genesis 19 a mother whose eyes are forever looking backward. Lot's wife looks not at whatever future she might have with her two remaining daughters, but back to the ones left behind. This mother has been advised not to look back, not to consider the past of the city or her left-behind children. Yet she does and is forever after preserved in that backward glance. Thus, she not only fails to see her two remaining daughters—she ensures that she never will.

In Genesis 38.14, Tamar dons the garb of harlotry and sits at the gates of Enaim ("Eyes") after she "sees" (rat'tah) that Shelah has grown but is not being offered to her in marriage. Verse 15 states, "When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot, for she had covered her face." He fails to see her, to recognize her, even during intercourse since he departs

34 Tapp, 162; Shargent, 36.
35 The translation here is unclear. The conditional sense of the Qal imperfect is rendered as "his sons-in-law, which married his daughters" in the King James Version and the American Standard Version, suggesting that perhaps there are other daughters besides these two unmarried girls. However, the Revised Standard Version as well as the English Standard Version translate this as men who are betrothed to these girls (“sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters”).
36 Van Wolde, 15.
without comment. His lack of vision is ironically confirmed when he demands to see Tamar prior to her public punishment. Judah recognizes his own signatory items and then must accept that she has realized what he did not. With Tamar, we see what Judah must be made to see: that she is the more righteous.

For Ruth’s part, the lack of vision is more benign but just as neglectful. For example, Orpah evokes Lot's wife. Orpah signals her return to Moab by her return to the land of her mother (bet em). This maternal imagery brings to mind our connection to Lot's wife, looking back for her daughters in the foreign land of Sodom. And like Lot's wife, Orpah dies from our view through her return to her mother’s house, the place of her backward glance (from whence we glimpse the metaphoric meaning of her name, ‘back of her neck’) as well.

Naomi clearly believes that her happiness and security depend upon proximity to husbands and sons. She bemoans her lack, calling herself bitter—not sad, not grieving, but bitter—an enhanced state of sorrow coupled with anger. Although she returns with a loyal daughter-in-law, she does not even acknowledge Ruth to the women of the town (1.20-21), despite Ruth's expressed desire to stay with Naomi above all others. She fails to see any merit in Ruth.

Later, in the dark of the threshing floor, Boaz asks Ruth, “Who are you?” implying that he, also, does not or cannot see. He must be told by Ruth who she is, not only in her essence, but in her desired relationship with him (“I am Ruth, your servant. Now spread your ‘wing’ [kanap] over your servant, for you are a redeemer,” 3.9). As Levine points out Naomi (and, I would argue, Boaz as well) must learn to see Ruth’s value.

The focus of sight in Bathsheba's story comes from David's perspective:

And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon (2 Sam. 11.2)

Bathsheba, unlike our previous women, is the focus of a man's—David's—gaze. The sight of her spurs David to action even though David dwelt (yashab) in Jerusalem while Joab and his men fought the king's battles (2 Sam. 11.1). Yet like Lot and Judah, and to some extent Boaz, who must ask Ruth to identify herself; David sees in Bathsheba what he wants to see—a beautiful, sexually available woman. The problem is,

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37 Campbell, 55; 64; 72-73.
38 Levine, “Ruth,” 84.
39 Ibid.
however, that Bathsheba is not sexually available—at least to him. Prior to sending for her, David is in fact informed of her married state. Unlike Judah, he cannot claim ignorance of her status. He admires her beauty from his rooftop and that gaze alone supersedes all other information about her.

For most, Bathsheba’s trickery lies in a scene of ambiguously engineered enticement only (ambiguous insofar as it is not clear if she is aware of the king’s gaze or not). She can be faulted for setting the action in motion—or for starting something without thinking through the consequences. Or perhaps she fully knew the consequences but proceeded anyways. She may in the final analysis ultimately be guilty of playing at naïveté. Bathsheba’s ambiguity can bear all of these interpretations.

**Deceit**

Deceit firmly attaches itself to women, especially daughters, in the Bible. We find many examples of female falsehood: In Exodus, Pharaoh’s own daughter directly defies her father's decree to kill every Israelite baby boy by rescuing the baby Moses. In further defiance, she sends him to be raised in an Israelite household, only later bringing him into Pharaoh's palace to be raised as her own (Ex. 2.10). Rachel lies to her father Laban about stealing his household gods and compounds the deceit by sitting upon them, possibly defiling them. Did this happen during her menstrual cycle? We cannot be sure; since Rachel lied to her father already, she might also be lying about her physical state (Genesis 31.34-35). In 1 Samuel, Michal, who loved David, tricks her father Saul by lying about David's presence in her household thereby aiding David in his escape from Saul (1 Sam. 19). The narrator tells us more than once that Michal loves David but never once says anything of her love for her father or if in fact her beloved David bore any love for her at all (1 Sam. 18.20, 28).

Irene Nowell suggests that biblical deceit is the purview of the powerless, one of the few means of influence available to them. And few are more powerless in the Bible than daughters. Thus we find deceit linking our four narratives. Lot’s daughters ply their father with alcohol

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40 Berlin, “Characterization in Biblical Narrative,” 76.
41 Rachel claims that “the time of women” is upon her. If so, she has defiled the items by proximity to her menstrual blood (Levs. 15:20 charges that a menstruating woman contaminates anything or anyone she touches during her monthly period).
42 Klein, 85-90.
43 Nowell, 5.
until he would not know one from the other in order to trick him into incestuous sex (Genesis 19.35). Tamar plays the harlot on the side of the road. She does not overtly lie to Judah but neither is she forthcoming. Nowell contends that Tamar's is a double deception since "she was not a prostitute and payment was not what she wanted."44 Ruth tricks the somewhat inebriated Boaz, entering the threshing floor under dark of night intent upon pursuing her cause. She further manipulates Boaz, asking that he serve as go'el, a role specifically reserved for the brother of the deceased (Deuteronomy 25.5-10).45 Bathsheba’s deceit is established if not by her seductive bath then by her machinations to put Solomon on the throne. She recalls an unrecorded promise by David that he would privilege her son above all others (1 Kings 1.17). Through this, Bathsheba exploits David's continuing desire to engineer the course of Israel, even as he slips into death.

If, as Nowell claims, deceit is a ploy utilized by the vulnerable, then has gender alone rendered these women vulnerable? Perhaps a better question might be are these particular women more vulnerable than other women in the Bible who do not resort to such deception? To whom or to what are they made vulnerable? Is it the whimsy of men alone that renders them defenseless? Certainly we have other women so victimized—Jephthah’s daughter in Judges 11, for instance, or the unnamed Levite’s concubine in Judges 19—two women who die horribly at the hands of violent, brutal men. The difference here is female enterprise. We might note that the women in Judges lack initiative, resulting in their shocking deaths. However, such a declaration blames the victim, as if their silence justifies their destiny, when in reality we have different stories. The point is that not all daughter stories evidence deceit (Jephthah’s daughter) and not all daughters who lie to their fathers succeed (see Michal, who despite her lies on his behalf was eventually repudiated by David [2 Sam. 6.21-23]). Therefore, one’s status as a biblical woman does not automatically render one a liar in the Bible.

Deceit plays a significant role in our stories. It ties the narratives together in a linked motif that highlights the vulnerability of the women but in markedly dissimilar ways. Lot’s daughters are victimized by their father’s inept parenting and his inability to value them in any substantive way. Tamar, too, is held captive by Judah’s blatant disregard for her. Ruth’s vulnerability lies in her foreign status, her widowhood and the crushing poverty that surrounds her and Naomi. Boaz is not the

44 Ibid., 4.
perpetrator of this victimization but clearly there are family connections in Bethlehem who have failed to recognize Naomi’s desperate situation.

Like much in Bathsheba’s story, the narrator’s economy of language makes it difficult to know what is deceit and what is merely not known. However, there is no doubt that deceit permeates the narrative, from her problematic pregnancy and David’s abhorrent actions with Uriah to those around Bathsheba who would use her as a political pawn either via the disgraced house of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 23.34) or in her dynastic intrigues on behalf of Solomon and Adonijah.46

This symbolic connection draws attention to a key ingredient in these narratives: deceit emerges when males who should provide for and/or protect these women do not, often with ironic consequences. Such pretense should not be read as a cautionary device—that is, do not act like “these women”—since the result for them is not death but a positive through the birth of sons. Deceit is not encouraged but neither does the Bible necessarily discourage women from mendacity. Its role is much more complex in this context. For our purposes, deceit therefore serves to alert us that these are enterprising women, providing another defining element within these gendered narratives.

Daughterhood

We have said much about daughters in the text. Now we ask: what is the role daughter in our stories? Should we expand our notions of biblical daughterhood to include women who are unprotected? How important is this claim, “better to you than seven sons”? Who makes that charge and why?

In all four stories, we have daughters who are either mistreated (Lot’s daughters, Tamar) or who are left without a husband at home and no apparent protector/father figure (Ruth/Naomi and Bathsheba). The mistreatment/abandonment by their fathers/fathers-in-law or absence of a husband or proxy protector leaves them vulnerable, a theme that drives much of the narrative. The actions taken by these women are often a direct result of how they were/are treated as daughters, and how they reclaim what is necessary to re-establish themselves in a new environment.

In Gen.19, “daughter” is the only identifier that attaches to these girls. No name is given for these two unmarried daughters of Lot’s house. While

46 This minority view considers the possibility that Bathsheba might also be a foreigner, either via her marriage to a Hittite or more significantly through linking her to Bathshua the Canaanite in 1 Chron. 2.3; Nowell, 268-269; 277.
their anonymous status often renders them unworthy of consideration, this designation here serves as the lynchpin through which to read and understand them. That is, we see that their deception and trickery both fit with biblical notions of daughters.

So, too, Tamar. She is first introduced as the daughter of an unnamed father but throughout the story, she is recognized as Judah’s daughter-in-law, not Er’s wife. She is not necessarily an unembedded woman in the same way as Ruth, but her status as dismissed daughter-in-law renders her as such: she is a wife without a husband, a daughter-in-law without a father-in-law, a married daughter sent shamefully back to her father’s home. Her deception puts her in league with the deception of Lot’s daughters.

Even Bathsheba’s story raises questions about her characterization as an unprotected woman and daughter: she is named as daughter of Eliam and granddaughter of Ahithophel, even though neither plays any role in her story (2 Sam. 23:34). Like Ruth, she is consistently identified in her narrative by her own name and not by her marital association. In fact, it is only when David asks who she is that we hear of Uriah, perhaps more for David’s benefit. She is a daughter, granddaughter and wife whose relations have few if any textual interactions with her whatsoever.

Ruth’s story is the most intriguing and insightful narrative with respect to biblical daughters. The claim “better to you than seven sons” requires a more comprehensive discussion since so much of the expression is tied to the value of sons. Two unrelated biblical narratives echo this paradigm of completeness around a bevy of sons. In 1 Sam 1, we have Samuel’s birth narrative and the barren mother motif. Rather than the usual mother’s prayer, appealing to God alongside paternal silence, we have a clearly loving relationship focused on comforting and encouraging the barren wife— “… to Hannah [her husband Elkanah] gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Sam. 1.5).47 When she weeps over her barren state, the husband, Elkanah, asks tenderly, “Hannah, why do you weep? … Am I not more to you than ten sons?” (1 Sam. 1.8; emphasis mine).

The implication is clear: while Hannah laments her infertility, the love and affection of Elkanah is there and available to fill the void offering an

47 The Bible’s evidence for marital affection is often implied rather than supplied. See for example Jacob’s sharp retort to his beloved Rachel’s plea for children; Abraham’s curt response to his long-time wife Sarah’s desire to banish Hagar, the first mother; Isaac’s silence in the text in his relationship with Rebekah and her efforts to obtain and maintain her difficult pregnancy.
emotional sufficiency that (presumably) comes from children. He presents an image of loving plenty through his emblematic challenge, “Am I not more to you than ten sons?” How successful this poignant endearment is remains to be seen: Hannah still prays for a child. Yet Elkanah, through his moving response, encourages readers to infer a tender emotional bond.

Similarly, we have the story of the hapless Job, whose family structure presents a standard of symbolic family completeness. He is the father of ten children—seven sons and three daughters—who regularly feast together in a model of family harmony (Job 1:4). These children die during the course of Job’s trials but others are restored to Job at the end of his tribulations. We are told, “The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before,” blessing his later days even more than his beginnings (42:10, 12). Seven more sons are granted Job’s inheritance as well as three daughters, named alongside the sons (42:13).

In this context, family sufficiency and completeness contains many more sons than daughters. In the modern idiom, it would be analogous to the American standard of 2.4 children. That such a configuration cannot possibly exist in reality is beside the point. It stands as the metaphoric standard of family completeness. Thus, both Hannah and Job echo a sense that a house full of sons represents the biblical prototype of family abundance. Both Elkanah’s “Am I not more to you than ten sons?” and Job’s restoration of seven sons after their earlier loss represents a rhetorical depiction of the desired biblical family.

In Ruth, we find crucial typological clues in the acclaim of the Bethlehem women. When she is acclaimed as “better than seven sons,” we recognize reverberations with the biblical sense of family completeness. She fulfills the roles that Mahlon and Chilion vacated (especially since both men are clearly identified in Ruth’s narrative more as sons than as husbands). On one level, she redeems Naomi and her place in the text by proving her worth as a child-substitute. Ruth does the things that a husband and sons should do by caring for her widowed

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48 Rather than overt affection, many feminist scholars view this as dim insensitivity on Elkanah’s part. To think that his love is sufficient to Hannah is undercut by the text, where Hannah fails to reply, but next enters the temple to continue to petition God for a child (see Amit and notes, 70ff).

49 As seen in the paradigm of seven sons and three daughters in Job.

50 It is worthy of note that while Jacob has the eponymous twelve tribes, that is not the paradigm of family sufficiency that we find evoked here.

51 Amit, 71.

52 Van Wolde, 435.
mother-in-law, providing for her physical needs and voicing an emotional bond in evocative and tender terms. Ruth, the redeeming daughter-in-law and foreigner, realizes the crowd's acclaim in her ability to surpass sonship as a daughter or wife or mother. She does not realize the crowd's praise as “better to her than three daughters,” echoing the Joban parallels. The number, therefore, is not random: Ruth’s actions complete Naomi’s family in the way seven sons would “complete” a household. And, the comparison to sonship is not misogynistic—Ruth is celebrated not as the same as seven sons but as better than seven boys.

On this crucial level, Ruth’s transformation into a paradigm of family sufficiency challenges that notion of sonship. Ruth 4 reads, “Praise to you Naomi, a son is born…,” then is followed immediately by the “better than seven sons” claim. One might read this wording as signifying “Yes, Naomi has another son [Obed], but what you have in this daughter surpasses seven of those.”

It simply is not enough that Ruth exhibits chesed. She overcomes much in order to redeem the image of the foreigner, the Gentile and, most importantly, the daughter. Rather than “a quiver full of children” (Ps. 127.5), we find here a celebration of only one—and, a woman, a Moabite, and a daughter, at that. We now see Ruth clearly not for how well she plays the son but rather in her ability to rehabilitate our ideas of family sufficiency. A daughter has challenged that notion, the biblical authors have argued, and put the reader on notice. We must reconsider the daughters who have gone before for undoubtedly here is one who resides in the text, acclaimed above all sons and thus rehabilitating our notion of biblical daughters.

_Dbhq_ (cleaving/affection)

Although the verb _dbq_ (to cleave or attach) is not mentioned in the stories of Tamar or Bathsheba, the concept is present in both narratives. The text is not clear on Tamar’s relationships with either of her first two husbands, but it is evident what is left for her: widowhood, the very definition of abandonment. It is her rightful pursuit of attachment that prompts her to act. It is both ironic and fitting that Tamar dresses as a prostitute—the typical union between prostitute and client is, by nature, short-lived, yet Tamar is seeking the opposite: a long-term (cleaving) to her in-law’s family.

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53 Ibid., 434.
Like Tamar, we are told very little about Bathsheba’s relationship with Uriah. Neither are we certain of Bathsheba’s affection for David, although many might conjecture. What is interesting is David’s affection for Bathsheba. Clearly she is more to him than a mere dalliance. His effort to secure Bathsheba involves enormous risk, and the price he pays (the death of their love child) is high for both of them. Again, much is left to interpretation in Bathsheba’s story, but there is no doubt about the lengths to which David will go to keep Bathsheba close by, leading to questions about whether affection drives this narrative or not.

The occasion of Ruth’s heartfelt commitment to Naomi requires a fuller consideration. The Anchor Bible Commentary passes somewhat quickly over dbq in Ruth, but feminist scholars express heightened interest in the use and placement of this word. The invocation of this evocative clinging offers profound insight into the nature of Ruth’s connection to Naomi. It is she who emotionally embraces Naomi and would willingly follow her unto death, undeterred by Naomi’s silence or disregard.

Gail Twersky Reimer likens this particular scene to the emotional core of another parent-child interaction, the Aqedah, or the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. God charges Abraham to “Take your son, your only son, the one whom you love…” and sacrifice him upon Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:2). Abraham, the loving father, remains silent in the face of Isaac’s questions. Ruth 4:15 turns the focus of that loving around, claiming “for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him...” While she and Naomi, the beloved parent, are acclaimed, Ruth remains silent. If we look back to the emotional tension between parent and child in the Aqedah, we find hints within Ruth to view this as a mother-child relationship. This phrase, “the one who loves you” invokes the impetus behind Ruth’s cleaving to Naomi.

In Genesis 19, Lot claims that he cannot travel to the hills as God would want him to do lest evil or destruction overtake (tidabagni) him. Lot’s sense of the word here seems reminiscent of “the hound of heaven,” especially since Lot’s anxiety is focused on that evil or unlucky force that might pursue him even unto death. He avoids emotional proximity to his god, to his daughters and seemingly to life itself. He evades anything that might emotionally overtake or overwhelm him.

Yet, the emotional elements of this dbq, or clinging, bring to mind a more nuanced sense of overtaking: it is the same word used in Genesis 2.24 when God says that a man shall cleave to his wife and the two shall

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54 Campbell, 72; Levine, “Ruth,” 84-90; Aviva Zornberg, “The Concealed Alternative,” in Reading Ruth, 76.
55 Gail Twersky Reimer, “Her Mother’s House,” in Reading Ruth, 99.
become one. It is used in Genesis 34.3 to describe what Shechem felt in the aftermath of his violation of Dinah: “His soul clung (tidbaq) to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl, and he spoke kindly to her.” This is the qal imperfect verb form, expressing a simple causal action: that is, Shechem feels real affection for Dinah. The biblical authors are signifying a genuine bond, on Shechem’s part by the use of the poignant “cleaving” here.

Speaking more expansively, Deuteronomy 11.22-23 employs dbq to characterize the embrace of the Israelites for YHWH:

For if you will be careful to do all this commandment which I command you to do, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and cleaving (davqa) to him, then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves.

In the Ruth text, we see in this use of dbq to express an intimate love more akin to that between a parent and child. Cleaving unto one’s God, a mighty and fearful God, to be sure, suggests a vibrant emotive relationship between kin. This is taken and intensified in Ruth’s claim that she will hold fast to Naomi even unto death:

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung (davqa) to her. …But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you." (Ruth 1.14, 16-17).

To cling in this way, to adhere or stay close enough to be one’s shadow, suggests a proximity to one another beyond simple friendship. This is passionate attachment to another, like a child feels for its mother or a husband and wife experience. Boaz uses this term twice in encouraging Ruth to stay close to his people, perhaps foreshadowing Ruth’s nearness to Boaz, not as mere kinsman, but as husband and lover:

Then Bo'az said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close (tidbaqin) to my maidens.” (Ruth 2.8).
And Ruth the Moabitess said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close (tīḏbaqīn) by my servants, till they have finished all my harvest.'" (Ruth 2.21).  

We see here, then, a significant contrast between Lot’s tale and Ruth’s involving our notions of cleaving/abiding and secondarily, a typological connection between these two tales. In one, Lot flees, fearing to be overtaken by his God. Lot’s emotional frigidity forestalls closeness of any sort. His children stay with him long enough to produce another generation but the language of cleaving/ emotional connection is noticeably absent. Affection is not part of Genesis 19’s textual dynamic. By contrast, Ruth craves an emotional bond with Naomi and on this hinges our redemption of the biblical vision. Her emotional proximity to Naomi corrects our vision of Moabites as well as daughters. It allows us to see in Ruth the truest expression of ’ēshet chayil, or the woman of valor.  

**Textual Redemption**

The designation of go’el/redeemer looms large in the book of Ruth. How one settles upon the redeemer in the story can be as varied as the readings associated with this book. Boaz is often identified as the redeemer through his symbolic covering (kanaf), or care for, of the women in the story. Similarly, the child Obed can serve as go’el; he represents not only the redemption of Naomi and Ruth but continuity of the line necessary to bring us to David. Taking a different tact, YHWH can be the go’el since ultimately it is God who provides the means for maintaining the women as well as continuing Elimelech’s name and property. And finally, Ruth herself can be both hero and go’el because without Ruth there is no narrative tension and therefore no redemption.

But the greater question raised by this comparative process is not who is go’el, but rather, who or what is redeemed in these stories? Is it Naomi who is redeemed by Boaz? Is Ruth is redeemed by Boaz? Is the Davidic line redeemed by Tamar’s initiative? Is Solomon redeemed by Bathsheba? In Lot’s case, we can certainly argue that he serves as the anti-go’el: he redeems no one. Are Lot’s daughters then responsible—and able—to redeem themselves? Can something as heinous as their misbegotten

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56 In both cases, this is the simple causal imperfect (qal) of the verb dbq, signifying second person feminine (“You, Ruth, shall remain close”)

57 Nowell, 260-265.

58 Levine, “Ruth,” 90.
scheme result in their own textual redemption? That is, are Lot’s daughters their own go’el, their own redeemers?

If we go back to our discussion of seeing and knowing, we find that one of the things redeemed by Ruth is Naomi’s vision of her world. Naomi is made to recognize Ruth’s role as daughter to her: it is up to the Bethlehem chorus to elevate Ruth out of Naomi’s silence and focus her place in the biblical tradition for all future generations.59

In Boaz we find a character who fails to see Ruth and must be initiated into her worth. This marginalized daughter must claim her place in an older man’s life and instruct his efforts (not unlike Lot’s daughters). In addition, she obtains a place for herself like another Davidic daughter-in-law, Tamar of Genesis 38. We find in both stories women who act upon the unseeing (Judah as well as Boaz) in order to obtain their place in the narrative as both go’el and daughter. And in Bathsheba we encounter a woman who is seen but perhaps only as another wants her to be seen and not as she really is (also like Tamar’s roadside seduction). This seeing-and-not-seeing begins a chain of events that results in Bathsheba’s evolving narrative status: she goes from participant in an adulterous liaison to a mother securing the throne for her son. Some scholars view this as evidence of Bathsheba’s diplomatic ingenuity and persuasion rather than mere duplicity and emotional manipulation.60 Bathsheba’s redemption takes a form that should by now be clear. Suffice to say, deceit and trickery of men are both essential motifs for heroic women in the Bible.

59 Ibid.
60 Heather A. McKay, “‘Eshet Hayil or ‘Ishshah Zarah: Jewish Readings of Abigail and Bathsheba, both Ancient and Modern,” in Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible, ed. George J. Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 2000), 259.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION:
LOT’S DAUGHTERS, TAMAR, RUTH AND BATHSHEBA, AND THE WEAPONS UPON THEIR BODIES

“God is for men, religion is for women.”
—Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (1904)

This research was fueled by a simple question: Why are these particular female narratives in the Bible? In the context of a sacred text, the stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba do not seem to fit. The stories fail to impart anything specifically about what sort of relationship biblical women have with God. At most, God lurks quietly behind the scenes but does not make an appearance or speak directly to any of the women. There is no mention of observing dietary laws, cult practices or ritual concerns. One infers God’s presence because the stories appear in the Bible. But, without that biblical context, we just have stories of women. In fact, the narrative events move forward not through God’s auspices but via the resourcefulness of the women. Their more folkloric character thus raises questions about their place in the grand epic narrative of Israel.

By way of conclusion, this work argues for women as their own analytical category in the biblical context. Secondly, I will reflect on the implications of identifying these stories as remnants of a domestic folklore culture. From here, I draw together some of the ideas about daughters in the Bible and how that adds to notions of the female heroic. And finally, I want to think about whether female biblical heroes are also religious heroes and what that does—or does not—mean.

As we have seen, traditional approaches to the heroic assume a monolithic benchmark that fails to factor in gender. The ingenuity expressed by the women in these stories seems extraordinary—in fact, valorous. That such valor emanates from women challenges the cultural
bromide of the male heroic. The typical heroic standard subjects both men and women to a presumed gender-neutral test, when in fact heroic trait lists have traditionally only worked for male narratives. It is important to recognize that both men’s and women’s narratives embody unique character traits; it is on that basis that we can make claims for the female heroic. Employing a revised rubric, I find that the biblical stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba communicate a gender-specific valor unique to the individual enterprise located within their stories. Additionally, these stories find common cause with narratives associated with the female heroic from other cultural contexts.

By way of conclusion, I want to frame a few of the points made in this study. In my introduction, I suggested that it is not enough to reduce a text to its component parts and simply identify one trope or another. The subsequent task is to answer the ‘so what?’ question. That is, can we discern meaning and significance behind those tropes and motifs? This includes not just providing the current state of scholarship on this issue but considering some of the implications that arise from such a study, both in its original context as well as for the future state of such scholarship.

**Woman as Analytical Category**

First and foremost, this work makes the case for women as their own analytical category. We have seen through this study that we can discover much about the women in the text without reference to men or depending upon male models in order to validate their inclusion. Analyzing the stories might not enrich our understanding of God or Israel’s religious culture; however, there is tremendous efficacy to reading these as female narratives. This perspective liberates the Bible from its charge as merely an androcentric document. Through this process, we discover much about women and the ability of the text to convey important gender information.

To do this, it is necessary to separate these narratives from their biblical context. It seems nearly impossible to discover pertinent gender information without removing these stories from their historical books and reading them in isolation. Does that mean that we can only appreciate female narratives out of context? That is not necessarily so. I believe this process illustrates another way to read women’s stories by challenging established frames of reference which require these women’s narratives to fit an institutional or theological agenda. This process liberates the women from their institutional confines but also provides greater clarity to their role as women. Even after resituating the stories back into the biblical
context, we find that, in important ways, the women serve as signifiers of Israel itself: that is, as an independent actor of ingenuity and initiative.

What our study has discovered in the Bible is a robust picture of the female heroic that sits alongside other notions of the heroic metamyth. I contend that the female heroic is clearly alive to the consequences of her actions, including not only punishment but her own death, either metaphorically or physically. We find this particularly in our female heroic stories. In the Bible, the female hero encounters death on many levels—through the deaths of the men around her as well as her own symbolic death as an unmarriageable woman. Furthermore, within the confines of a patriarchal society, the cost of her actions could be her reputation or, more significantly, her own life. Yet, she fully enters into this reality. In each instance—Tamar dons her courtesan’s veils; Ruth enters the threshing floor; Lot’s daughters ravish their father; and Bathsheba, either at her bath or before the dying David—we find a woman, with individual enterprise, entering a liminal space between life and death. She emerges on the other side, her quest fulfilled, her goals realized, her battle won.

As I have argued, the female heroic presents a unique, identifiable set of characteristics that stands alongside male models of the heroic. Furthermore, what we find in the Bible is a distinctive and robust picture of women who through individual resourcefulness show the value and power of valiant female initiative. This typology provides a way to valorize female ingenuity as a gendered action. That is, it enhances our appreciation for imaginative biblical women rather than seeing them only as agents on behalf of larger ideological issues. This heroic identification celebrates female trickster figures who work outside established power structures and who find success in untraditional (according to masculine norms) ways. Like male heroes, what commands our attention here is the journey undertaken by these female characters. But, the biblical female heroic metamyth offers an image of women resolutely concerned with survival and the continuity of life in the face of death, neglect and shame, who are willing to use guile, trickery and deceit to achieve their own ends.

Female heroes carry their essential weapons within themselves. We find in these biblical gender heroes a full and vigorous notion of the feminine. This argument for the female heroic releases the Bible from those who would dismiss it as a reductive, patriarchal text and thus limit its ability to communicate anything worthwhile to the modern context.
There is no doubt that the study of women often results in enlightening our appreciation of men. Theories about women—literary or historical—cannot stand if they fail to contemplate basic gender dichotomies, either as a biological truth (sex) or as a culturally-defined reality (gender). However, most of the scholarship that we have considered here results in thoughtful, measured ideas about institutional Israel or men or both—but not the women themselves.

Anthropologist Sherry Ortner’s influential discussion of the male/female-public/private divide argues that many cultural studies tend to create oppositional categories of male (or public) domains of power over and against female (or private) domains of domesticity and nurture.¹ She argues for the universal nature of this gender divide which finds its genesis in simple human biology. Cultural studies prove that social constraints and obligations of gender often follow from one’s sexual identification as biologically male or female. One’s sexual identification--and thus one’s body—plays a crucial role in deciding one’s place and obligations in a society. For example, a woman's body functions to create and nurture “species life.” This places women closer to creation and the home and thus, according to Ortner, to nature. A man is not tied to home through menstruation, pregnancy, lactation or child-rearing. Because men do not have these episodic physical transformations, a man's physiology frees him more completely to take up public life or the projects of culture. Ortner concludes that the public domain work of politics, commerce, rhetoric and building is universally more valued than the private domestic sphere of nurture, education and religion. With respect to religion, this concept suggests that the public business of God (priest; shaman; ritual specialist) is men’s work; women deal with the emotive and the more personal aspects of faith and belief. Because of this value differential, Ortner argues, women operate in lower order social roles compared to men's more public, civic and cultural roles: “The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact.”² These power differentials, argues Ortner, are further reflected in academic studies which assume the higher value of public and/or institutional life over private/domestic spheres of influence.

Ortner later revisits this article and softens some of her conclusions on the universal nature of female oppression. By 1996, she finds cultures

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¹ Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” 5-31.
² Ibid.: 5.
more unpredictable with respect to power relationships between genders than she thought in 1972. Later, she is less willing to make universalistic claims for worldwide male cultural dominance. However, she does not back away from the gendered nature of the nature/culture divide. Ortner continues to affirm the widespread bifurcation between male and female spheres but she ameliorates her previous stance, claiming that the universal problem is how the relationship between nature and culture is resolved. As an example of this, Ortner defends the idea that differential gender relationships (“the transcendence of nature” via public or civic life) is a consequence of social structures designed for purposes other than the oppression of women and is not therefore an aggressive, active will-to-power by men. The power differentials that break along gender lines are a consequence of how a society establishes itself and are not always a conscious effort by one gender to limit another.

The idea that power differentials are a consequence of established social arrangements pertains to the Bible as well, where we find a world that is primarily patrilocal, patriarchal and patrilineal. To quote Conrad again, God is for men: the covenant is written upon men’s bodies via circumcision. No such requirement is made of women. Israelite religious practices demand an all-male priesthood and only unblemished men are allowed into the Holy of Holies. Women are freed from these rigorous religious requirements. Or, put another way, women are excluded from the centers of religious power. In this way, the text does not read like a conscious theological rationale for the subjugation of women. Rather, the dissimilar power relationships seem to reflect patriarchal arrangements already present either in the society of the time or during the time the text was written or both.

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3 Ortner finds that male dominance is not nearly as universal as she thought in 1972; cultures are “more disjunctive, contradictory, and inconsistent” than she used to think. And, while the categories of nature/culture represent universal structures, the problem for ethnographers and historians is identifying how communities work out the relationship between the two instead of assuming a monolithic, universally applicable power differential where male/culture holds a higher status over female/nature: “...[E]ven if the nature/culture relationship is a universal structure across cultures, it is not always constructed—as the paper may seem to imply—as a relationship of cultural ‘dominance’ or even ‘superiority’ over nature... the argument from the universality of the nature/culture opposition was in no way meant to suggest a similar universality at the level of ‘sexual meanings.’ “ (178); Ortner, “So, Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” in Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 173-180.

4 Ortner, Making Gender, 176-177.
The text does reproduce those arrangements, but in some ways, the text weakly ameliorates those inherent patriarchal structures by offering a lesser egalitarianism. While men might be favored in biblical society, both genders are involved in Israel’s story (thus, religion is for women). Men as well as women serve to illuminate notions about God and the community of Israel. For instance, male analogues to our women-as-Israel examples exist in the Bible. We find men in the text doing some of what women symbolically do. For example, the metaphoric role of underdog is not limited to one gender. We see this in the motif of the younger son who inherits against primogenituric expectation (Isaac, Jacob, Judah and Ephraim). Furthermore, we find analogous structural disadvantages in stories of men as well as women. Men like Daniel operate as foreign nationals, just as women like Esther and Judith do. Men also have stories where they act on their own behalf. Jacob tricks Esau out of his birthright; Joseph rises to prominence in Pharaoh’s court by his own wits. God is given a good deal of the credit for the good outcome for men as well as women in this context.

Each gender possesses the ability to represent the community in its totality rather than its particularity. We potentially see the women more clearly as full contributors to the human condition rather than in the specificity of their gender. As Frymer-Kensky argues, we are better served by looking at men and women as two degrees of humanity subsumed under the heading creation, rather than overemphasizing gender differences to the exclusion of all else. But again, we end up talking about the community—be it the textual community of the Bible, the historical Israelite context or the narrative’s theological perspective—rather than the specifics of a creation that was formed male and female and not androgynous. However, differences do matter; male and female are not equivalent in the Bible and to assume their similarity risks suggesting that

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5 Frymer-Kensky gives passing notice to the Gnostic and Kabbalistic notions that Genesis 1.27 (“in His image he created him, Male and Female he created them”) refers to an original androgyne who was separated into Adam and Eve based on the curious “he created it/him”; see her entry, “Woman (and Man) in the First Creation Story, in Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament, ed. Carol Meyers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 175. See also James L. Kugel, Traditions of the Bible (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 84-85. Phyllis Trible associates the original androgyne with ha’adam in Genesis 2-3 and not the P account of Genesis 1. She argues that it is only with the creation of woman and removal of the rib that the original ha’adam is differentiated into male; God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 98-99.
women become most human when they serve the functions that men serve in God’s designs for Israel.

Women’s stories too often are read as a reflection of male categories of power and meaning. Women become symbolic of the male/public face of biblical narratives but men never become symbolic of the female/domestic sphere. Using Ortner’s public/private divide as our organizing principle, we see that the comparison is a one-way conversation: women are to men as men are to men. Or: women are to Israel as men are to Israel, an analogy that from a gender perspective only tells us that women can potentially represent Israel as well as men can. In traditional analysis, women are measured against men rather than measured within their own gender.

Thus we find that the current debates about women in the Bible tend to reproduce these categories of public/male/valued and private/female/devalued, whether that is an accurate depiction of Israelite society or not. In fact, Carol Meyers argues that in the pre-monarchic economy of ancient Israel, distinctions between a “public” and “private” realm hold no meaning since there was no true public domain. Household production formed the dominant level of social organization and since no real male-oriented public hierarchies existed, Meyers concludes that the family household was the primary economic and social unit and therefore gender power differentials were less bifurcated:

We can thus re-vision the place of women in pre-monarchic village households and suggest that the vital productive and reproductive roles of women, along with their essential social and socializing roles, created a situation of gender complementarity…”

Yet, as Israelite culture moves toward monarchy, this gender complementarity is deemphasized. The importance of female narratives rises when they become like men by representing the civic/public aims of the text. As women’s stories successfully illuminate the image of Israel—as a people, a culture or a dynastic line—they grow in importance. But analyzing these stories solely from this perspective tells us relatively little about the women themselves. If we want to recognize these as stories where gender plays a defining role in how we read and understand the women in the story, we must move beyond this particular analytical framework.

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Origins of Female Literature in Israelite Culture

Having made the case for identifying these narratives in a new way, what purpose does the argument serve other than presenting a novel approach? How does this enlighten our understanding of women, of biblical composition or the role of the Bible today?

It is nearly impossible to suggest how certain themes or voices within the Bible came into being. The sources are lost to us. We cannot recreate their beginnings. At most, we can conjecture as to their origins, but such theories will always remain tentative at best. The later biblical writers and editors depended upon myriad sources in cobbled together the Pentateuch and historical narratives. Many of these narrative voices attest to the Bible’s folkloric and oral roots whose original composition lies well beyond our ability to reconstruct.7 Yet, given the folkloric affinities of our particular stories, it seems likely that their beginnings lie in a domestic sphere where they were kept alive through retellings in Israelite and affiliated households.

An argument for the domestic origins for female narratives in ancient Israel finds support in folklore studies. Folklorist Jack Zipes argues that, in general, early folk and fairy tales served something of a pedagogical function:

Originally the folk tale was (and still is) an oral narrative form cultivated by non-literate and literate people to express the manner in which they perceived and perceive nature and their social order and their wish to satisfy their needs and wants… [T]he folk tale originated as far back as the Megalithic period and both non-literate and literate people have been carriers and transformers of the tales.8

Few debate the folkloric origins of these biblical stories.9 The roots of their stories have little or nothing to do with the subsequent religious practices of Israel. Yet we find them now within a piece of sacred literature and suggest that these narratives have been reworked so that we might see within them the workings of God and ultimately, the chosen

8 Jack Zipes, Breaking the Magic Spell, 7.
9 Alan Dundes calls the Bible “codified folklore”; Holy Writ as Oral Lit: the Bible as Folklore (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 12; see also Susan Niditch, who claims that biblical underdog tales are “the very stuff that folklore is made of…”; Underdogs and Tricksters, 23.
destiny of Israel. Their gendered components have been harnessed to the larger story of Israel and thus we no longer see them in their original Sitz im Leben—as tales about women, not about Israel.

Folklore, in its earliest embodiment, flourished in domestic settings as household narratives. Folktales (and fairy tales, the more miraculous and/or shape-shifting cognates to folktales) might not be composed in homes but found their most common retelling in households. This is the point that Marina Warner makes:

So although male writers and collectors have dominated the production and dissemination of popular wonder tales, they often pass on women’s stories from intimate or domestic milieu; their tale-spinners often figure as so many Scheherazades, using narrative to bring about a resolution of satisfaction and justice. 10

If we then adopt the gendered public/domestic divide offered by Ortner, it would follow that folktales, the household literature of the private sphere, were disseminated by women.11 Zipes argues that oral folkloric literature is timeless in its ability to adapt to historical and economic situations. Good tellers rearrange and transform the stories to fit their audiences. Thus, these stories have the power to be retold and reformed by women in the household, the nuances added or subtracted to meet the needs of the teller. Says Warner, “… fairy tales… offer a way of putting questions, of testing the structure as well as guaranteeing its safety, of thinking up alternatives as well as living daily reality in an examined way.”12

Is it possible to imagine that women shared these stories of exemplary females with other women and children in the household? Stories are, says Warner, the weapon of the weaponless.13 Our four biblical stories focus on women struggling to claim that which they feel is their due—not necessarily a husband, but certainly a son which would ensure their place in the community as well as their financial well-being. They use the

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11 Speaking of the continual circulation of the European folkloric cycle, but apropos to the propagation of folk and fairy tales in general, Marina Warner writes, “Women’s capacity for love and action tragically exceeded the permitted boundaries of their lives—this self-immolatory heroism [found in folk tales and fairy literature] was one of the few chivalrous enterprises open to them”; see From the Beast to the Blonde, 393.
12 Ibid., 411.
13 Ibid., 412.
system to their advantage and coerce another into doing what they want, which is providing them with the means for economic security (which, in the Bible, is a son). In this, these particular tales are similar to folk literature which reflects the anxieties and concerns of their own context and times: fear of invasion, loss of property, early death of children and mothers. Perhaps we might conjecture that their popularity is owed to women telling and retelling tales of women like Tamar and Ruth and even Lot’s daughters and Bathsheba to several generations of women and children in the household.

Therefore, within folkloric discussions where the role of women in propagating and disseminating these sorts of stories is acknowledged, I conjecture that these narratives find their beginnings as oral literature made popular at the household level. They possibly developed and were shared most prominently in domestic settings by Israelite women. Their continuing popularity as Israelite folk stories might then explain their inclusion in a larger sacred work like the Hebrew Bible:

Folk tales powerfully shape national memory; their poetic versions intersect with history, and in the contemporary embattled quest for indigenous identity, underestimating their sway over values and attitudes can be as dangerous as ignoring changing historical realities.\(^\text{14}\)

**Overwhelmed by the Story**

The Bible contains few stories where women-as-daughters star. We have far more women-as-wives and women-as-mothers (potential as well as realized) than women-as-daughter narratives. And in those few daughter narratives, we find multiple instances of horrific violence and family chaos, such as Dinah’s brother’s slaughter of Shechem (Genesis 34) or the rape of Tamar, resulting in civil war (2 Samuel 13).

Literary critic Carolyn Heilbrun claims that in family dramas, sons take center stage. In literature, the Freudian dynamic plays out with boys, who metaphorically fear castration by the father; the sons respond with violence in order to assert themselves against their fathers. The Oedipal tragedy speaks to the masculine within the text, which tends to overwhelm all other story lines. But for mothers and daughters, Heilbrun argues, the motif is not violence but engulfment. Daughters do not fear metaphorical castration or violence at the hands of their mothers. Rather, daughters are often swallowed up by mothers, consumed by their smothering maternal

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 410.
love or an oppressive need to keep their daughters near and under their considerable controlling influence.\textsuperscript{15}

A similar trope is found in the family dramas of our biblical narratives. Israel itself serves as the mother who overwhelms the women in our stories. Our four narratives are smothered by the text’s theological aims and over time, these women have been reduced to stock characters. We no longer read them for what they might have meant in their original oral context or for what they might tell readers about women in the Bible. When we question why these stories of sexual deception and trickery might be in the Bible, traditional interpretations encourage us to see these narratives as examples of some aspect of Israel (the mother) herself. We fail to read these stories for themselves, for what they communicate to us about women as vibrant, robust examples of female valor.

This is not an argument for a universal “woman” in the Bible any more than it is an argument for a universal female narrative. I am suggesting that the Bible has reengineered these narratives to such an extent that their gendered nature is lost to us. What we have instead is what folklorist Jack Zipes calls a commodified popular culture:

Once there was a time when folk tales were part of communal property and told with original and fantastic insights by gifted storytellers who gave vent to the frustration of the common people and embodied their needs and wishes in the folk narratives... Today the folk tale as an oral art form has lost its aura for the most part and has given way to the literary fairy tale and other mass-mediated forms of storytelling.\textsuperscript{16}

The Bible broadly embodies Zipe’s notion of a mass-mediated or commodified storytelling. The original context of biblical narrative is no longer available to us so we are left to read and understand these stories only as part of a later and highly redacted text. Whether they were known to their original audiences as bawdy tales, moral fables or legendary epics will probably never really be known. But their placement in the Hebrew Bible assures that we read and understand these as communicating something about how Israel understood itself, its past and its future under

\textsuperscript{15} She argues that the efforts of textual daughters to assert themselves are viewed as metaphorically as well as textually insignificant. In this, she makes larger claims for women consenting “to their roles as stock figures in a drama of which they could never be the protagonist” (137); Carolyn Heilbrun, “‘To The Lighthouse’: The New Story of Mother and Daughter,” in Hamlet’s Mother and Other Women, 2nd revs. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 134-139.

\textsuperscript{16} Jack Zipes, Breaking the Magic Spell, 6.
God’s providential care. Thus what we find is that biblical composition and redaction represents a type of culture industry, which has predetermined not just the inclusion of folkloric narratives but also their actual transmission into the historical context.\textsuperscript{17}

Folklorist Renate Baader dismisses this sort of editorial rebranding. Her analysis specifically critiques 17th and 18th century French folklore but her criticism has bearing upon the biblical context. She claims that 17th and 18th century male editors took morally ambiguous folk tales and revalorized feminine faults in an effort to craft a morally acceptable tale.\textsuperscript{18} In a similar fashion, our stories of gutsy women seeking their due have been revalorized in accord with the institutional issues of later writers and redactors. Their initiative and sexual potency has been harnessed to an official history where it has been rendered not only less shocking but also usable. Gender distinctions are dissolved: according to Warner, “women’s voices have become absorbed into the corporate body of male-dominated decision-makers” where their stories have lost their bond with “the particular web of tensions in which women were enmeshed and come to look dangerously like the way things are.”\textsuperscript{19} Once we might have found simple folk narratives. Now, biblical rebranding encourages us to see these female stories as part of a larger civic, theological or dynastic account.

Folklorists like Zipes speculate that female-driven narratives end up serving the aims of a dominant masculine culture. From this perspective, we conjecture that later editors and redactors took these popular tales and incorporated them into the Israel’s story of itself, modifying their more female-oriented focus to the fit the aims of then-current institutional, theological or political Israel. Over time then, we can see how the original sense of these stories as profoundly gendered narratives was lost. Now, we can move beyond such limitations and hopefully rediscover the polyvalence inherent in narratives of biblical women.

\textsuperscript{17} Zipes, ix.
\textsuperscript{19} Warner, \textit{From the Beast to the Blonde}, 417.
Saint, Icon or Hero?

Despite the fact that religious information is sorely lacking in our four stories, they are preserved in a recognizable sacred text. This might lead one to wonder if the coupling of gender with the Bible’s larger theological themes presumes that our women have the potential to inform our notions of women as religious or spiritual figures. Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba are unlike male heroes. So, can we claim that they hold more in common with other female religious heroes? Thinking specifically of female saints in the Christian context, do we see our female biblical heroes finding common cause with religious heroes like saints as they strive to fulfill God’s will? Do female biblical heroes reproduce some of the same motifs as Christian saints? And if so, is that significant?

Female hero stories, like hagiographies, portray something of an iconic or static image of an exemplary individual who shows pluck and initiative. On a structural level, the comparison seems to end there: it would be hard to consider Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba as religious figures of any sort, given the lack of God-language and ritual activities. Their stories are not hagiographies; they do not act in order to serve or to model a closer relationship to God. Furthermore, female heroes differ from saints in their reproductive and ritually impure states. In their embodied aspects, I am thinking particularly of ascetic religious heroes who tend to renounce their sexuality (whether male or female) through celibacy and ascetic physical denial. This sexual denunciation deflates their particularity. Ultimately, the potency of gender is nullified through abstinence.

Like heroes, female saints do exhibit an exemplary physicality. Hagiographies recount tales of extreme self-denial of adequate food and bodily pleasure. Carolyn Walker Bynum’s study of female ascetics of the 12th and 13th centuries suggests that this bodily mortification is a saint’s unique intimate expression of solidarity with Christ’s physical suffering.20

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20 Fasting was the way in which women participated in Christ’s suffering; suffering was considered an admirable and appropriate means for women to attain sanctity. Women’s “holy anorexia” therefore was not simply a bizarre behavior or a body-hating practice but rather a gender-specific avenue in the Middle Ages towards imitatio Christi where women attempted to incorporate within themselves the suffering physicality of Jesus. Says Bynum, “The notion of substituting one’s own suffering through illness and starvation for the guilt and destitution of another” is a theological (not a psychological) statement; see Carolyn Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 206.
As we have seen, female heroes also exhibit a hearty physicality but not in order to mortify the flesh nor in imitation of divine suffering. In contrast to saints, female heroes of the Hebrew Bible do not deny their physical sexuality; these female heroes actively employ their physicality. Female heroes demonstrate an embodied robustness that is as unique and appropriate an expression of their gender as fasting is for female ascetics. In the female heroes of the Bible therefore we locate powerful examples of female resourcefulness that at once celebrates their initiative as well as their unique and dynamic physicality. As another exceptional attributes of the female heroic in the Bible, we locate in these women instances of vibrant female action that honors women as embodied, sexual beings.

Saints act as a type of icon. In the Eastern Christian tradition, icons serve as painted scripture, static images whose intention is neither historical nor realistic. Icons reflect higher spiritual truths as a source of meditation and devotion. The idea is not to convincingly depict any particular saint but rather to portray them in their spiritual essence as a conduit to the divine realm.

As we have seen, female heroes are not disembodied. Hearty physicality plays an indispensable role in their identification. Nor do we find their iconography particularly transcendent. Instead, our female narratives draw attention to women of worldly resolve, expressed in an imaginative medium. Still, female hero narratives do approximate saints as icons in their purest sense. Female hero narratives do not communicate verifiable historical realism any more than they point to transcendent, divine truths. But, female heroes, who valorize action, do offer a dialogue (not unlike meditation in the presence of an icon) between readers and the text. Trickery and sexual enterprise become hallmarks of these narratives, expressing an essential self-reliance that identifies them as heroic women.

We read them and share their stories because they convey in a stylized fashion a vital message about decisive, vigorous women who inhabit a realm that we recognize as potentially our own.

A female biblical hero is like a saint in her notable actions but unlike a saint in motivation: a female biblical hero moves forward for her own ends, not for or toward divine purposes. The narrative mirrors an icon in representing a static image that points to a truth outside of itself. But unlike an icon, a female biblical hero’s significance lies in her sometimes morally ambiguous action and including her sexuality.

Female heroes like Lot’s daughters, Ruth, Bathsheba and Tamar function as evocative gender symbols because they, in the words of Victor Turner, include a real sense of both physical and natural processes. Gender particularity and a robust physicality remain essential elements to their stories. Female heroes do not escape from the confines of gender so much as become more fully gendered through the telling of their tales.

**Weapons Upon Her Body**

The title of this work, “Weapons Upon Her Body,” is adapted from a passage from Tractate Yebamot 115a of the Babylonian Talmud, which says

> [If a woman states], “Idolators fell upon us” or “Robbers fell upon us, and [my husband] died while I escaped,” she is believed. There [her statement is believed] in accordance with the view of R. Idi. For R. Idi stated: “A woman [carries] her weapons about her.”

Yehuda Radday further expands upon this passage, providing the symbolic nuance behind its charge:

What the Talmud teaches in Bab. Sanhedrin 21a in the name of Rabbi Shimeon proves how well the Rabbis knew to read between the lines, how deeply cognizant they were of human nature, how much they appreciated what is best in women, and how they were able to smile when a smile is in order... Rabbi Idi (fourth century C.E.), a connoisseur as it seems, remarked in Bab. Yebamot 115a that a woman carries her weapons upon her body.

A woman’s gender not only identifies her: it protects her. She bears upon her person the justification—the weapon—for her own defense. For the female heroes, her wits and ingenuity as well as her body become tactical advantages, her very gender serving as an aspect of her valorous array. Gender defines a woman but gender is also a defensive as well as an offensive weapon for the female hero.

Gender can define certain narratives. In fact, we more fully appreciate the motivations of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba when we read these as gendered stories. We are not asking these women to be men

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22 Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 43.
23 Ibid., 44.
or to justify their achievements only when they align with male characters. Instead, when we read their stories as gender hero stories, we expect to find certain things: they use trickery, individual initiative and sexuality without recourse to anyone or anything other than themselves; that is, their weapons are their bodies. Unlike biblical male heroes whose crucial battle attributes include superior physical strength as well as divine assistance, our women bring nothing to the conflict beyond themselves. In the context of their narratives, gender heroes bear upon themselves as well as within themselves the necessary resources to overcome. And therein lies the crux of the metamyth: exemplary female heroes do not look beyond themselves for help. As women, they bear within themselves the means to succeed. This is not a sex-for-power argument. These narratives exemplify women who discover an interior strength that enables them to act. In this, they serve as powerful metaphors for female fortitude: their most essential battle implement is themselves.

Second, we have refined our vision of women as characters in their own right. We have moved beyond viewing biblical women as flat, functional figures, and come to appreciate them as what Ortner refers to as their own analytic category.25 Women are more than simply agents who enrich the historical and theological picture of Israel. And they do far more than foreshadow David’s character or the aims of the Davidic dynasty. Reducing female narratives to the official aspirations of later editors and redactors denies these stories—and us—their essential gendered meaning.

Carolyn Heilbrun echoes those sentiments:

Women, I believe, search for fellow beings who have faced similar struggles, conveyed them in ways a reader can transform into her own life, confirmed desires the reader had hardly acknowledged—desires that now seem possible. Women catch courage from the women whose lives and writings they read...26

While this represents a modern perspective on something that may not have been the intent of ancient oral storytellers, these sentiments provide a moment of reflection. Stories survive because they communicate something to the reader (and the hearer) about themselves. As Heilbrun says, we “catch courage” from stories of those who struggle as we do—

and eventually succeed—whether we do or not. One imagines ancient women taking courage from the stories of Lot’s daughters, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba. The vibrancy of these stories lies not so much within the action itself (few would recommend what Lot’s daughters did), but rather within the triumph of female initiative and ingenuity. We need not justify their inclusion in the Bible based on their ability to inform our understanding of Israel. They offer stout service to the text as valorous exemplars of independent women.

Finally, we find that we have developed a notion of what a gender hero is. This is a narrative where the gender of the protagonist plays an integral role to reading her story. In the Bible, we are presented with unique examples of this. A gender hero is an exemplary woman who shows initiative and courage, who through her own auspices achieves her goal. This often includes trickery and sexual intrigue, but she is far more than the sum of her sexuality. A gender hero enlightens our ideas about women as embodied, physical beings and gives us another means for establishing women as an analytic category.

Women—in the Bible as well as in other literature—do not need to measure up to expectations set by men. We have found that women carry their essential weapons within themselves. As such, a gender hero, even in the Bible, does not necessarily seek God’s help. This makes a gender hero problematic; her story makes us uncomfortable. But unlike saints and other iconic imagery, we find in gender heroes a full and vigorous notion of the feminine. This argument for the female heroic releases the Bible from those who would dismiss it as a reductive, patriarchal text and thus limit its ability to communicate anything worthwhile to the modern context. Patriarchy exists, but we have amazing and timeless examples of female heroism here, if we have eyes to see.
APPENDIX A

MALE AND FEMALE HERO TRAITS
(RAGLAN/JEZEWSKI)


<table>
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<th>Hero Traits (Raglan, 1934)</th>
<th>Female Hero Traits (Jezewski, 1984)</th>
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<td>1. His mother is a royal virgin.</td>
<td>1. Her parents are royal or godlike.</td>
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<td>2. His father is a king.</td>
<td>2. They are often related.</td>
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<td>3. King is often a near relative of his mother,</td>
<td>3. There is mystery surrounding her conception and/or birth.</td>
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<td>4. Birth circumstances are unusual.</td>
<td>4. Little is known of her childhood.</td>
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<td>5. He is reputed to be the son of a god.</td>
<td>5. She herself is a ruler or goddess.</td>
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<td>6. At birth, attempt is made on his life, often by his father.</td>
<td>6. She is charming and beautiful.</td>
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<td>7. But, hero is spirited away.</td>
<td>7. She uses men for political purposes.</td>
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<td>8. He is reared by foster parents in a far country.</td>
<td>8. She controls men in matters of love and sex.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Little information about his childhood.</td>
<td>9. She is married.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom. | 10. She has a child or children

11. After a victory over the king and/or giant, dragon or wild beast | 11. She has lovers.

12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and | 12. Her child succeeds her.

13. Becomes king. | 13. She does a man’s job or deeds.

14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and | 14. She prescribes law.

15. Prescribes law, and | 15. There are conflicting views of goodness.

16. Later he loses favor with the gods and his subjects. | 16. Her legend contains the Andromeda theme.¹

17. Eventually he is driven from the throne and the city. | 17. The subsequent resolution of this theme is by treacherous means which results in an untimely death, exile or incarceration of the male.

18. He meets with a mysterious death. | 18. Her death is uneventful and may not even be mentioned in her legend.

19. Death often occurs on a hilltop. |

20. His children, if any, do not succeed him. |

21. His body is not buried. |

22. Nevertheless, he has one or more holy sites/sepulchers. |

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¹ **Andromeda Theme**: female hero is “rescued by stronger male, often saving her from life with a less-suitable mate; resolution though requires the rescuer’s passing since he is now rendered less attractive.”
APPENDIX B

THE HERO (VLADIMIR PROPP)


Tale takes the following sequence (not all elements will appear but sequence will remain the same):

1. A member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced).
2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero (“don't go there,” “go to this place”).
3. The interdiction is violated (villain enters the tale).
4. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (either villain tries to find the children/jewels, etc.; or intended victim questions the villain).
5. The villain gains information about the victim.
6. The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of victim or victim's belongings (trickery; villain disguised, tries to win confidence of victim).
7. Victim taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy.
8. Villain causes harm/injury to family member (by abduction, theft of magical agent, spoiling crops, plunders in other forms, causes a disappearance, expels someone, casts spell on someone, substitutes child, commits murder, imprisons/detains someone, threatens forced marriage, provides nightly torments). Alternatively, a member of family lacks something or desires something (magical potion, etc.).
9. Misfortune or lack is made known, (hero is dispatched, hears call for help / alternative is that victimized hero is sent away, freed from imprisonment).
10. Seeker agrees to, or decides upon, counter-action.
11. Hero leaves home.
12. Hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, preparing the way for his/her receiving magical agent or helper (donor).
13. Hero reacts to actions of future donor (withstands/fails the test, frees captive, reconciles disputants, performs service, uses adversaries’ powers against them).
14. Hero acquires use of a magical agent (directly transferred, located, purchased, prepared, spontaneously appears, eaten/drank, help offered by other characters).
15. Hero is transferred, delivered or led to whereabouts of an object of the search.
16. Hero and villain join in direct combat.
17. Hero is branded (wounded/marked, receives ring or scarf).
18. Villain is defeated (killed in combat, defeated in contest, killed while asleep, banished).
19. Initial misfortune or lack is resolved (object of search distributed, spell broken, slain person revived, captive freed).
20. Hero returns.
21. Hero is pursued (pursuer tries to kill or otherwise undermine the hero).
22. Hero is rescued from pursuit (obstacles delay pursuer, hero hides or is hidden, hero transforms unrecognizably, hero saved from attempt on his/her life).
23. Hero unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.
24. False hero presents unfounded claims.
25. Difficult task proposed to the hero (trial by ordeal, riddles, test of strength/endurance, other tasks).
26. Task is resolved.
27. Hero is recognized (by mark, brand, or thing given to him/her).
28. False hero or villain is exposed.
29. Hero is given a new appearance (is made whole, handsome or perhaps given new garments).
30. Villain is punished.
31. Hero marries and ascends the throne (is rewarded/promoted).
APPENDIX C

HERO PATTERN (J. VON HAHN)


1. The hero is of illegitimate birth
2. His mother is the princess of the country
3. His father is a god or a foreigner
4. There are signs warning of his ascendance
5. For this reason he is abandoned
6. He is suckled by animals
7. He is brought up by a childless shepherd couple
8. He is a high-spirited youth
9. He seeks service in a foreign country
10. He returns victorious and goes back to the foreign land
11. He slays his original persecutors, accedes to rule the country, and
   sets his mother free
12. He founds cities
13. The manner of his death is extraordinary
14. He is reviled because of incest and he dies young
15. He dies by an act of revenge at the hands of an insulted servant
16. He murders his younger brother
APPENDIX D

BIRTH OF THE HERO (OTTO RANK)


1. The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king.
2. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles.
3. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative).
4. As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box.
5. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by a humble woman.
6. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents in a highly versatile fashion.
7. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other.
8. Finally he achieves rank and honors.
APPENDIX E

THE HERO’S BIOGRAPHY (HEDA JASON)


1. Prologue/genealogy of protagonist
2. Complications at conception
3. Unusual birth
4. Celebration of hero's birth
5. Hero named
6. Baby-hero made invulnerable
7. Prophecy/destiny of baby revealed
8. Attempt made on baby's life; baby removed
9. Rescued and raised in foster home
10. Hero's childhood and youth
11. Acquires heroic attributes
12. Hero embarks on warrior career; sets out on quest/adventure
13. Tales of exploits
14. Chosen to rule over his elders
15. Adult life events (further combat, decision-making, etc.)
16. Hero's physical prowess
17. Hero loses strength
18. Abandons warrior career
19. Death of hero
20. Burial
21. Second generation heroes

Says Dan, "The heroine is depicted as particularly virtuous: she will not be seduced, even in the most horrible circumstances, and is charitable. The villains, in contrast, are sinners: seducers, slanderers, murderers, and misers" (14).

1. Heroine is persecuted or threatened in her family home
   a. Family gives heroine over to villain
   b. Villain harms heroine
   c. Family banishes heroine, or heroine runs away from family

2. Rescue of heroine and meeting of future husband
   a. Helper aids heroine in her distress
   b. Agent connects heroine with future husband
   c. Future husband meets heroine

3. Prince marries heroine
   a. Heroine bears child(ren)

4. Heroine separates from husband
   a. Husband temporarily leaves home; heroine thereby exposed to villain's intrigues; OR husband sends her on journey, entrusting her to villain
   b. Villain intrigues against heroine; OR villain actually harms heroine
   c. Husband banishes heroine (or she runs away from husband and his family); OR heroine simply wanders off
5. **Heroine rehabilitates herself**  
   a. Heroine temporarily changes her identity in order to approach her family  
   b. Benefactor helps heroine  
   c. Heroine works to attract attention of others  

6. **Heroine is rehabilitated and villain punished**  
   a. Husband discovers villain's treachery  
   b. Husband and others set out in search of heroine  
   c. Heroine recognizes husband/family/villains.  
   d. Heroine reveals identity to others  
   e. Heroine tells her story to others  
   f. Benevolent other(s) punish villain(s)  
   g. Husband reinstalls heroine
APPENDIX G

FEMALE BIBLICAL HERO TRAIT LIST
(COLLINS)

13. Little is known of her childhood.
14. She can be charming or beautiful.
15. She is widowed or otherwise abandoned by men.
16. She uses men for her own purposes.
17. She has lovers.
18. Her story includes the bedtrick, an instance of individual initiative focused on trickery or deception, in order to secure what is rightfully hers.
19. She fulfills a man’s job or obligations in seeking her due.
20. She has a son as a result of the bedtrick.
21. Her child’s story continues on in toledot, or recitations of family history.
22. Removal or de-emphasis of the male figure after the birth of the son.
23. Her death is hardly ever noted.
24. Her actions are morally ambiguous and there are conflicting views of her goodness.

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