

Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19*

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I. Introduction

It is becoming increasingly apparent that Hebrew narrative tends to follow conventional patterns. This awareness is having a revolutionary effect on the interpretation of many narrative texts, particularly those which appear to have borrowed motifs and expressions from other passages. In the past, higher criticism has treated duplicate accounts in the Pentateuch as variations of the same original story.¹ The characters and specific circumstances may vary, but this is explained as evidence for multiple sources. Recently Robert Alter has argued that these should rather be understood as "type-scenes" occurring at crucial junctures in important individuals' lives.² Such type-scenes may be expected to unfold according to more or less standard patterns. But signs of convention are evident also at the microlevel, that is in the use of predictable vocabulary and phraseology in specific narrative contexts. To cite only one example, David M. Gunn has discovered a great deal of stereotyping in the manner in which battles and violent deaths are recounted in Judges and Samuel.³

There is one particular type of repetitive strategy that has received inadequate attention, namely echo narrative technique, or echo literary strategy. By *echo literary strategy* we mean a story-teller's deliberate employment of preexistent accounts or segments thereof to shape the recounting of a new event. Since the term *echo* implies a repetition of sound, the designation

[p.326]

nation would seem especially appropriate for oral presentations, in which a narrator borrows familiar traditional accounts and incorporates the structures and phrases found there into his own presentation. However, it is also theoretically possible that this rhetorical strategy could be employed in written narrative composition, particularly in OT texts, where so much traditional material is found. While we have not attempted to identify all or even many accounts which might have been influenced by an echo rhetorical strategy, the purpose of this paper is to examine one passage which appears to be a likely candidate, Judges 19. Our

¹ There are two accounts of creation (Gen 1:12:4a; 2:4b25); thrice a patriarch passes off his wife as his sister (Gen 12:1020; 20; 26:111); twice Beersheba is named, commemorative of a covenant between a patriarch and Abimelek (Gen 21:22-31; 26:26-33); twice Hagar flees into the desert (Gen 16; 21:9-21); two decalogues are given (Exod 20:117; 34:10-28); etc.

² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 47-62. Alter acknowledges the influence of Robert C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Semeia Supplements; Philadelphia: Fortress Press and Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

³ David M. Gunn, "Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel," *VT* 24 (1974) 286-317.

investigation will consist of two parts: (1) an analysis of the relationship between Judges 19 and Genesis 19, and (2) an explanation for the narrator's use of this traditional material.

II. Judges 19 and Genesis 19

The connection between Judges 19 and Genesis 19 has long been recognized.⁴ Although most scholars have accepted the primacy of the Genesis account,⁵ recently some have proposed the reverse. Susan Niditch has argued that Judg 19:10–30 is an integral part of a larger beautifully crafted tale (encompassing chaps. 19–20) concerned with lofty theological notions of community, family, caring, and responsibility. Genesis 19, by contrast, is not integral to the larger narrative framework in which it is embedded. Furthermore, it presents a much simpler theological message, and should therefore be viewed as secondary.⁶ The interpretation is creative and daring, going against the current of prevailing opinion, but can it be maintained? In order to answer the question a closer look at the relationship between the two texts must be taken.

The parallels between Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are striking. At the thematic level we note:

- (1) A small group of travelers arrives in the city in the evening.
- (2) A person who is himself an alien observes the presence of this company.
- (3) The travelers have a mind to spend the night in the open square (רחוב).

[p.327]

- (4) At the insistence of the host, the travelers agree to spend the night in his house.
- (5) The host washes the guests' feet (implied in Gen 19:3 after the offer in v. 2).
- (6) Host and guests share in a fellowship meal.
- (7) Base men of the city surround the house.
- (8) They demand of the host that he deliver his male guests over to them that they might commit homosexual gang rape.
- (9) The host protests this display of wickedness.
- (10) When the protests prove futile the hosts hand over a substitute female.

⁴ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian, 1957) 235-37, dismissed Judges 19 as an imitation of Genesis 19, devoid of any positive value.

⁵ So George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895) 417-19; C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges: With Introduction and Notes* (1918; repr. New York: KTAV, 1970) 444-45; Hans W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth* (ATD; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 252; C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Bible Student's Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 480; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 282-83; Culley, *Studies*, 5659; Gunn, "Narrative Patterns," 294 n. 1; John Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (NCB; Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1967) 240. A van den Born, "Etude sur quelques toponymes bibliques," *OTS* 10 (1954) 210, speaks of "un pastiche de l'histoire de Sodome."

⁶ "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 (1982) 365-78.

But the connections extend beyond common motifs. The chapters also share a common vocabulary, particularly verbs: "spend the night" (לִיָּן, Gen 19:2; 11 times in Judges 9, functioning as a *Leitmotif* tying vv. 1–9 to the events that happen at Gibeah), "to turn aside" (והִלַּכְתָּם לְדַרְכָּם, Gen 19:2; Judg 19:11, 12, 15), "rising early and going on one's way" (והִשְׁכַּמְתָּם, Gen 19:2; Judg 19:9), "to dilly dally" (הִתְמַהְמַה, Gen 19:16; Judg 19:8), "washing the feet" (רָגְלֵי־רַחֲוֵי, Gen 19:2; Judg 19:20), "and they ate" (וַיֹּאכְלוּ, Gen 19:3; Judg 19:21).⁷ The substantives also correlate, as in "at evening" (בְּעֶרְבֹ, Gen 19:1, Judg 19:16), and "house" (בַּיִת, Gen 19:2, 3, 4, 11; Judg 19:18, 21–23). Niditch downplays these correspondences, suggesting that "these are common terms associated with travel and hospitality in the OT." On the other hand, "A rote or wooden re-use of language by one of the versions would tend to point to a borrowing or imitative relationship."⁸ (But she finds no firm indication of copying in the shared language. While this may be true for the units as whole entities, the intensification of the parallelism as the narratives reach their respective climaxes (Gen 19:4–8; Judg 19:22–24) suggests that there was indeed some intentional echoing. The correspondence between the texts may be highlighted by juxtaposing them as in the accompanying synopsis.⁹

The relatively limited number of unique features in the two texts is quite remarkable. The pluses are rather evenly divided. In the Genesis text the added elements consist of: (1) a reference to the scope of the participation in the vile deed (v. 4); (2) the interrogative particle, "Where?" which results in a stylistic variation (v. 5); (3) mention of the time of day that the visitors had come to Lot (v. 5); (4) a modifying prepositional phrase, "to us" (v. 5); (5) reference to the doorway, where Lot meets the residents (v. 6); (6) notice of Lot's shutting the door behind him, presumably to protect those inside the house (v. 6); (7) the prepositional phrase "to you" (v. 8).

The pluses in the Judges text are these: (1) an introductory וַיִּבְרַח, "and behold" (v. 22); (2) reference to the locals pounding on the door of the old man's house (v. 22); (3) further descriptions of the anonymous counterpart

⁷ Cf. וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁחָה, "and he prepared a banquet," in Gen 19:3; and וַיִּשְׁתּוּ, "and they drank," in Judg 19:21.

⁸ "The Sodomite Theme in Judges 19-20," 375.

⁹ Cf. the more general charts of Burney (*Judges*, 444-45) and Culley (*Studies*, 56-67).

[p.328]

**A SYNOPSIS OF THE TEXTS OF GENESIS 19:4-8
AND JUDGES 19:22-24**

Genesis 19:4-8

4 Before they lay down

**the men of the city
the men of Sodom
surrounded
with reference to the house**

**both young and old
all the men totally**

5 and they called

to Lot

and they said to him

"Where are

the men

who have come

to you

during the night?

Bring them out

to us

that we may 'know' them."

6 And Lot

went out

to them

at the doorway

and shut the door

behind him

Judges 19:22-24

22 While they were making merry

Behold

the men of the city

men of the sons of Beial

surrounded

the house

ponading on the door

and they said

to the old man,

the owner of the house

saying

Bring out

the man

who has come

to your house

that we may 'know' him."

23 And the man,

the owner of the house,

went out

to them.

Key

bold Verbatim Quotations

==== Paraphrastic Alterations

_____ Minor Variations (grammatical, stylistic,
or such as are required by the context)

_____ Unique Features (unmarked)

Genesis 19:4-6

4 נָרוּם יִשְׁכְּבוּ

אִנְשֵׁי הָעִיר

אִנְשֵׁי סָדֵם

נָסְבוּ

עַל־חֲבִית

מִנְעַר וַעֲדֹקָן
כָּל־חַשֶׁם מִקְנֵה:

5 וַיִּקְרָאוּ

אֶל־לוֹט

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵךְ

אִיה

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים

אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ

אֵלֶיךָ

הַלַּיְלָה .

וְהוֹצִיאָם

אֶל־יָדָיו

וְהוֹצֵאָה אוֹתָם:

6 וַיִּצָּא

אֶל־וֶם

לוֹט

הַמַּצְחָה

וְחִדְלַת סָדֵם

אֲחֵרָיו:

Judges 19:22-24

22 וְהָיָה מִיָּמֵינוּ אֶתְלֹבֶם

וְהָיָה

אִנְשֵׁי הָעִיר

אִנְשֵׁי בְנֵי־בְלִיעַל

נָסְבוּ

אֶתְחַבֵּית

מִתְדַּמְּקִים עַל־הַיָּלֹחַ

וַיֹּאמְרוּ

אֶל־הָאִישׁ

בְּעַל חֲבִית חֲזָקָן

לֵאמֹר

הֲרָצָא

אֶתְהָאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁר־בָּא

אֵלֶיךָ

וְהוֹצֵאָה

23 וַיָּצֵא

אֶל־וֶם

הָאִישׁ

בְּעַל חֲבִית

[p.330]

7 And he said,

"Please,

**Do not, my brothers,
act wickedly.**

8 Please,

Behold

I have two daughters

who have never 'known' a man.

Please, let me bring them out

to you.

Do to them

according to that which is good

in your eyes

To these men

do not commit

(such an) act,

because

he has come

under the shelter of my roof."

And he said

to them,

Do not, my brothers,

do not act wickedly,

please.

Because

this man

has come

to my house,

do not commit

this folly.

24

Behold

my daughter

a virgin

and his concubine.

Please, let me bring them out

Ravish

them.

Do to them

what is good

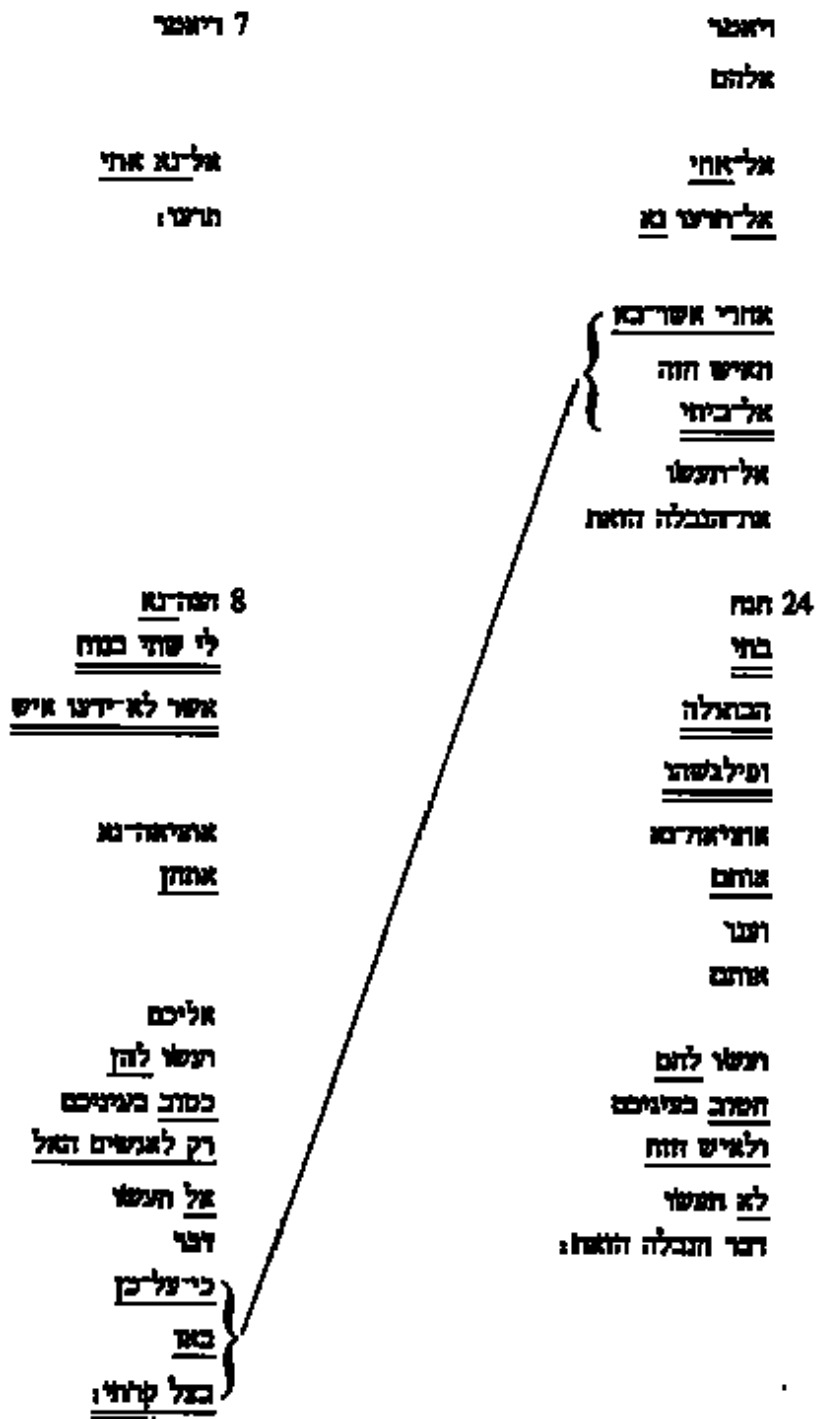
in your eyes

To this man

do not commit

this foolish act."

[p.331]



[p.332]

to Lot (vv. 22–23); (4) the prepositional phrase, “to them” (v. 23); (5) the man’s warning not to commit this vile deed (הנבלה הזאת, v. 23); (6) the permission granted by the old man to ravish his daughter and the concubine (v. 24); (7) a repeated reference to the vile deed (v. 24).

Apart from these distinctive elements, virtually every element in Genesis 19 finds a counterpart in Judges 19. In fact, if the *nota accusativi* and the following substantive are counted as a single lexical entity, then the total number of words in each text is exactly the same, 69. If accentual units are counted, similar conclusions result. Of the words found in Genesis 19, almost one-fourth (16) occur in the same form in Judges 19. An additional 24 expressions from Genesis 19 find a close counterpart in Judges 19, the variations being grammatical, stylistic, or such as are called for by the context. Occasionally statements from Genesis 19 are recast and/or paraphrased in Judges 19. "Before they lay down" in Gen 19:4 is roughly equivalent to "While they were making merry" in Judg 19:22, inasmuch as both identify the temporal context of the events that follow. What appears as a question and a command in Gen 19:5 is conflated into a single command in Judg 19:22. The causal clause at the end of Gen 19:8 is recast and brought forward to precede the first warning not to commit the evil deed in Judg 19:23. "I have two daughters" in Gen 19:8 is answered with "my daughter...and his concubine" in Judg 19:24, preserving the involvement of two potential female victims. "Who have not known a man" in Gen 19:8 is replaced by a single expression, בתולה.¹⁰

The conclusions to the two stories are quite different. In the first, Lot's offer of his two daughters is rejected by the men of Sodom, and in the end it is the intervention of the visitors that saves the entire household from the locals' fury. In the second, the men of Gibeah are not satisfied with the old man's proposal either. With the comment, "But the men would not listen to him," the narrator summarizes a response that might otherwise have been cast in the shape of Gen 19:9. Although the text is silent on any threats to the household as such, the intervention of the visitor again proves decisive. He seizes his concubine and delivers her over to the men of Gibeah who find relief for their lusts by abusing her all night. The morning finds her on the doorstep of the house which should have provided refuge for her. The sequel to Genesis 19 has the city totally destroyed by an act of direct divine intervention. In the sequel to Judges 19, Yahweh involves the Israelites in punishing one of their own tribes.

Nevertheless, given their similarities, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that incorporated into these accounts is an authentic example of echo narrative technique. It simply will not do to dismiss the shared diction as "common terms associated with travel and hospitality in the OT," as Niditch has done. One of the accounts appears to have been deliberately

[p.333]

modeled on a story that was being circulated at the time of its composition. But the borrowing is not slavish. Regardless of which text is primary, the secondary author expressed great freedom of expression in his re-use of the traditional story. Whether the primary tradition was transmitted in written or oral form cannot be established at the present. The extent of the borrowing seems to point in the direction of the former.

III. The Rhetorical Significance of Echo Narrative Technique

Having established that one author's account is modeled after the other's, the direction of the borrowing remains an open question. Since the two texts are virtually identical in length, it cannot be argued that either is an expansion or commentary on the other. The canon

¹⁰ This agrees with the definition of בתולה as "one who has never had intercourse" reflected in Gen 24:16; Lev 21:3; Judg 21:12.

of the shorter reading being primary is irrelevant. If it is assumed that the hypothetical J document (Genesis 19) antedates the "appendices" of Judges, the question is answered. However, Niditch has challenged prevailing opinion by arguing for the primacy of Judges 19, basing her arguments upon the integrity of the passage to its broader literary context. Can this position be sustained? In order to do so one would need to demonstrate that the author of Genesis 19 had greater motivation for utilizing Judges 19 than vice versa.

Some scholars understand the book of Judges to be essentially an apology for the Davidic monarchy.¹¹ In keeping with this view, and complementary to the refrain, "In those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), the author's intention in chap. 19 has been to discredit the Benjamite tribe as a whole, and the house of Saul in particular.¹² Significantly, Gibeah was both Saul's birthplace (1 Sam 10:26) and the site of his residence as king (1 Sam 13-15). If Judges 19 is primarily concerned with this polemic, it is difficult to imagine why it should have been utilized by the author of Genesis 19. While some have drawn connections between the

[p.334]

Abraham traditions and the house of David,¹³ an anti-Saulde stance is nowhere in evidence.

Recent scholarship has been fascinated by both of these accounts because of their sociological messages. By attempting to understand these texts from the perspective of the female participants in the narrative, we have gained a new appreciation for the feelings of the victims of an oppressive patriarchy. Both of these stories reflect a world in which the rules of hospitality protect only the males. It is quite acceptable to offer females as sacrifices in dealing with conflicts among males.¹⁴ Others have focused on the common motif of

¹¹ Cf. A. E. Cundall, *Judges - An Apology for the Monarchy?* *ExpTim* 81 (1969-70) 178-81; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 692. Recently W. J. Dumbrell ("In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes: The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered," *JSOT* 25 [1983] 23-33) has taken the opposite stance. He argues for an antimonarchic polemic in the book. The exilic author is calling for a return to direct theocratic reign, freed from the encumbrances of human institutions, particularly the bureaucratic monarchy. While his view has much to commend it, Dumbrell continues to be preoccupied with the symptoms of Israel's malaise (the failure of political structures), rather than the cause (the internal spiritual corruption).

¹² M. Güdemann, "Tendenz und Abfassungszeit der letzten Kapitel des Buches der Richter," *MGWJ* 18 (1869) 357-58, though Judges 19 is viewed as dependent upon Genesis 19. For more recent proponents of this interpretation see B. Luria, "Parsa \square t pilegeš bēgib," in 'dyyunim bēseper šopē" (1966) 463-94, as cited by J. Untermann, "The Literary Influence of The Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) on The Outrage at Gibeah (Judges 19)," *HAR* 4 (1980) 161n.

¹³ Cf. Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (SBT 2/5; London: SCM, 1967).

¹⁴ See particularly Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 65-91. Cf. also the comment of D. N. Fewell, "Stories like the rape and dismemberment of the Levites concubine in Judges 19 and the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 show the darkest side of patriarchy yet - the torture and murder of the most vulnerable and innocent for the sake of male honor and

homosexual rape. Such action is viewed as an aggressive form of inhospitality, the epitome of disorderly and destructive antisocial behavior.¹⁵ If these texts are concerned primarily with such issues, then the portrayal of Sodom as an inhospitable community reminiscent of Gibeah is reasonable. After all, for the Israelites of the Iron Age the city itself was no more than a faint memory. To bring vividness and life to the traditions of the patriarchs by means of familiar analogies from one's own experience is a clever rhetorical strategy. However, we have hardly done justice to these and other passages like them if we have treated them merely as case studies for sociological investigation. The messages of both Genesis and Judges are primarily theological, and texts like these should be treated in the light of the larger theological issues that exercise the authors' minds.

Within the context of the patriarchal narratives, Genesis 19 serves several functions. It is tied to the foregoing by the participation of the מלאכים (19:1). Although Lot gives no evidence of having recognized their status, these are two of the trio of heavenly visitors who had appeared to Abraham and Sarah in the previous chapter to announce the fulfillment of the promise of a son. What is high in the author's mind in chap. 18 is the portraiture of Abraham. After this announcement, while these two had gone on to Sodom, Abraham and the third (referred to as Yahweh) had remained behind conferring on the hill overlooking the cities of the valley. In a rare glimpse of Abraham, "the friend of God," being admitted to the secrets of the divine mind, Yahweh had disclosed to him that he was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorra, for their outcry was great and their sin exceedingly grave (18:20). In v. 21 he announced that he was going down to determine whether the behavior of the cities corresponded to the outcry that had

[p.335]

reached his ears. While Abraham pleads for mercy from "The Judge of all the Earth" (v. 25), the pair of מלאכים visit Sodom on Yahweh's behalf. What they experience confirms beyond all doubt the justice of the divine judgment of which Abraham has been apprised.

Second, the story presents a portraiture of Lot. However, the concern is not with the man for his own sake. Although he represents a byline to the chosen family, because of his connections with the Abrahamic house he is a benefactor of the divine blessing upon his uncle. In spite of the fact that the process of integration into the Sodomite community has begun,¹⁶ Yahweh cannot abandon him. The comment in 19:29, "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow," is not frivolous. In fact, as the aetiological sequel indicated, the promise that Abraham should become the father of many nations rubs off on him, inasmuch as he becomes the ancestor of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

If Genesis 19 is patterned after Judges 19, then the story of the outrage at Gibeah should have some bearing on the patriarchal account. Is Gibeah afforded archetypal status by serving as a model for the Sodom story?¹⁷ It is difficult to imagine why Sodom should have been depicted as an ancient day Gibeah. Nothing about this small Israelite settlement of the days of the judges commends itself to such utilization.

On the other hand, the author of Judges has ample reason to incorporate a well-known story from the patriarchal traditions into his literary portrait of his own nation. In the "book of

pompous religiosity" ("Feminist Reading of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance and Transformation," *JSOT* 39 [1987] 84).

¹⁵ Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20," 367-69.

¹⁶ On the significance of the marriage of his daughters to men of Sodom see Gen 34:9-10, 16.

¹⁷ Cf. Culley, *Studies*, 59.

saviors" (2:6–16:31) entree into the world of the late second millennium BC is gained to a large extent through the personalities that shaped and reflected Israelite society. The individuals that hold the office of judge are painted with bold and colorful strokes and emerge from the canvas almost bigger than life. The "first appendix" (17:1–18:31) is in certain senses transitional. On the other hand, the interest continues in the Danite tribe, from whom Samson had come. At a literary level, the primary actor in the narrative is presented as an equally colorful person, with his own name and his own personal struggles. However, the shift to a broader interest has already begun. The events that transpire reflect not only Israelite life at the personal level, but the spiritual and political condition of an entire tribe. Furthermore, the reader begins to get a glimpse of the state of the Levites during these dark days. By identifying the apostate priest simply as "a Levite," our attention is drawn to the tribe that has been charged with the spiritual leadership of the nation.

This trend toward anonymity continues in the final chapters. In fact, in the events leading up to and surrounding the Benjamite crisis the only person named is the relatively insignificant Phinehas, who is functioning as priest at Shiloh (20:28). The events of chap. 19 concern individuals, to be

[p.336]

sure, but the principal character is simply "a Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim" (19:1). The following scenes involve "his concubine," "her husband," "her father," "his father-in-law," "his son-in-law." In vv. 10–15 the party of travelers consists of the master, the concubine, and a servant. In vv. 16–24 the host is described but not named: he is an old man from the hill country of Ephraim staying at Gibeah, the owner of his house. These individuals are presented as real persons, but they are faceless and nameless.

The author's interest clearly lies beyond the cast of characters involved in the plot. In a narrative filled with ironical touches, the key statement is undoubtedly the comment of the Levite, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners [Jebus] who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah" (v. 12). The reasons for hesitating to stop overnight in Jebus are obvious: the Jebusites represented one of the Canaanite tribes against whom the Israelites had once declared holy war. No welcome was to be expected there. On the other hand, Gibeah, just a few miles down the road, was an Israelite village. There the Levite and his party should find a welcome.

Initially it appears that the primary defect of the people of Gibeah is their inhospitality. While the old man's warning to the party not to spend the night in the open square has an ominous ring for those who know the outcome of the story, the reader is led not to expect anything more serious. In fact, this impression is sustained by the author's careful attention to detail when the host's acts of hospitality are described. While they are enjoying one another's company the real world crashes in on them.

By patterning the following climactic scene after Genesis 19, the narrator serves notice that, whereas the travelers had thought they had come home to the safety of their countrymen, they have actually arrived in Sodom. The nation has come full circle. The Canaanization of Israelite society is complete. When the Israelites look in a mirror, what they see is a nation which, even if ethnically distinct from the natives, is indistinguishable from them with regard to morality, ethics, and social values. They have sunk to the level of those nations whom they were to destroy and on whom the judgment of God hangs. The transformation that comes over the Levite in the process should not go unnoticed.¹⁸ In attempting to defend his household

¹⁸ Cf. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975) 279.

against the rapists in 19:23–24, he had assumed the role of a judge after the order of Lot (Gen 19:9). However, the sequel casts him as a successor to the savior judges, rallying the nation to a massive attack against the enemy. But once this goal has been achieved he disappears from view and the image of the nation that we had seen at the beginning of the book returns. Now the responsibility for punishing one of their own tribes must fall on the nation

[p.337]

as a whole. The holy war which should have been waged against the foreign enemy must now be conducted internally.

That the narrator has been intentional in bringing the reader full circle from the beginning of the book is evident in the literary shape of the account. Judg 20:18–19 is almost a verbatim quotation of 1:1–2. As in the opening scene the sons of Israel inquire of Yahweh who is to initiate the attack against the Benjamites. Once again the lot falls to Judah.

Viewed in this light, the final unit (chaps. 19–21) takes on an entirely new significance. This is not merely a late addition to the "Deuteronomistic" edition of the book, added along with chap. 1 to form a tragic-comic framework.¹⁹ This is the climax of the book. With the portrayal of Gibeah as Sodom revisited, and the Benjamites as a Canaanite tribe under the law of *here*, the drama of the dark days of the judges has reached a fever pitch.

IV. The Canaanization of Israel as the Unifying Theme of Judges

Increasingly scholars are recognizing that the book of Judges represents a self-contained unitary literary composition.²⁰ To be sure, the underlying theology is clearly Deuteronomic, and the style and diction display many affinities with other parts of the so-called "Deuteronomistic History."²¹ However, more often than not, the course of events and the nature of divine activity in the book fly in the face of the standard Deuteronomic formula: Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings on the curse. With few exceptions, God operates in mercy, not by immutable formulae chiseled in stone.²² Furthermore, the distinctive structuring and the meshing of common motifs and themes in the various accounts point to deliberate planning. Each of the identifiable segments of the book contributes to the theme of the Canaanization of Israelite society in the period immediately following the conquest under Joshua.

1. The Prologue (1:1-2:5)

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 29-38.

²⁰ 20. For unitary interpretations of the book see Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); J. P. U. Lilley, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges," *TynBul* 18 (1967) 94-102; K. R. R. Gros Louis, "The Book of Judges," *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (eds. K. R. R. Gros Louis et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1974) 141-62; Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part 1: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury, 1980); D. W. Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," in *H. M. Orlinsky Volume* (ErIsr 16; ed. B. A. Levine and A. Malamat; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982) 70-79. Cf. also D. M. Gunn, "Joshua and Judges," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ea. R. Alter and F. Kermodé; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 103-7.

²¹ For the seminal work on the concept see Martin Noth, *the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

²² Cf. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 146-204.

The Prologue sets the stage for the plot to be unfolded by describing political conditions in Israel in the era immediately following the death of

[p.338]

Joshua. The tone of the annalistic 1:1–36 is relatively secular, in comparison to the rest of the book. But the seeds of future problems are laid in the survey of tribal fortunes. The dominant impression left by this section is the contrast between the tribes of Judah and Joseph who experience the presence of Yahweh, on the one hand, and the remaining tribes, on the other hand, who refuse to or are incapable of eliminating the Canaanites. Even if they enslaved the natives, 2:1–5 makes it clear that this was a violation of the covenant (cf. Deut 7:1–5).

2. The Introduction to the Book of Deliverers (2:6-3:6)

The narrator's agenda is spelled out in this thesis statement for the actual "book of judges" to follow. The spiritual malaise that set in after the death of the generation that had witnessed the mighty saving acts of Yahweh is sketched in bold strokes. Without a clear memory of Yahweh's claims upon them, the Israelites quickly apostasized, turning to the gods of the Canaanites around them. The narrator's interests here are several: (1) the cyclical nature of historical events in Israel; (2) the rapidity with which the spiritual rot set in (2:10); (3) the progressively deteriorating condition of the nation with each succeeding cycle (2:17–19); (4) the causes of the problem: failure to retain a vital memory of Yahweh's salvific deeds (2:6–10; 3:7), and intermarriage with the Canaanites (3:6). This thesis statement establishes the primarily religious focus of the narratives that follow. The Canaanization of Israelite society is essentially a spiritual issue.

3. The Introductions to the Deliverer Cycles (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)

The concern with the fundamentally religious problem of the era is maintained with the prefatory comment before each of the deliverer cycles, "Now the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh." These evaluations serve to tie the separate accounts together and to unite the whole "book of deliverers"

4. The Accounts of the Judges (3:7-16:21)

Although all of the accounts of the judges follow a basic literary framework, each one focuses on a different aspect of the role of the deliverer judges in Israel. It is clear from 10:1–5 and 12:8–15 that the narrator is aware of the incompleteness of his account. He has carefully selected stories of the judges that will help him develop his thesis. But with each of the judgships a further deterioration in the social and religious climate is evident.

The account of Othniel (3:7–11) is paradigmatic, emphasizing the divine role in the deliverance from Cushan-Rishathaim. The story of Ehud (3:12–30) focuses on the clever strategy of the deliverer. Although the editor makes no moralizing comment on Ehud's behavior, his treachery and brutality seem to be of a piece with Canaanite patterns. Shamgar (3:31) is an

[p.339]

enigma. The brevity of the statement suggests a certain embarrassment on the part of the author that the nation has had to turn to non-Israelites for help. Deborah (4:1–5:31) is the exception that proves the rule. But she is not a savior-judge like the rest; she is a prophetess,

actively serving Yahweh prior to her involvement in the call of Barak to bring about deliverance. The feminist motif is intentional,²³ highlighting the abnormal conditions within the nation. Barak is weak-willed and indecisive. Leadership from the men is simply not forthcoming.

A great deal of space is devoted to Gideon (6:1–8:35). Through the accounts of his experiences the author provides a direct glimpse into the homes and villages of Israel. What he sees there is not an encouraging sight. Altars of Baal are found in peoples' backyards, and when they are torn down the townsfolk rally on the side of the Canaanite god. Gideon himself is characterized as lacking in faith, needing a series of signs before he finally enters into the battle with the Midianites. After the victory has been won, he ostensibly rejects the offer of a hereditary kingship, with the pious comment, "Let Yahweh rule [משל]." But it is clear that in the narrator's mind this rejection was not taken seriously. From 8:4 onward he has been acting more and more like a king, exercising despotic ruthlessness over his subjects and letting personal agendas eclipse national and tribal interests. After his apparent (but sham) refusal of the hereditary monarchy his actions are clearly those of oriental monarchs: he claims the bulk of the war spoils, he dons purple robes, he establishes an aberrant national cult center, he acquires a large harem, and calls his son Abimelek ("My Father is King"). This is the real Gideon, the man who has no scruples about idolatry, nor about marrying Shechemites. The sequel, the story of Abimelek's abortive attempt at establishing himself as king in Shechem, reads like a page out of a Canaanite history notebook.

Jephthah is a tragic figure. In the first place he is a victim of a Canaanite style environment, a son of a harlot rejected by his own family and forced to live the life of a brigand. When called upon to lead his people, he is not above seizing the opportunity for personal political advantage. Ultimately, however, Jephthah becomes a victim of his own word. His rash vow sounds like the kind of bargains that Canaanites struck with their gods to ensure their favor.²⁴ While the text stresses the personal distress the fulfillment of the vow caused him, he may well have viewed this as the supreme demonstration of his piety.

Samson embodies everything that is wrong with Israel.²⁵ As a Nazirite, he fritters away his calling and divinely given talent, using it essentially for

[p.340]

personal selfish ends. Everything about him seems to be wrong: he marries a Philistine in deliberate defiance of his parents; he toys with the enemy from whom he is to bring deliverance; he has affairs with a Philistine harlot and with Delilah. Even his final appeal for divine aid appears to arise out of purely personal concerns (16:28; cf. 15:18). Popular opinion to the contrary, the statement that he accomplished more in his death than in his life is hardly complimentary.

It is important that to the narrator the judges were for the most part a part of Israel's problem rather than a solution. Their lives illustrated the Canaanization of Israelite society at every level. Not one of them rises to challenge the trend. When this occurs it is done through a messenger (מלאך, 2:1–5), a prophet (נביא, 6:7–10), or directly by Yahweh himself (10:10–16). The judges dealt with the symptoms of the spiritual malaise, but there is no evidence in

²³ Cf. B. Lindars, "Deborah's Song: Women in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 65 (1983) 158-75.

²⁴ Cf. the Punic inscriptions in *KAI* 79, 104, 108. Also L. E. Stager and S. R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifices at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?" *BAR* 18 (1984) 31-51.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of the role of the Samson stories in the book see Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 162-79.

the book that any of them ever addressed the underlying causes (cf. Samuel in 1 Sam 7). If anything positive happened in the book it tended to happen in spite of the judges, rather than because of them. Even the arresting of the judge by the spirit of Yahweh is anomalous. Where people are not predisposed to assume leadership, Yahweh must conscript them.

5. Micah and the Danites (17:1-18:31)

This story illustrates many Canaanite features in Israelite life: (1) the loss of personal integrity in the Ephraimite household (17:1-3); (2) the establishment of private cults antithetical to Yahwism (17:4-5); (3) the shiftlessness and opportunism of the Levitical priesthood (17:7-13; 18:20); (4) the glibness with which they performed their duties (18:5-6); (5) the unscrupulous exploitation of their countrymen by the Danites (18:17-20); (6) the centrifugal tendency of the tribes to operate independently in religious affairs (18:27-31).

V. Conclusion

All of this sets the stage for the final climactic scene in the drama. The Israelites are not only acting like Canaanites; to the narrator that is exactly what they are: apostate and standing under the judgment of God. The response of the Israelites to the brutal dismemberment of the concubine in 19:30 is the appeal of the narrator to his readers: "Consider it! Take counsel!

Speak up!" In the final episodes the degeneracy of the nation is attributed to the lack of a central authority and the individualization of society, an anarchy in which each man has become the standard of his own morality (17:6; 21:25). No one, not even Yahweh, is king in this land. The primary covenant stipulations have all been forgotten; virtually every one of the principles preserved in the Decalogue has been violated.

[p.341]

The spiritual condition of the people inhabiting the land of Canaan at the end of the settlement period is the same as it had been at the beginning. It had made no difference that a new group of people now occupies the land. In painting this picture the interests of the narrator are clear. His primary concern has not been to trace Israel's political evolution, but to recount her spiritual devolution. In exposing the total Canaanization of Israelite society he calls on all who are appalled at these trends in his own time to consider and to speak up. In so doing, his fearless pen has earned this anonymous literary craftsman his rightful place among "the former prophets" of Israel.