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PUTTING TOGETHER BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

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Putting together biblical narrative suggests that someone has taken it apart, and that has indeed been the principal occupation of formidable intellectual energies in the academic study of the Bible for over a century and a half. Let me hasten to say that if we murder to dissect, we also dissect to understand, and nothing in what follows is meant to discount the impressive advances in the understanding of the historical development of the Bible that have been achieved through the analysis of its text, whatever the margin of conjecture, into disparate components. But unfortunately, scholarly attention, like other forms of human attention, has difficulty in focusing on more than one order of objects at a time, and the concentration on dissected elements has led to a relative neglect of the complex means used by the biblical writers to lock their texts together, to amplify their meanings by linking one text with another. If biblical scholarship has been guided by a tacit imperative that might be formulated, as I have said elsewhere,¹ as *the more atomistic, the more scientific*, it also needs to be recognized that the atoms were often purposefully assembled by the writers into intricate, integrated structures which are, after all, what we experience as readers, and which abundantly deserve scholarly attention.

It should be noted that increasing attention—in part inspired by the new literary analysis of the Bible—has been devoted in recent years to the ways in which biblical texts meaningfully refer to other biblical texts, and one enterprising new study, David Damrosch's *The Narrative Covenant*,² boldly attempts to identify such interconnections while at the same time building on the discrimination of historically distinct textual layers proposed by analytic scholarship. In any case, the biblical writer's use of allusion as a conscious literary device deserves to be studied with some care, for in both its range of formal deployments and in its variety of modes of signification it reveals much of the artful complication of ancient Hebrew narrative.

Allusion to antecedent literary texts is an indispensable mechanism of all literature, virtually dictated by the self-recapitulative logic of literary expression. No one writes a poem or a story without some awareness of other poems or stories to emulate, pay homage to, vie with, criticize, or parody, and so the evocation of phrases, images, motifs, situations from antecedent texts is an essential part of the business of making new texts. For reasons that I hope will soon be clearer, the corpus of ancient Hebrew literature that has come

down to us in the Bible exhibits a remarkable density of such allusions. Now, some may object that the sort of dynamic that comes into play when, say, T. S. Eliot [118] alludes to Shakespeare and Milton cannot be applied to the Bible, which represents a “scribal culture” that makes frequent use not of literary allusion but of traditional formulas, verbal stereotypes. The whole notion of formula, so often invoked in biblical scholarship, needs serious critical re-examination because there is such an abundance of subtle, significant *variations* in the biblical use of formulas, but that is an undertaking that lies beyond our present purpose. In any case, the Bible offers rich and varied evidence of the most purposeful literary allusions—not the recurrence of fixed formula or conventional stereotype but a pointed activation of one text by another,³ conveying a connection in difference or a difference in connection through some conspicuous similarity in phrasing, in motif, or in narrative situation. The marker for the allusion may be as economical as a single unusual or strategically placed word or as profuse as a whole episode parallel in situation to and abounding in citations from an earlier episode. The infant Moses is placed in an “ark” (*tevah*) and set among the bulrushes, to be saved from the decree of drowning Pharaoh has issued for all Hebrew male babies (*Exod.* 2:3). The solitary term *tevah* recalls the ark in which Noah and his family and the specimens of the sundry species were saved from the universal drowning that engulfed all living things, and the Noah story, which itself involved a renewal of the first creation, leads back in turn to a cluster of reminiscences of *Genesis* 1 in *Exodus* 1.⁴ Thus the *Exodus* story is marked as a new beginning, a resumption of the process of God-given creation and procreation derailed by an oppressor. At the other end of the spectrum of allusive markers, the horrendous tale of the concubine at Gibeah in *Judges* 19 is an elaborate replay of the story of the visit of the two angels to Lot’s house in Sodom in *Genesis* 19 (the identity of chapter numbers is of course mere coincidence). In both, two strangers are taken in by the only hospitable household in town; in both, the brutish populace wants to gang-rape the male guest, or guests; in both, the host offers the mob two women instead; and the author of *Judges* 19 quotes sentence after sentence of dialogue and narratorial report from *Genesis* 19, making only minor changes in the language.

The relation of the concubine in Gibeah to the Sodom story raises two methodological issues which may help clarify the place of allusion in biblical narrative. The first is the question of dating that has been an endless source of perplexity in biblical studies. Allusion, of course, presupposes the temporal priority of one text to another. To contemplate for a moment an extreme possibility, do we know that *Judges* was written later than *Genesis*, or that its author was really familiar with *Genesis*? Might *Genesis* even be alluding to *Judges*, and not the other way around? Such a hypothesis is extremely unlikely first because the language of the story in *Judges* gives evidence of being an *elaboration* of the language in *Genesis* 19, going beyond the classical terseness of the Sodom narrative through the addition of little phrases that make the moral judgment of the events more explicit. If, moreover, there were no actual

allusion to Sodom in Gibeah, the whole conspicuous function of Sodom as moral paradigm would be lost. In biblical literature, Sodom, not Gibeah, is the proverbial model of a wholly depraved society that condemns itself to destruction; the Hebrew writers repeatedly want to trouble Israel with the grim possibility that it may turn into Sodom, its supposed anti-type.⁵ This notion of paradigm undermines a second hypothesis that might be entertained as an alternative to allusion—that *Genesis 19* and *Judges 19* represent two different versions (the only ones that have survived) of a conventional, stereotypical tale about the violation of hospitality that circulated in the folklore of ancient Israel. In fact, none of the biblical episodes strikingly similar to each other in plot and theme—what elsewhere I have called “type-scenes”—exhibits the kind of extensive sharing of actual language we find in these two texts. The only plausible inference is that the author of *Judges 19* had a minute textual familiarity with *Genesis* in a version that must have been fairly close to the one that has come down to us—and analogous evidence in the use of allusion can be cited for a familiarity on the part of the authors of the Former Prophets in general with much of the received version of the Tetrateuch. The writer in *Judges*, addressing himself to the origins of a murderous civil war, wanted to show his audience what could happen when an Israelite community casts away the fundamental bonds of civilized intercourse. This moral possibility was etched in fire and brimstone in the story of Sodom, from which he felt free to quote extensively, while firmly stressing that in the non-miraculous, political framework of his own story, there are no angels to intervene, the wayfaring Levite behaves like anything but an angel, a woman is raped to death, and the agency of retribution is not divine fire but bloody civil strife.

Allusion is pervasive in the Bible, to begin with, for the mechanical reason I have just cited—that this was, on the evidence of the texts themselves, a traditional culture that encouraged a high degree of verbatim retention of its own classical texts. A local indication of the assumption of retentiveness is the constant use of the technique of near-verbatim repetition of clauses and sentences within a single episode. Again and again, a revelation of a shift in attitude, perspective, or situation is introduced through the alteration of a single word, the deletion of a phrase, the addition of a word, a switch in the order of items, as statements are repeated; it is a technique with a power and subtlety that could have worked only on an audience accustomed to retain minute textual details as it listened and thus to recognize the small but crucial changes introduced in repetition. A listener who could in this way detect close recurrence and difference within the frame of a single episode might reasonably be expected to pick up a good many verbal echoes and situational correspondences between far-flung episodes. As I shall try to show, the biblical conception of history and the common biblical ideology often provided compelling reasons for the use of allusion in the Bible, but there is also a good deal of allusion in the Bible, as in other literatures, that is more local in intention: a given story evokes some moment in an antecedent story strictly for

the narrative purposes at hand, to underline a theme, define a motive or character, provide a certain orientation toward an event.

In 2 *Samuel* 13:9, David's son Amnon, preparatory to raping his half-sister Tamar, gives the order, "Take out every man from me," the identical words—*hotsi'u khol 'ish me'alai*—that Joseph uses (*Gen.* 45:1) when he wants to clear the viceregal chamber before he tells his brothers that he is Joseph. The momentary irony is clear and pointed: the same words that were a preface to a [120]great moment of fraternal reconciliation are now a prologue to a sexual violation of the fraternal bond. But the connections between Amnon and Joseph reach more to the heart of Amnon's story, the ironic dissonances sharpening as the terrible tale progresses. Once brother and sister are alone in his bedroom, Amnon, who has been pretending illness, seizes Tamar, making only the most terse and unadorned statement (in the Hebrew, just four words) of his lust, "Come lie with me, my sister." This brutally direct imperative echoes the two-word (Hebrew) speech in *Genesis* 39 which is all that Potiphar's wife is reported to have said to Joseph: "Lie with me." Interestingly—indeed, almost teasingly—the allusion to *Genesis* 39 is not only verbal but also structural. In the Joseph story, that is, the high moral satire of the concupiscent Egyptian lady is pointed up by a structure of contrastive dialogue in which she has only two words as the language of her desire while he is full of nervous volubility in reminding her of his status, his responsibilities toward his master, and the iniquity of consummating such an act of betrayal. In the story of Amnon and Tamar, the assailant is again laconic in lust (and after the rape, he has just two words for her, *qumi lekhi*, "get out"), while the assailed one, Tamar, speaks eight words for every one of his—as she desperately tries to ward him off by reminding him of the baseness of the act and the shame that will attach to her, raising the possibility that he can have her legally if he asks it of the king their father. The links with Joseph are then made explicit in an odd detail of royal sartorial custom which the writer appends to the rape narrative. After Amnon has his servants thrust Tamar out, referring to her contemptuously as *zot* (with the force of "this creature"), and bolting the door behind her, we are told that "she had on a coat of many colors [*ketonet pasim*], for such were the robes that the virgin daughters of the king would wear" (v. 18). Joseph, of course, is conspicuously associated with a coat of many colors, is, in fact, the only other figure in the Hebrew Bible said to wear such a garment.

This confluence of allusions to the Joseph story gives thematic depth to the tale of incestuous rape. The episode begins with an echo of Joseph's reconciliation scene and moves back in reverse narrative direction to the ornamental tunic, which in the Joseph story marks the initial crime of brothers against brother, when they attacked him and fabricated out of the blood-soaked garment the evidence of his death. Tamar, at the end a victim of fraternal hatred like Joseph at the beginning, tears her tunic as a sign of mourning, and her fine garment, like his, may well be bloodstained, if one considers that she has just lost her virginity by rape. (Allusion being a two-way street, the detail of royal costume here may also throw backward light on the Joseph story,

suggesting that Jacob's extravagant and provocative gift of the coat of many colors could be a gesture of conferring quasi-regal status on his decidedly virginal son.) The strife among brothers of the Joseph story is pertinent not only to this episode but to its ramified consequences. Absalom, Tamar's full brother, vows vengeance, and after the passage of two years, he has his henchmen murder Amnon. This act leads to his banishment from David's court, and, eventually, to his rebellion against David. The entire second half of the David story is an account of the aging king's loss of control over his wayward sons, and the allusion to Joseph in this episode, which is the very moment when things [121]begin to fall apart, may indicate a general parallel to the aging Jacob, who from the time of the massacre of the male population of Shechem (another act of vengeance in response to a sister's being raped) is repeatedly at the mercy of his intransigent sons.

The rape itself is a pointed reversal of the scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife. At least in this sexual arena, anatomy does prove to be destiny. When the importunate lady's two words of sexual command are unavailing, she initiates what looks like an attempt at rape, "seizing" Joseph as Amnon will take hold of his sister. But the young man, too quick and too strong for the woman, is able to wrench away from her and flee, leaving his garment (still another piece of clothing to be adduced as false evidence) in her hand. When, however, it is the man who is the assailant, the woman is, quite literally, overpowered, a point the narrator takes pains to bring home to us in a string of three verbs where one would suffice, "he was stronger than she, and ravished her, and lay with her" (v. 14). The evocation of *Genesis* 39 with the sexual roles reversed might even reflect one of those flickerings of feminist consciousness one finds in the patriarchal Bible: Tamar's vulnerability as a woman is equally stressed in her powerlessness vis-à-vis the rapist and in the social disgrace consequent upon the violation. In any event, Joseph's successful resistance to the sexual assault, though it leads to his imprisonment, is a way-station in his spectacular ascent to royal power, whereas the victimization of Tamar triggers a process of internecine havoc in the royal house of David that will continue till the king is on his deathbed. The story of Amnon and Tamar of course has its own coherence and so may easily be read without reference to the Joseph story, but to do so would be to rob it of some of its deepest thematic resonances, to fail to see the full implications of the particular episode, of the collision of character and gender, and of the larger political plot. Here, as almost everywhere in literature, the writer has shaped his meanings by aligning his text with memorable moments in the inherited literary tradition that are at once parallel and antithetical to his own narrative materials.⁶

In the Bible, however, the matrix for allusion is often a sense of absolute historical continuity and recurrence, or an assumption that earlier events and figures are timeless ideological models by which all that follows can be measured. Since many of the biblical writers saw history as a pattern of cyclical repetition of events, there are abundant instances of this first category

of allusion, none more striking than the beginning of the *Book of Joshua*. These chapters pick up the thread of narrative that has been interrupted by Moses' long valedictory address which constitutes the whole of *Deuteronomy*. In a large-scale deployment of what biblical scholars call resumptive repetition—that is, after an interpolation, the last phrases before the narrative broke off are repeated—the beginning of *Joshua* takes us back in a variety of ways to the early chapters of *Exodus*. The warrant for these allusions is not merely formal but also conceptual because the conquest of the land that Joshua is about to launch after the death of Moses is seen as a second Exodus, a significant new stage in the process of national liberation begun in the emancipation from Egyptian bondage.

[122]The first object of conquest, as everyone recalls, is the city of Jericho, just to the west of the Jordan river, and the miraculous collapse of its walls is reported in Chapter 6. It may be that the miracle itself, through the blasting of rams' horns and shouting preceded by seven days of complete silence enjoined on the Israelites, harks back to Moses' words to Israel at the Sea of Reeds, "The Lord will fight for you and you will be silent" (*Exod.* 14:14). But I would like to concentrate on the allusive deployment of the five chapters that precede this spectacular event. The first chapter is taken up with God's pledge to give Israel the land, his injunction that they depart not from his teaching, and Israel's answering pledge to listen and perform all that God requires of them. The chapter, full of Deuteronomic phrasing, is structurally apt as a resumption of the themes of Moses' valedictory address just concluded, and it need not detain us further here. Chapter 2 is the story of the two spies sent to Jericho. Chapter 3 reports the crossing of the Jordan by the assembled tribes of Israel, and Chapter 4 the memorialization of this event by the setting up of twelve stone markers. Chapter 5 is an account of the mass circumcision performed at Gilgal after the forty years in the Wilderness during which circumcision was not practiced, a ritual here carried out as an act of national dedication enabling the people to partake of the paschal sacrifice immediately preparatory to the beginning of the war of conquest. We may be able to see the strong links with *Exodus* better by beginning with this last episode and working backwards.

After the mass circumcision and the celebration of the paschal feast (which of course is itself a ritual re-enactment of the last night in Egypt before the Exodus), Joshua, standing alone outside Jericho, encounters a "man" who confronts him sword in hand. "Friend or foe?" Joshua challenges the stranger, who responds by proclaiming himself "captain of the Lord's host." Joshua at once prostrates himself, and then, perhaps surprisingly, the divine officer delivers neither prophecy nor exhortation but only the following words: "Take your shoes off your feet, for the place you stand upon is holy" (*Joshua* 5:15). The explicit verbal echoes from the Moses story are unmistakable, their most obvious function being to represent Joshua as a second Moses. The structural correspondences, however, between the two stories are complicated, pointing to differences as well as to connections between the two figures. The whole

chapter, which is essentially Joshua's dedication after that of Israel, is a replay of early episodes in the Moses story in reverse order, almost as if a film reel of the events from *Exodus* had been run backward. The shepherd Moses encounters God in the burning bush at Mount Horeb and is instructed, "Take your shoes off your feet, for the place you stand upon is holy ground" (*Exod.* 3:5). The sequence of action is as follows: the epiphany of the burning bush; Moses' reluctant acceptance of his mission; the tremendously compact and enigmatic encounter (*Exod.* 4:24-26) with the threatening figure of the Lord "on the way, at the encampment"; the act of circumcision which wards off the threat of death; the beginning of Moses' arduous task in Egypt. In the Joshua story, the sequence is first circumcision, then the appearance of the sword-wielding divine figure, which then turns into a benign epiphany echoing the Mount Horeb experience, and finally, as in the Moses story, the hero begins his mission. There are smaller verbal clues, in addition to the actual quotation of *Exodus* 3:5 [123] in the angel's words, that link the two stories. The mass circumcision is performed with flint knives, just as Zipporah seized a flint to circumcise her son and avert the threat of death in *Exodus* 4. Explaining the need for the circumcision at Gilgal, the narrator observes that "they did not circumcise them *on the way*" (*Joshua* 5:5)—*baderekh*, as at the beginning of the Bridegroom of Blood story in *Exodus* 4. The condition of being uncircumcised is instructively called "the shame [KJV: "reproach"] of Egypt," a slightly odd designation, considering the information we are given here that the Israelites who came out of Egypt were circumcised whereas the generation born in the Wilderness was not. (Whether the writer knew that circumcision was practiced among the Egyptians themselves is unclear.) The point is to associate the lack of circumcision with the pagan realm in which the people were enslaved and to mark the circumcision as a step in the process of liberation—which means, taking on a covenantal national identity—that was initiated in the flight from Egypt.

Let me now briefly sort out this whole set of correspondences in the interest of seeing what a nice instrument of expression allusion can be in the hands of the biblical writer. In the Moses story, the point of departure is the theophany, as Moses, "the master of all prophets," is later the chief recipient of Israel's greatest theophany. The encounter with the Lord at the encampment involves an actual threat of death, perhaps in keeping with Moses' own impulsive killing of the Egyptian taskmaster and certainly in adumbration of the Lord's slaying of all the firstborn of Egypt. The circumcision, which has a magical or apotropaic effect, must be dictated by a violent reminder from the divinity because Moses has married and begotten his son in alien Midian, and now has to re-enter the covenantal frame of Israel as he assumes his task of leadership. By contrast, Joshua is a second Moses, not the first, a leader who is also a follower, not a founder. The covenantal framework is already standing; it is strongly invoked in Chapter 1, and in Chapter 5 God can appropriately begin with a general command to renew the ritual of circumcision, which the people carry out as a matter of course. After this dedication in the flesh comes

the appearance of the divine stranger, who at first seems threatening but in fact is not. To Joshua the military man, what is revealed is not God himself or any pyrotechnic miracle, but the commander-in-chief of God's forces, and Joshua's initial challenge to him is that of a good sentinel, "Friend or foe?" The theophany itself is muted, for Joshua's role is not really that of a prophet: the fact of revelation is chiefly a confirmation of the process of dedication before the beginning of the conquest. When the Lord tells Moses he is standing on holy ground, it is because there the Lord is present to him and also because on that mountain the Lord will reveal himself again, amidst thunder and lightning, to give Israel his commandments. When the captain of the Lord's host tells Joshua he is standing on holy ground, that is in part because it is the place of revelation but also because it is the soil of the Promised Land that Israel through Joshua's leadership is enjoined to possess.

If we now move backward in the expository sequence at the beginning of *Joshua*, Chapters 3 and 4 are set out as a re-enactment of the miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds in *Exodus* 14 and the memorialization of that event [124] in the Song of the Sea, *Exodus* 15. The allusions of Chapter 3, in which the priests cross the Jordan dryshod while the water stands in a heap (*ned*), as at the Sea of Reeds, are perfectly explicit: the episode is a pre-eminent instance of the biblical notion that historical events exhibit patterned repetition, in a sense dramatically recur as a manifestation of providential design. The link between *Joshua* 4 and *Exodus* 15 is more structural correspondence than explicit allusion: in the play of primal national energies of the *Exodus* narrative, the miraculous event is commemorated by the rhapsodic celebratory gesture of song, accompanied by timbrels and dancing; in this later phase, the commemoration is ritualized in the erection of stone markers that reflect the formal division of the tribes and are associated not with a miracle vouchsafed the whole people but rather its priestly caste alone.

The most ingenious allusion to *Exodus* in these initial episodes occurs in the story of the two spies in Chapter 2. Now, there is a more obvious allusion here to the twelve spies in *Numbers* 13, a connection Jewish tradition rightly perceived when it chose *Joshua* 2 as the portion from the Prophets to be read in synagogue along with the Torah reading that includes *Numbers* 13. In *Numbers* there are two resolute spies (Joshua and Caleb), ten cowardly ones. Here there are only two dependable spies who in a sense make restitution for the collective failure of their predecessors. But the restitution, it should be stressed, is represented as a resumption of the process of the Exodus interrupted for forty years by the fearful report of the spies who were sent out by Moses. When the king of Jericho gets word that strangers have sneaked into the city, he asks Rahab the harlot, who has taken them in, where they are. She pretends they have already fled and encourages the king to set out in pursuit of them. In fact, she has hidden them in the thatched roof of her house on the city wall. When she climbs up to tell them what has happened and to give them instructions for a safe escape, she feels impelled to explain why she is helping them. Her first words are: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that your terror

has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint before you” (*Joshua* 2:9). The second and third clauses are a close paraphrase of the end of one line and the beginning of another in the Song of the Sea, with the order of the lines reversed and the tight verse rhythm loosened into prose: “All the inhabitants of Canaan faint. / Terror and fear fall upon them” (*Exod.* 15:14-15). The allusion to *Exodus* 15 is then spelled out as Rahab immediately goes on to say, “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds before you when you came out of Egypt” (2:10). If she has heard the sensational news, as a Canaanite she presumably has not heard the actual words of Moses’ song of triumph at the sea, though the two spies might well recognize her unwitting citation of the poem, and the Israelite audience of the story certainly would. By means of the allusion, the truth of history speaks through the mouth of a Canaanite harlot. The Song of the Sea, which follows two stanzas on the victory over the Egyptian host with a third stanza anticipating a similar triumph over the peoples of Canaan, is seen to be literally predictive rather than poetically hyperbolic. As one of the inhabitants of the land herself bears witness, terror of the Israelites *has* fallen upon them, the Canaanites indeed faint before the Israelite host. The allusion in the dialogue [125] assigned to Rahab announces the keynote for the re-enactment of *Exodus* that will follow. She sends the spies off “to the mountain” to wait there three days, as Moses took the Israelites out of Egypt to the mountain where they would wait three days before the giving of the Law. The spies, in turn, give Rahab a sign to protect her household from the Israelite onslaught to come: she is to place a scarlet thread in her window, as in *Exodus* the Hebrews smeared blood over the doorposts to protect their houses from the deadly sweep of the tenth plague. Afterward, the whole sequence we have reviewed unfolds: the new crossing of waters, the new commemoration, the circumcision, the encounter with the armed angel that becomes a reassuring epiphany. In all this, the larger symmetry of the story is underscored: Israel passes across a threshold of water from bondage into the “liminal” sphere of the Wilderness, and then crosses a second threshold of water into the land, after undergoing appropriate experiences of dedication and revelation that recall the very first stages of its movement toward liberation forty years earlier.⁷

The kind of allusion we have been considering is a way of making two stories into one continuous story. Joshua, after all, is the immediate successor to Moses, and through the play of allusion he and his followers are seen to repeat, with significant differences, the acts of Moses and the previous generation. But in the larger biblical panorama of narrative that spans eras of Israelite history, many stories cannot be contiguous in this way and so allusion often involves not the continuity of re-enactment but the evocation of a figure or an event in an earlier text that serves as a moral touchstone. A central concern, for example, of all biblical literature is the question of leadership. Ancient Israel makes no absolute distinction between civic and spiritual leadership, so this is at once a political and a religious question. A whole set of models for leaders faced with challenges, frequently in conflict with their

followers, is offered by the Wilderness stories in *Exodus* and *Numbers*. Before these, many of the underlying political issues are adumbrated in the tales of rivalry, conflict, and resolution within the family in *Genesis*. Among the later historical books, the one that is explicitly constructed as an exploration of the spectrum of possibilities of leadership—they progress from good to flawed to disastrous—is the *Book of Judges*. The background of the people’s political predicaments in its formative period is invoked as early as Chapter 2, when a verse that is a prelude to the Exodus story is transposed into an element in the prelude to the history of the *Judges*: “And there arose another generation that knew not the Lord” (2:10).⁸ In *Exodus* 1:8, it is of course a new king who knew not Joseph. The disturbing reversal, in which language referring to an alien king’s iniquitous relation to Israel is attached to Israel’s relation to God, is characteristic of the often dissonant use of allusion in *Judges*. Whether one is talking about conjectured editors supposedly responsible for the Deuteronomistic framework or the authors of the stories proper (and in my view scholarship has seriously overstated the difference between the two), the world of this book is one in which covenantal faith repeatedly collapses into pagan excess and social order into pure mayhem. The echoes, then, of earlier Hebrew literature frequently point up the ways in which Israelite behavior has fallen precipitously from its founding models. Dissonant allusion is sometimes [126] emphatically applied to the wayward populace, while the leaders, who are usually a mixture of strengths and flaws, are defined through a junction of consonant and dissonant allusions.

In Chapter 8, Gideon, who began his career as an idol-smasher, successfully completes a campaign against the Midianite marauders who had terrorized Israel. Pursuing the enemy forces to their trans-Jordanian bases, he captures their chieftains Zebah and Zalmunnah, who admit to having murdered his kinsmen, and he kills them himself, then takes the crescent ornaments from the necks of their camels. His men respond to the victory as follows:

And the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you, and your son, and your son’s son, for you have liberated us from the hand of Midian.” And Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.” And Gideon said to them, “Let me ask something of you: give me each of you the earring he has taken as booty.” For they had gold earrings, as they were Ishmaelites. And they said, “We will certainly give.” And they spread out the cloak and every man cast therein the earring he had taken as booty. (8:22-25)

The intrusion of Ishmaelites into a story which all along has been about Midianites is a puzzlement. It is generally explained as one of those famous slippages of terminology and traditions that can be detected in the Bible. That is, a later period identified the nomadic martial and mercantile people of the trans-Jordan as Ishmaelites, and the writer or editor evidently sought to make the practices of the Midianites more comprehensible to his audience by

substituting this designation for the older term strictly applicable to Gideon's period. But a confusion between Ishmaelites and Midianites occurs at a famous moment in biblical narrative, when Joseph's brothers spot the caravan and hit on the idea of selling him into slavery. Without contradicting the conventional assignment of these two terms in *Genesis* to two different sources, E and J, I would like to propose an unconventional possibility for thinking about the use of the terms. Whatever the reasons for the working of both Ishmaelites and Midianites into the older story, I would suggest that the ancient audience was familiar with the conspicuous switch in designation in *Genesis* 37, and that a similar switch here, in conjunction with the peculiar prominence of the Midianite-Ishmaelite camels (it is a camel caravan in the Joseph story), may have been used as a marker of allusion. The recollection, however teasingly oblique, would set up a background of tension to the narrated events: a flickering memory of the moment of fraternal betrayal as the Israelites entreat Gideon to be their king. Joseph himself is a figure who climbs from slavery to royal status but is ultimately the king's high functionary and will found no dynasty.

If the connection with Joseph is a teasing possibility, the parallels to Moses and Aaron are emphatic. Gideon follows good theological doctrine in insisting that not he or his sons but the Lord alone should reign. His stance, though not his language, is reminiscent of Moses in the Wilderness tales, the Moses who eschews dynastic rule, who, like Samuel after him, avows that he has never expropriated a single donkey or otherwise exploited the people, as [127]monarchs are wont to do (see, for example, *Numbers* 38:15). *Judges*, however, is a constant chronicle of rapid decline, and that process can be seen here in the switch within the space of a verse from the model of Moses to that of Aaron at his weakest moment. In this regard, there is a silence at this point in our text that deserves commentary. Let me propose a general formal principle of biblical narrative. In dialogue, in most instances in which a speaker completes a statement, and then begins another statement with a new "he-said" (*wayomer*) formula of introduction, we are invited to wonder why there is no intervening response from the other party to the dialogue: has something inferrable from the narrative situation transpired in the silence between first speech and second speech by the same character? What seems to me likely in the exchange between Gideon and the men of Israel is the silence of stubborn resistance. He makes the ringing declaration that not he but the Lord will rule over them. They look at him hard-eyed, unconvinced, and he realizes that some other step is necessary. In the pattern of allusion, what he does is to make the move from Moses to Aaron: the request for golden earrings, precisely Aaron's request in the episode of the Golden Calf (*Exod.* 32), is something concrete and in a way reassuring that they can understand, as the impatient Israelites in *Exodus*, perplexed by the imageless God with whom Moses has tarried on the mountain, could understand the graven image Aaron fashions out of their gold. The people proclaim of the Golden Calf, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." This very phrase has been on

Gideon's mind since the encounter with the angel that initiates his vocation as judge: "And where are his wonders of which our fathers told us, saying, 'Has not the Lord brought us up from Egypt?'" (6:13). The allusion to the Golden Calf provides a thematic link between the political and the cultic questions at the end of the Gideon story. From the gold earrings cast into the cloak (as Aaron lamely told Moses, "I cast it into the fire and this calf came out" [*Exod.* 32:24]), Gideon makes a cult-object, an ephod, which he sets up in his hometown, "and all Israel whored after it there, and it was a snare for Gideon and his household" (8:27). In the writer's anti-monarchic view, the monarchy itself is a kind of idolatry. When Gideon sees that the people are loath to do without it, he finds an equivalent that seems to him a lesser evil, a golden image, presumably to be used as an appurtenance of monotheistic cult, which will in its own way give the people a sense of security in its chronic historical anxiety, being a solid institution, as is monarchy, *kekhol hagoyim*, like those of all other nations. Just as the story of Gideon is about to round out to formulaic closure ("and the land was quiet forty years"), the "snare" of the cultic sin, against the background of the crisis of belief and leadership in the Golden Calf episode, introduces an ominous note that prepares us for the breakdown of order about to come. In the next story, Gideon's bastard son Abimelech will massacre his seventy half-brothers, and in that tale of disaster we get a grim monitory picture of the kind of gnarled destructive person who would aspire to be king.

The examples we have considered of course do not exhaust the range of possibilities of allusive technique in biblical narrative, and they scarcely intimate the densely allusive character of biblical poetry, which often depends on a minute phrasal recall of earlier poems and narrative texts. But the three [128]categories I have proposed—local allusion for the definition of theme, allusions dictated by actual continuity and narrative re-enactment, allusion to models as part of an ideological argument—broadly mark the three most common occasions for allusion in biblical literature. In any case, the ubiquity of allusion in this body of texts tells us something important about the character of the literature cultivated in ancient Israel.

The diversity of biblical literature is one of its most remarkable features. Over the eight or more centuries during which it was created, as we turn from one genre to the next, one school to the next, and one era to the next, there are often startling changes not just in emphasis but in fundamental outlook, even vehement debate among writers. But for all this diversity, there is also a kind of elastic consensus that expresses itself in certain shared values and concepts, accompanied by a shared set of images, idioms, model figures and exemplary stories. For all we know, there may have been a Hebrew literature which operated outside this consensus and which did not survive. Within the consensus, allusion was a natural means of reinforcing ideological continuity across schools and eras. It was not a matter, as some scholars have imagined, of mechanically reproducing literary material from the past, but of elaborating, transforming, reversing, re-inventing, selectively remembering, pieces of the

past to fit into a new textual pattern. This is, of course, what generally happens in the literary deployment of allusion, the difference being that certain notions of God, man, nature, and history that came to define national consciousness were locked into these habits of allusion. God's sovereign power seen as a transformation of primal chaos into order and the liberation from Egyptian bondage as the great sign of Israel's historical election were so central that writers of the most disparate aims and backgrounds repeatedly rang the changes on these ideas as they had been classically formulated in *Genesis* and *Exodus* respectively. Allusion, then, becomes an index of the degree to which ancient Hebrew literature was emphatically on its way from corpus to canon, even if certain later institutional notions of canonization would have been alien to it. For the prominent play of allusion requires that the sundry texts be put together, taken together, seen, even in their sharp variety, as an overarching unity.

At the same time, allusion beautifully manifests what we have come to see increasingly in other formal aspects of literary technique in the Bible (such as repetition, ellipsis, dialogue, narrative point of view)—the imaginative subtlety, the extraordinary technical inventiveness, of the ancient Hebrew writers. It is, I think, a daring leap of imagination for a writer to put in the mouth of a man about to rape his sister the very words used in an earlier story by a man about to reveal himself to his brothers who have done him violence and presumed him dead. After that initial leap, it requires the most sophisticated awareness of the expressive possibilities of intertextual irony for the writer to develop as he does a fine network of links between the story he is telling and the tale once told of Joseph. These are, often quite spectacularly, narratives that deserve the most nicely attuned attention, not always in the same way but surely to the same degree as the modern classics of art fiction from Flaubert to James and beyond. The delicate movement of allusion through the various [129]biblical texts, sometimes perceptible in a single word, sometimes palpable in the large outlines of a story, abundantly demonstrates that for the Hebrew writers literary tradition was ultimately not a pious compulsion, as scholarship has often pretended, but a resource to be drawn on again and again for the shifting expressive needs of a purposeful art.



NOTES

1. Robert Alter, "Introduction to the Old Testament," in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge 1987) 25.

2. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco 1987). A still more recent study, moving on a rather different track, Harold Fisch's *Poetry with a Purpose: biblical poetics and interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis 1988) offers a virtuoso reading of the play of allusion in *Deuteronomy* 32 (see 55-79).

3. For a useful general definition of literary allusion in these terms, see Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1:1 (January, 1976) 105-128.

4. These allusions have been aptly observed by Moshe Greenberg in *Understanding Exodus* (New York 1969).

5. I have discussed this in "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative," *Tikkun* 1:1 (May, 1986) 30-38.

6. I offer a more theoretical justification for the centrality of allusion to literary expression in Chapter 4 of *The Pleasures of Reading* (New York 1989).

7. The aforementioned chapter on allusion in *The Pleasures of Reading* (supra n. 6) includes a consideration of the Rahab story that touches on some of these same points, though with the aim of illustrating the general operation of literary allusion.

8. The allusion to *Exodus* in this verse has been noted by David Gunn, "Joshua-Judges," in Alter and Kermode (supra n. 1) 111-12.