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The Case of Joseph's Coat: Giving Gifts to Children in the Hebrew Bible*

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Abstract

Joseph's coat is one of the most recognizable garments in the Hebrew Bible. In The Gift, Marcel Mauss theorizes that a gift contains part of the giver's social persona, thus requiring a counter-gift to be given. Drawing on Mauss's work as a heuristic category, this study investigates the economy of gifts and counter-gifts in the Hebrew Bible using Joseph's coat as a case study. Joseph's age at the time he receives the gift and the seeming lack of a counter-gift form the two main questions that this study investigates. To answer these questions requires determining who made the coat, a question best answered through an archaeological analysis of how textiles were created in ancient Israel. The paper concludes that an ancient audience would have understood both Jacob and Rachel to be makers of the gift, and therefore the (expected) recipients of a counter-gift. The end of the Joseph Novella suggests that this expectation was met after a period of delay, during which time Joseph grew into adulthood and rose to a position where he could properly return a gift on par with the special coat.

Keywords: *Joseph; giving; child; gift; counter-gift; Hebrew Bible; Genesis; textiles; coat; garment; social persona*

Gifts have meaning. In contemporary Western culture we give gifts on birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, and other ceremonial occasions. Then there are those gifts we give "just because." There is no expectation that the receiver returns a counter-

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gift because we understand gifts to be voluntary. The only strings attached are those that wrap the package. As anthropological and archaeological studies have demonstrated, this notion of gift giving drastically differs from gift giving in the ancient world, where there is an obligation to give a counter-gift. This paper addresses one of the most famous gifts in the Hebrew Bible, Joseph's so-called "coat of many colors" (Gen 37:3). The following analysis explores the materiality of the garment, asking who produced the garment and to whom the expected counter-gift would have been returned. All these questions are threaded together through a childist interpretation, which focuses on Joseph's age at the time he receives the coat. Focusing on age provides a new lens for reading the story and potential answers to the lacking counter-gift in the narrative.

Childist Interpretation

A childist interpretation focuses on the children in the text. Identifying children in a biblical text can be a bit tricky, since the Bible favors the use of relational terms (e.g., "son" or "daughter") that can refer to grown adults as well as young children. Within the Hebrew Bible, the terms used to refer to children are plentiful and often refer to relative ages and social stages rather than chronological ages. Terms range from the more generic *ben* (son), *bat* (daughter), *yeled* (male child), *yaldâ* (female child), to a more specific *yônēq* (suckling), *ṭap* (toddling child), *bətûlâ* (young woman of marriageable age), etc.[2] Yet, it is possible to understand characters in the biblical text as children by paying attention to the context in which they appear. Following a socio-anthropological categorization of people in the ancient world, I understand children as individuals who are not married and still dependents of the natal household.[3] This definition of children encompasses a wide range of ages. It need not only refer to wee children. The issue here is one of dependency. In the ancient

[2] See the extensive bibliography and word study by Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible: Especially the Elisha Cycle*, BJS 355 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013), 41-76.

[3] Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household,* EANEC 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 18; Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts*, ABS 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 6–9.

Near East, women were married in their teens, while men were not married until they were older and able to provide for a family.[4] The patrilocal nature of most marriages makes it trickier to determine when males moved from the social category of child to adult. The creation of a separate family unit through marriage seems to be a key marker of adulthood recognized both in the biblical text and ancient Near Eastern texts.

When Joseph's narrative begins, he did not have a family or a household of his own to support. Rather, the text describes him as a teenaged son who contributes in multiple ways to the family household economy. While he helps his brothers tend the flocks, he is also described as helping the women in the tents (Gen 37:2). The text also characterizes him as a messenger boy, sent by his elderly father to bring back updates on how things were going in the field (Gen 37:2, 12–14). Ethnographic studies of societies comparable to those described in the patriarchal narratives have noted the gendered division of labor.[5] While there are some activities that can cross boundaries, important for this discussion is the observation that women stay close to the domicile, running the household and tending gardens. Able-bodied men do work away from the house, such as tending flocks or working the fields. Young children stay close to the house, attended to by the women of the family. As children age, they are given age-appropriate jobs to do. As boys grow up, they increasingly are given more opportunities to engage with the male sphere, until a time when it is no longer appropriate or necessary to stay in the women's realm. In the narrative surrounding the coat, Joseph is depicted as an individual on the cusp of adulthood; he is betwixt and between. He is described as moving back and forth between the female and male domains. Moreover,

[4] Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Writings from the Ancient World 6 (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1987), 715–47; Martha T. Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements, 7th–3rd Centuries B.C.*, AOAT 222, (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker), 1989.

[5] Hilma Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood Among the Arabs* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1947), 127–30; Patty Jo Watson, *Archaeological Ethnography in Western Iran* (Tuscan: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 105–112, 205; Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–135; Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 152–156.

Joseph remains a dependent. Through this characterization, Joseph can be considered a child.

Once children are identified, the onus placed on the childist interpreter is to move from an adult-centric to a child-centric reading. Such a reading "critically examines the construction of children in the Bible and reads the text with a focus on children to reassess their roles and importance."[6] A childist reading is by nature interdisciplinary.[7] It might draw upon literary, socio-historical, anthropological, archaeological, gender, feminist, or other criticisms.[8] The following analysis thus weaves together different disciplines as it reassesses the story of Joseph's coat. In addition to the biblical text, my analysis utilizes anthropology to discuss the practice of gift giving and both archaeology and dress studies to address the materiality of clothing.[9] A focus on Joseph's age threads its way through the analysis, investigating the social expectations placed on a child to reciprocate a gift and in doing so helps explain why gifts of clothing bookend Joseph's story and his interactions with his brothers.

[6] Childist reading is the term used when a study focuses on the child. Faith Parker, "Click 'Add to Dictionary': Why We Need to Speak of Childist Interpretation," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature," San Diego, CA, November 2014; see also Julie Faith Parker "Children in the Hebrew Bible and Childist Interpretation," *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 2 (2019): 130–57.

[7] Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens, eds., *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, Brill Series in Jewish Studies 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

[8] *Inter alia*, Flynn 2018; Flynn ed. 2019; Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*; Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die*. For more on childist interpretation and various ways in which it can be used, see Kristine Henriksen Garroway and Julie Faith Parker, "Children in the Bible and Childist Interpretation," Special Issue, *Biblical Interpretation* 28 no. 5 (2020):1–6.

[9] Dress studies is itself an interdisciplinary field, drawing on historical, sociological, anthropological, iconographic, and art historians. Alicia Batten, "Foreword," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: 'For All Her Household are Clothed in Crimson*, ed. Antonios Finitis (London: T & T Clark, 2019), x–xi.

A Brief Introduction to Gift giving

The study of gift giving is a field that anthropologists began to investigate in earnest in the early 1900s.[10] Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*, in which he presented gift giving as an obligatory part of life, has become especially influential.[11] He posits that one was obliged not only to give gifts, but to receive them, and then to give counter-gifts. Looking at the "why" behind the phenomenon, he explains that all objects given impart something of the giver to the receiver.[12] Pierre Bourdieu added to the conversation in *The Logic of Practice*. Rather than focusing on the why, Bourdieu asked to what end? He concluded that while gift giving may be obligatory, the response to the gift was not always uniform. Individuals have the ability to "choose the conduct appropriate to each situation."[13] The positive response would be what Mauss described as the obligatory counter-gift. A negative response might be a lack of reciprocity, which could result from a flat refusal to respond (a snub) or in the incapacity to respond (a dishonor).[14] Timing is also key in the gift, counter-gift process, for an individual remains in debt to the giver until they give the counter-gift.[15]

The field of biblical studies has drawn upon these anthropological models to develop an understanding of gift giving within the biblical text. Gary Stansell's work presents a social-scientific approach in which he concludes that the gift giving described by the text aligns with what is seen cross-culturally in what he calls a Maussian, pre-industrial framework.[16] Gift giving, through the gift, counter-gift

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[10] Bronislow Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: Dutton, 1961); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Bell, John von Strumer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon, 1969), Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, trans. Felicity Baker (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, 1967).

[11] Mauss, *The Gift*.

[12] The gift is not inert, but alive with a part of the giver's spirit (the *hau*). The counter-gift must be given so as to return to the giver the equivalent *hau*. Economically speaking, gift giving in this model is a conservative, zero-sum game (Mauss, *The Gift*, 10).

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 100. Bourdieu is referencing Roman Jakobson, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton), 1956.

[14] Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 101.

[15] Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, 106.

[16] Gary Stansell, "The Gift in Ancient Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 65–90.

process, functioned in biblical society as a measure of honor and shame, rank, and a means of establishing or strengthening ties between peoples. Victor Matthews writes on the unwanted gift in the Hebrew Bible, again noting that reciprocity is at the very heart of the gift giving process.[17] Tracy Lemos' work investigates a very particular type of gift, those gifts given in marriage. While her work admittedly analyzes a narrower subset of gifts, she too uses an anthropological framework to understand gift exchange within the biblical world.[18] Michael Satlow notes how most scholars today interact with Mauss's work as a set of questions and a heuristic category, rather than a general theory.[19] The present paper also operates in this way, both drawing from and resisting different aspects of Mauss's ideas. While Mauss and subsequent scholars have approached gift giving as between two men, the pressing question for the present discussion concerns the place of children in the gift giving matrix.[20]

Clothing in the Hebrew Bible and the Materiality of Objects

From an anthropological perspective, clothing was traditionally understood as having a functional purpose, but now it is thought of as part of the discourse of display.[21] As part of a discourse, dress, like speech, is communicative.[22] It is a type of nonverbal communication that presents "constant, complex social messages that would have been intended by the wearer and understandable by the viewer."[23]

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[17] Victor H. Matthews, "The Unwanted Gift: Implication of Obligatory Gift Giving in Ancient Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 91–104.

[18] T. M. Lemos, Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine 1200 BCE to 200 CE (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–19.

[19] The resulting conference volume argues that this notion of "I give so that you may give" is too simplistic of a frame when discussing Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian and ancient Israelite cultures (Michael Satlow, ed. *The Gift in Antiquity* (Somerset: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[20] Mauss hints at the reason for this lacunae in his own work when he categorizes the things that could be given as gifts: objects, foodstuffs, rituals, women and children (Mauss, *The Gift*, 10).

[21] Heather McKay, "Gendering the Discourse of Display," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien can Dijk-Hemmes*, ed. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra, Biblical Interpretation Series 18 (London: Brill, 1996), 171.

[22] On anthropological theories of dress and the body, see Rosemary A. Joyce, "Archaeology of the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (2005): 139–158; Lynn Meskell, "Archaeologies of Identity," in *Archaeological Theory Today,* ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 187–213.

[23] M. M. Lee, "Deciphering Gender in Minoan Dress," in *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, ed. A. Rautman, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 114–115.

Studies of dress and clothing in the Hebrew Bible have noted that clothing is simultaneously metaphorical and communicative.[24] Clothing in general is used by the biblical text as a visual metaphor that affirms or reinforces social norms, enhances or adorns the person who is important/ attractive, and shows the role or status of a character.[25] Clothing thus worn is a tool of agency.[26] Clothing carries additional layers of meaning when it is gifted, for it conveys the meaning of the clothing itself, the meaning of the gift, and the social persona of the gift giver. "At the psychological plane, making and giving clothing, receiving and returning it, wearing it and seeing it worn give clues to the character's perceptions."[27] Interpreters do well, then, to pay attention to the aspect of clothing in a narrative.[28]

The symbolism and communicative aspect of Joseph's coat has not been lost on scholars. Here the symbolism communicates agency, while the communicative powers of the coat are tied up in the coat's materiality. Jacob *ʿāśâ* the coat.[29] Bethany Joy Wagstaff argues that this word shows that Jacob was the artisan, the one who crafted the

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[24] Antonios Finitis, ed., *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household are Clothed in Crimson*" (London: T & T Clark, 2019); Shawn W. Flynn, "YHWH'S Clothing, Kingship, and Power: Origins and Vestiges in Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household are Clothed in Crimson*," ed. Anotnios Finitsis (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 11–28; Ora Horn Prousser, "Suited to the Throne: The Symbolic Use of Clothing in the David and Saul Narratives," *JSOT* 71 (1996): 27–37; Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *JSOT* 65 (1995): 25–28. On dress in general see, Christoph Berner, Manuel Schäfer, Martin Schott, Sarah Schulz, and Martina Weingärtner, eds., *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2019); Megan Cifarelli and Laura Gawlinski, eds., *What Shall I Say of Clothes? Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of Dress in Antiquity* (Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2017); Laura E. Quirk, *Dress, Adornment, and the Body in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021).

[25] McKay, "Gendering the Discourse of Display," 181–82. See also the discussion by Nili Fox regarding the transgression of social norms displayed via dress. "Gender Transformation and Transgression: Contextualizing the Prohibition of Cross Dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5," in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, eds., Nili Fox, David Glatt-Gilad, and Michael Williams (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 49–72, esp. 50–51.

[26] Sara Koening, "Tamar and Tamar: Clothing as Deception and Defiance," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household are Clothed in Crimson*," ed. Anotnios Finitsis (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 87–108.

[27] Barbara Green, *What Profit for Us? Remembering the Story of Joseph* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 73–74.

[28] Consider Matthews who carefully explicates the clothing of the Joseph narrative, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," 28–29.

[29] For the traditional understanding of Jacob merely commissioning or purchasing the garment, see the review of scholarship in Bethany Joy Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: Material-Culture Approaches," (PhD Diss., University of Exeter, 2017), 226–33.

textile.[30] She understands the wording – the garment is *made* and not *given*— to be a carefully worded choice. For her, the biblical author uses "a culturally loaded term," one that points to the imbuing of the *kətonet pasîm,* the so-called coat of many colors, with Israel's own authority, thus giving the object agency, and one that has relevance for the "broader social engagements and contexts of textile production."[31] The coat communicates Jacob's authority as patriarch. Summing up the issue, David Cotter writes:

> What is important about the garment, however, is not its appearance but what it means in the overall dynamics of the family. It was the symbol of the father's preference for Joseph and a symbol that was easily read by Jacob's other sons … So the coat, intended by its donor probably simply as a gift, serves to poison yet further the atmosphere in this already emotionally fraught family.[32]

This is not a case of passing the mantle from master to student à la Elijah to Elisha (2 Kings 1). It is also not, as Cotter states, "simply a gift." This is a case of favoritism. Favoritism, couched as love, drives the production and presentation of the coat to the beloved child.

The Coat of Genesis 37: A Counter-Gift Ignored?

The following childist analysis encourages the reader to read the text with an eye to Joseph's age. The Joseph narrative with its "coat of many colors" has been the subject of many studies, and even a popular musical. However, studies often overlook Joseph's age as a primary factor in the story of the coat. If age is referenced, it is quickly passed over in favor of other aspects in the narrative. The relationship between parent and son, between adult and child, is one that will be explored below as it relates to the process of making the coat, giving the gift, and returning a counter-gift.

[30] Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 228, and 228 n 608.
[31] Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 234.
[32] David Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 272–73.

> "This, then, is the line of Jacob: At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic."
>
> Genesis 37:2–3 (JPS)

The gift that was given to Joseph demands a counter-gift in return.[33] Yet, no counter-gift is immediately given. This presents a problem, one which interpreters dodge, and the text also seems to dodge. Where is the counter-gift? Does Joseph simply ignore this practice? Bourdieu states that in a gift-economy to ignore the obligation of a counter-gift shames the recipient.[34] This notion of honor and shame is also picked up by Matthews in his investigation of unwanted gifts in the biblical narratives.[35] Matthews provides many incidents of people giving gifts that the recipients cannot possibly requite. For example, Jacob sends Esau "an apparently continuous stream of animals … as evidence of nearly unlimited wealth" to show his superior position.[36] It is a gift so grand that Esau likely cannot return it, so he tries to side-step any potential shame, deferring his brother's gift by stating that he has enough. Does Jacob offer another gift too grand in the *kətōnet pasîm*?

Here we can pause and ask how Joseph's age affects this reading. Does Joseph not protest his father's gift because, unlike Esau, he is too young to know how to deflect the gift? Perhaps he has not had the time to develop his rhetorical skills. Masculinity studies in the Hebrew Bible describe immature men as impetuous and lacking

[33] To be clear, the arguments presented enter the hypothetical, treating the actions of the characters in the biblical text as representing actions that would be understood as normative and reflecting the world of the ancient audience. I am not stating that the characters were real people or that the coat actually existed, rather that if the narrative were to be heard by an ancient audience, they would have certain expectations surrounding the gift.
[34] Bourdieu The Logic of Practice, 101.
[35] Matthews, "The Unwanted Gift," 91–104.
[36] Matthews, "The Unwanted Gift," 97.

solidarity with grown men.[37] Joseph's bad reports regarding his brothers arguably indicate he does not get along with his older brothers. Running home to tell his father these reports and then later lording his dreams over his brothers seems rather impetuous. A mature man speaks with wisdom and knows how to use persuasive speech.[38] Joseph's maturity and rhetorical skills, if he had any, are not showcased in these events. Jacob favors Joseph and Joseph desires to please his father. So even if he cannot return a gift of the same magnitude, does Joseph shame himself by not returning any counter-gift to Jacob, a father who showers him with love and gifts? This is one possibility, but an unsatisfying one considering Joseph's prominence in the remainder of the narrative. If anything, the brothers, not Joseph, act shamefully. There must be a better answer than simply ignoring the issue of the counter-gift.

Textile as a Gift from Parents to Child: The Delayed Counter-Gift

As noted above, Joseph is a child, a dependent. His chronological age is given in verse 2; he is seventeen. His social age is also given, he is a *naʿar*, a helper or an assistant. While the definition of helper/servant makes the most sense in this context, the term *naʿar* also signifies youth. When referring to a very young child, the qualifier *qāṭān* is used.[39] The semantic range of the word *naʿar* is wide, not tied to a single social station or specific age, but it always connotes a sense of youth.[40] Here in Genesis 37 we cannot divorce the meaning "youth" from that of "helper/assistant."[41]

A childist exploration pauses here to ask at what point Joseph hypothetically received the gift. There is an awkward seam between

[37] Stephen Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming of Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 54, 136.
[38] Wilson, *Making Men*, 33.
[39] Julie Faith Parker, *"Valuable and Vulnerable,"* 63; Milton Eng, *The days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Hebrew*, LHBOTS 464 (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 80.
[40] Wilson, *Making Men*, 48. For an overview of the semantic range of and studies on the word, see Parker *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 60–64.
[41] Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 403.

verse 2 and verse 3.[42] Verse 2 begins with an introduction: "These are the generations of Jacob …" after which it moves to the normal syntax for biblical Hebrew. An element of time, the verb היה, opens the narrative sequence.[43] It is followed by the next verb in the chain *wayābēʾ*. "He [*hāyâ*] was shepherding sheep … and Joseph brought [*wayābēʾ*] an ill report." However, the narrative chain that was begun in verse two is disrupted as the syntax shifts. Verse 3 opens with a noun, not a continuation of the verb chain: *wəyiśrāʾēl*. Verse 3 therefore introduces a narrative aside and a new narrative sequence begins: *wəʿāśâ … ʾāhab*. "Now Israel loved [*wəyiśrāʾēl ʾāhab*] Joseph more than his brothers … and he made [*wəʿāśâ*] him a *kətōnet pasîm*." With two separate narrative events, one can ask *when* did Jacob make the *kətōnet pasîm*? Was it at or before the age of seventeen when Joseph brought bad reports of his brothers? We might question Jacob's parenting if Joseph brought bad reports and Jacob rewarded him as his favorite with a special coat. More likely, the two events in verses 2 and 3 are not related but are remnants of sources woven together.[44] If the two verses belong to different sources, it is hypothetically possible that in different oral, pre-textual, renditions of the narrative the coat was understood to be given to Joseph when he was younger than seventeen. Since the text refers to the coat again, after Joseph is identified as being seventeen, the coat was obviously not given to him as a baby or young child. The point in asking when in the story world the coat was given to Joseph has to do with the social expectations placed on a child to reciprocate a gift. Would a child have the ability to understand and reciprocate social practices, and/ or what expectations might one reasonably have for a child to return a gift?

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[42] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Ausburg, 1982, 36.

[43] On narrative chains, see, Page H. Kelly, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2018), 267–71.

[44] On the disjunction in the text and sources or layers of the text woven together see the arguments made regarding the use of the "generations" trope, the varying names of Jacob, and the "scene" changes see *inter alia*: Wenham 1994, 349–50; von Rad 1972, 347–50.

As noted, in the ancient Near East men married later than women. Martha Roth's analysis of Mesopotamian marriage contracts notes this has to do with inheritance. Sons would come into their inheritance around the time their fathers died.[45] At seventeen a boy (Joseph) was starting to enter manhood and would start to take on the social responsibilities this entailed.[46] Therefore, an ancient audience might expect Joseph to understand that he should give a counter-gift to his father. Such an elaborate textile would demand an equivalent counter-gift. One answer to the dilemma in the narrative might be that Joseph received the coat at seventeen, but the events of his demise happened rapidly, not allowing him the time to procure an appropriate gift.

Another option might be that the disjunction in the text between verses two and three reflects an oral tradition where Joseph was younger than seventeen when Jacob gave him the gift. A child would not be in a social position to requite it. There would be no disgrace in a child receiving a gift from a parent. No shame would be attached to such a transaction. In this scenario, gift giving would be like that of a patron gifting a client for a service rendered.[47] The father (patron) gifted the son (client) for a service (perhaps, happiness in his old age). Here Bourdieu's comment on timing the counter-gift is relevant. A male child is beholden to the father until such a time as he can break off and support himself. Bourdieu comments that one who receives a gift but delays in the counter-gift is obliged to the giver until the counter-gift is made. Understanding the gift in this way strengthens the family system as it ties the son, Joseph, to the father, Jacob, with an even stronger bond for a period of time until the gift can be requited.

One might assume that a child would be able to give a proper counter-gift when he has grown up. This would be at a point in time at which he has established his own family. Ideally, at this time the

[45] Roth, "The Age at Marriage and the Household," 715–47; Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*.
[46] Wilson, *Making Men*.
[47] On various systems of gift giving modeled in the Hebrew Bible, see Matthews, "The Unwanted Gift," 95.

child-parent relationship would change, moving away from one of dependency to one of independence. In the Joseph narrative this "cutting of the apron strings" occurs prematurely when Joseph is sold into slavery (Gen 37:27–28). As Joseph's narrative progresses, he eventually marries and comes into his own, rising to the rank of vizier. In the final episodes of the Joseph narrative his brothers go down to Egypt to obtain food. Gary Stansell comments on the gift exchanges that fly back and forth between Joseph and his family.[48] He understands the initial gift from Jacob as the one in Genesis 43:11: "some balm, and some honey, gum, laudanum, pistachio nuts and almonds."[49] The return gift from Joseph is extravagant in comparison (Gen 45:23). "To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey." Stansell explains the discrepancy between the quantity and quality of the gifts as follows: "Not unexpectedly, the countergifts are much greater than the initial modest gifts sent by the patriarch and thus signs that exhibit the honour and political power of the giver."[50] True, the counter-gift is greater and signals Joseph's new position. However, it also hints at the fact that Joseph is now in a position to properly repay the very first gift Jacob gave to him, which in my reading is not the one in Genesis 43:11, but the one in Genesis 37:3. We may even understand the gifts given to Benjamin to be a part of the counter-gift. The narrative takes pains to make clear that Benjamin is still living under his father's protection and authority. The three hundred pieces of silver and the five garments given to Benjamin (Gen 45:22) would enter Jacob's household. Particularly touching is the return of the textile. The favored status which the *kətōnet pasîm* bestowed upon him is now witnessed in full as Joseph returns not one, but five pieces of clothing.[51] The counter-gift is

[48] Stansell, "The Gift in Ancient Israel," 65–70.
[49] Translation from the JSB.
[50] Stansell, "The Gift in Ancient Israel," 73.
[51] "Fine clothes were a much-appreciated gift in biblical times, but here they may also be a gesture of reconciliation, for Joseph's tunic had been the occasion of strife years before."

lavish, but as I read it, it is a counter-gift for two gifts. It returns the one in Genesis 43:11 and the earlier one in Genesis 37:3. Understood in this way, the counter-gift is not inappropriate or too grand that it shames the recipient. The counter-gift is thus not lacking, only delayed.[52]

Textile in the Making: Jacob's Workshop

To whom would the counter-gift be returned? Thus far, the assumed answer has been Jacob, based on Bethany Joy Wagstaff's observation that we should pay attention to the verb *ʿāśâ* and the construction of the *kətōnet pasîm*. "It implies the whole process of its production from raw material into a garment that is wrapped around Joseph's body."[53] Wagstaff makes several important points concerning the creation of the *kətōnet pasîm*. First, the verb *ʿāśâ* means a freshly made garment, not one that has been repurposed. Her point that the artisan making the *kətōnet pasîm* would have manipulated the agency of the garment is well taken, as is the point that the artisan's skills would have affected the quality of the textile, and even perhaps over time might the process of weaving the textile have affected the artisan by further developing their skill.[54] But who is this artisan? Is it one person or many? Male(s) or female(s)? Was it the brainchild of one person operating under the adage "many hands make light work?"[55] Here one might consider an analogy with Michelangelo's workshop and the many works attributed to him that his apprentices helped create. Just as Michelangelo is credited with those works, so too we might understand Jacob as credited with "making" the *kətōnet pasîm*, even though he did not do all the "making." This is not to say that Jacob

Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 429. While the motif of the garment has not been lost on commentators, the materiality of the object here is important. Joseph returns not the same *kətōnet pasîm* but five changes of clothing. What is not matched in the quality of the original gift is not matched, is made up for in the quantity of the counter-gift.

[52] It should be stated that the argument for a delayed counter-gift is based upon the idea that a child needed to repay a gift from a parent. For the sake of argument, one might even question whether a child was expected to give a counter-gift.

[53] Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 234.

[54] Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 234–36.

[55] Roger Sansai discusses the hierarchical relations that are often formed when art is produced in this manner. *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 102.

necessarily commissioned the coat and had nothing to do with its production. Indeed, with the many steps involved to go from raw material to finished product, it seems improbable that Jacob would be the only person involved in making the coat.

An overview of the textile creation process demonstrates the time, energy, resources, and skill needed to create a well-crafted textile. Textile production does not begin at the moment of weaving but occurs at a much earlier point in the textile's life. Depending on the textile, and for our purposes here, a garment, either wool or linen would be used. This means that for wool, creation begins arguably when the sheep is sheered. After this the wool must be cleaned and spun into yarn. For linen, the flax plant must be planted and harvested, and the flax spun into usable thread. Spinning a raw product into thread is a skilled enterprise. The type of textile being created can also place different demands on the artisan's time. Some textiles might be simple, and others complicated. Some of the production can be done on a come and go basis, other stages (e.g., spinning) can be done while multitasking, while some steps need the full attention of the artisan.[56]

Outside of locations that had dedicated workshops for textile production, the archaeological evidence suggests that textiles were produced in the domicile.[57] The discovery of loom weights and spindle whorls inside settlements supports the idea that weaving and

[56] Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 129; Linda Hurcombe, "Time, Skill, and Craft Specialisation as Gender Relations," in Gender *Gender and Material Culture in Archaeological Perspective,* ed. Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (London: MacMillian, 2000) 100, and Tables 6.2–6.6.

[57] Locations the Shephelah and Beth-Shean Valleys, as well as Timnah have been identified as industrial textile workshops. Carol Meyers, "Material Remains and Social Relations: Women's Culture in Agrarian Households of the Iron Age, " in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past : Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors From the Late Bronze Age Through Roman Palaestina*, ed. William Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 432–33; Daniel Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts: A Literary and Artifactual Analysis," (Ph.D. diss. Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988); Susan Ackerman, "Digging Up Deborah: Recent Hebrew Bible Scholarship on Archaeology and the Contribution of Gender," *NEA* 66 no. 4 (2003):172–84.

other textile related activities occurred in the household.[58] Household space is both gendered space and social space.[59] Texts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ugarit, and the Hebrew Bible all reference weaving and textile production as the purview of women.[60] Ethnographic and cross-cultural studies also reveal that textile production is primarily the job of women.[61] Carol Meyers quotes that "the HRAF [Human Relations Area Files] materials show loom-weaving to be a woman's activity in 84%, and spinning in 87%, of the societies in which they occur."[62] Among those societies where men also participated in textile production, the participation was again divided along gender lines: men were fullers or shearers, while women spun, wove, and embroidered.[63] Such studies find that women do not work alone, but often accomplish more labor-intensive tasks using group labor. As a domestic project, textile creation was intergenerational and done in social groups.[64]

Producing Woolen Yarn

Based on the data above, we should think about the *kətōnet pasîm* as being created not by one person, but by many. Jacob was a herder, and a rather clever one (Gen 20:25-31:1). The trick he played on Laban to increase his own herd speaks to a man who was well acquainted with the ins and outs of animal husbandry.

> "The vigorous animals were hybrids, whose recessive coloring genes emerged when they were bred together. By

[58] See Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 131 and bibliography therein. See also, Itzhaq Beit-Arieh and Liora Freud, "Small Finds from the Iron Age," in *Tel Malḥata A Central City in the Biblical Negev,* Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology Tel Aviv University. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 627–65; Shlomo Bunimovitz and Tzvi Lederman, "Iron Age Artifacts," in *Tel Beth-Shemesh A Border Community in Judah: Renewed Excavations 1990–2000: The Iron Age*, ed. S. Bunimovitz and Z. Lederman, Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology Tel Aviv University. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 560–602; Lily Singer-Avitz, "Textile-Related Objects." in *Beer-Sheba III: The Early Iron IIA Enclosed Settlement and the Late Iron IIA-Iron IIB Cities*, ed. Lily Singer-Avitz and Ze'ev Herzog, Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology Tel Aviv University (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1305–23.

[59] Meyers, "Material Remains and Social Relations," 428–429.

[60] Meyers, "Material Remains and Social Relations," 433.

[61] Ackerman, "Digging Up Deborah," and Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*.

[62] Meyers, "Material Remains and Social Relations," 433.

[63] Meyers, "Material Remains and Social Relations," 433.

[64] For women as textile producers see: Judges 16:13.

> this means, Jacob secured for himself large flocks of healthy multicolored sheep and goats, whereas Laban's animals were weak and either pure black or white."[65]

Since Jacob is described as a semi-nomadic herder, one might envision the raw materials for the *kətōnet pasîm* as wool shorn (by Jacob himself?) from the family herd. If so, then the very essence of the *kətōnet pasîm* would be imbued with Jacob's social persona from start to finish. The process of making wool into a usable yarn has been referenced above, but here a few more details will help round out the discussion and highlight the time and energy that goes into preparing a garment made from wool.[66] Different breeds of sheep produce different kinds of wool. The quality of the wool also depends upon various factors, such as the individual sheep, the climate, the food the sheep eats, and the age and sex of the sheep. While today we think of sheep as being shorn, in the ancient Near East wool was plucked, or cut with a knife, from the sheep once a year during the molting season.[67] Like with cuts of beef, different "cuts of wool," so to speak, have different qualities. Wool taken from the underbelly is shorter and fluffier while the wool on the top of the body is longer. Preparing the wool is a long process.[68] Washing removes the lanolin that helps the fibers stick together when spun, so it must be added back to the wool. During the sorting process, one might divide the wool by color, fineness, length, and curl. Teasing or combing the wool removes the tangles and dirt and helps make the yarn finer. Beating the wool can also help with this. Experimental archaeology and tests from the Danish National

[65] Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 256.

[66] The following data regarding wool gathering, preparation, and textile production comes from the work by Eva Andersson Strand, who applies her findings to the ancient Near East. "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production. An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Complexity of Wool Working," in *Wool Economy in the ancient Near East and the Aegean: From the Beginnings of Sheep Husbandry to Institutional Textile Industry,* ed. Catherine Breniquet and Cécile Michel, Ancient Textile Series 17 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 41–51.

[67] Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 43.

[68] Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 45.

Research Foundation have found that one person working eight hours a day could prepare 114 grams of wool per day.[69]

Once the wool is properly prepped, it can be made into yarn.[70] The better prepared the wool is, the finer the yarn it will produce. The thickness of the yarn is dependent upon the kind of spindle used.[71] If one wishes to color the fabric, there are a few ways to do this.[72] Since every sheep has different hues of wool, one can divide out the wool by hue before it is spun. This is a very interesting point considering Jacob is specifically said to breed sheep with variegated hair color. Perhaps the "coat of many colors" is not such a bad rendering after all. It could refer to a coat made of yarns of varying shades of natural wool. Dyeing the wool is also an option.[73] Weaving the yarn into a textile can be done with a ground loom, a two-beam vertical loom, or a warp weighted loom.[74]

One final set of data helps put into perspective the wool to yarn process. It should be noted that different sheep produce different amounts of wool. In a study of two sheep, Sheep A produced 750 grams of wool, which turned into 294 square meters (~321 square yards) of fabric. Sheep B produced 375 grams of wool, which turned into 147 square meters (~160 square yards) of fabric.[75] As this shows, much wool is lost during the sorting and prepping.[76] According to the text, Jacob had a large flock from which to gather wool.

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69 https://ctr.hum.ku.dk/research-programmes-and-projects/previous-programmes-and-projects/tools / technical_report_1_experimental_archaeology.pdf

70 Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 47.

71 Heavy spindles produce thicker yarn, while lighter spindles produce finer yarn (Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 47).

72 Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 48.

73 The process of reproducing a particular dye made from mollusks was investigated by a scientist at the Shenker College of Engineering and Design in Ramat Gan. The intricate steps needed, the high number of mollusks required, and the types of mollusks found in Levantine excavations are clearly laid out in the findings. Most notably was the conclusion that the production of the famous indigo dye produced by the mollusks is attributed to the Phoenicians. Zvi Koren, "New Chemical Insights into the Molluskan Purple Dyeing Process," in *Archaeological Chemistry VIII*, ed. Ruth Ann Armitage and James H. Burton (New York: Oxford), 43–67.

74 Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 47.

75 More data on the sheep and wool can be found on Table 3.1 in Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 44.

76 Strand, "Sheep, Wool, and Textile Production," 44.

Producing Flaxen Yarn

A few scraps of cloth found in archaeological contexts include yarns made of linen.[77] Flax is a much more complicated material to work with, but this did not deter weavers in the ancient Near East. The Egyptians were known for their perfection of linen production and their ability to create shear garments.[78] Mesopotamian texts also attest to the knowledge of linen production; Inanna and Utu share a conversation about the various steps needed to transform flax into linen.[79] Wild flax was found in Israel as early as the Neolithic period.[80] Flax can also be planted and harvested. In an experimental archaeological undertaking, scientists gathered wild flax to prepare it for textile making.[81] This involved many initial steps: locating it, harvesting, preparing flax bundles, and separating bundles into like stem size widths and lengths for a softening process, which involved soaking the bundles on water laden towels. Spinning flax is difficult because it does not have the natural barbs of other fibrous materials, so the individual fibers must be "glued" together using water during the spinning process.[82] Producing yarn that was fine enough to be woven was a difficult task. Thicker threads held together better but produced an unwieldly yarn that had fiber ends sticking out along the thread. It was noted that domesticated flax would have been finer and not subject to this obstacle. The conclusions of the spinning process noted that the thread from wild flax produced a thread suitable for rugs, coarse fabrics, baskets, or cords, but not for clothing.[83] While *ša ʿăṭnëz,* the combination of wool and linen is

[77] Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts"; Wagstaff, "Redressing Clothing in the Hebrew Bible," 89–112, 139–40.
[78] Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts," 15.
[79] Diane Wolkenstein and Samuel N. Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 29–31; Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts" 9.
[80] Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts," 13.
[81] S. Abboa, I. Zezaka, S. Lev-Yadunb, O. Shamirc, T. Friedmand, and A. Gopher, "Harvesting Wild Flax in the Galilee, Israel and Extracting Fibers – Bearing on Near Eastern Plant Domestication," *Israel Journal of Plant Sciences,* Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology, Tel-Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Israel Published online: 14 May 2014. DOI: 10.1080/07929978.2014.907672.
[82] Abboa et al, "Harvesting Wild Flax," 4.
[83] Abboa et al, "Harvesting Wild Flax," 7.

strictly forbidden in Torah law (Deut 22:11), archaeological finds attest to its existence. Textile pieces found at Timnah produced "brightly dyed wool designs woven or embroidered onto a linen base" during the Assyrian period.[84] Therefore, if the raw materials for a *kətōnet pasîm* were thought to come from flax or were a combination of flax and wool, then Jacob, who is described as a herder, not a farmer, would have been understood to purchase domesticated flax.

Producing a Finely Made Garment

Since the *kətōnet pasîm* was a garment of prestige, an ancient audience would have understood it to be made from fine yarn, which means more time and energy went into producing it. The preparation of the yarn or flax would also require a highly skilled artisan. If the garment was made from fine woolen yarn, then savvy initial choices needed to be made such as, where on sheep the wool came from, how long the wool was beaten or combed, and so forth. If the yarn was dyed, then knowledge of dyeing was needed. The only other reference to the *kətōnet pasîm* in 2 Samuel 13, where it is described as the garment of a princess.[85] Since royalty wore the finest clothing, we might assume that the garment was made by skilled artisans who knew how to work a fine weave. If the garment of Joseph is of similar quality, then it too would be of a fine, evenly constructed weave. Considering it is a garment worthy of notice, it is possible it had decoration of some sort, perhaps multiple colors or embroidery on top.

The creation of the *kətōnet pasîm* therefore, does not seem to be the work of one person, but the work of multiple people. Ethnographic and cross-cultural studies show men engaged in the textile production on the early end of the spectrum, either planting and harvesting the flax, or with herding, raising, and plucking the sheep. Women were the primary artisans once the raw material was

[84] Browning, "The Textile Industry of Iron Age Timnah and its Regional and Socio-economic Contexts," abstract.
[85] See also Koening, "Tamar and Tamar," 87–108. Kyle P. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary,* AB 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 325–26.

harvested, preparing the material, spinning it, and weaving it into the desired kind of textile. The skill needed to create a fine garment would take years of practice to develop. Thus, when thinking about the phrase, "He (Israel/Jacob) made for him (Joseph) a *kətōnet pasîm*," we might best understand the making as taking place in "Jacob's workshop" in the same way we might understand Michelangelo producing a sculpture in his workshop. Who were the people in Jacob's workshop? If the garment contained wool, then Jacob and his sons seem a logical answer, as they participated in herding the sheep (Gen 37:12). The preparation and execution would have been the work of women. Considering the relationship between Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (Gen 29:30–31) and the communicative nature of the garment it would seem unlikely that Jacob would request that Leah help prepare such a coat for Joseph. However, it would make a lot of sense for Rachel to participate in the creation of a garment for her loved son. If the *kətōnet pasîm* represented a mark of a particular social status, even the election of the next head of the family, then Rachel would be the logical helpmate.[86]

The Gift and Counter-gift Revisited

This childist reading posits that an ancient audience would have understood the gift given to Joseph to be one given by both parents. Not only was it given by both parents, but both parents took part in producing the textile. My reading goes against how most scholars have understood Genesis 37:3, and for good reason. Scholars have failed to take into consideration Joseph's age. Commenting on the function of clothing and gendering the discourse of display, Heather McKay states gifts of clothing are gifts of honor given from one man

[86] Mendenhall's argument that the *kətōnet pasîm* was "a garment … associated with the highest social or political status" represents a popular belief. George Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 55; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 325. Looking at cross-cultural studies, McKay states that all societies know fine dress and can identify those in power (McKay, "Gendering the Discourse of Display," 179). In wearing the *kətōnet pasîm* Joseph's status would be known by all who saw him.
Rachel, as the loved wife, is still the second wife. Leah's eldest child would have been in line to inherit as the next head of the family. The gift of the *kətōnet pasîm* could have very well signaled the upending of the traditional system. Jacob's blessings in Genesis 49 are witness to the love he has for Joseph and the disfavor into which his eldest, Reuben, had fallen.

to another. She then cites as an example Jacob's gift to Joseph.[87] She is correct that the gift is one of honor, but I would suggest that the gift was given to a youth, a *naʿar*, not a man. Moreover, it was not a man, but a man and a woman who produced the gift to give to their beloved child.

The inclusion of a woman in the gift giving process is unusual. The only other time we find a woman giving a gift of clothing comes in 1 Samuel 2:19. The likely reason behind this is Samuel's age. Hannah makes a little robe for her son Samuel that she gifts to him every year. Remarkable here is that the gift of clothing is made and presented on a yearly basis; the text does not indicate at what age she ceases bringing him these garments. Samuel entered into the service of the Lord at three years of age; therefore, he could need a new robe as often as each year to accommodate his growth. Hannah's gift may seem practical, but it has many similarities with the story of Joseph's garment. Considering that Samuel served before the Lord, his garment would have been of high quality. So too was Joseph's. The lexical similarity between the two narratives is also of note. Hannah made (*taʿăśēh*) the little robe for her son. Both Genesis 37:3 and 1 Samuel 2:19 use the verb ʿāśâ, *to make*. Whereas we envision Joseph's mother taking part in the making process, 1 Samuel specifically says that Samuel's mother is a part of the process. In much the same way as I suggest Rachel took part in creating Joseph's gift, one may also think of Elkanah taking part in Samuel's gift. As a woman, Hannah would have needed to get the raw materials for the garment, and it is logical that her husband would have been understood to provide them.[88]

If gifts of clothing were gifts of honor and traditionally exchanged between men, why does the Hebrew Bible include stories of gifts of clothing that include women? I suggest the most reasonable answer has to do with the age of the person receiving the gift. Joseph is called a *naʿar* (Gen 27:2), and it is either at the age of seventeen or earlier

[87] McKay, "Gendering the Discourse of Display," 187.
[88] Perhaps Samuel's counter-gift to his parents came by way of his Temple service, or prayers on their behalf.

that he receives his special garment. In 1 Samuel 2, the recipient is also a *naʿar*. However, the context of Samuel's story makes it clear that Samuel is not a teenager, but a young child. His mother brought him to serve at Shiloh when he was weaned, at two or three years of age (1 Sam 1:24).[89] Both when he is brought to Shiloh and in the subsequent years when his mother brings little robes to him, Samuel is identified as a *naʿar*. We might conclude that when an individual is not seen by society as an independent, grown man, then the traditional "rules" of gift giving can be broken or do not apply. Another possibility is that the rules are not broken, but are different for children. Perhaps because Samuel is younger when he receives his garment, the gift is said to be *made* and brought by his mother. For Joseph, a boy closer to manhood, it may be that the gift is more acceptable if *made* and presented by his father.

Understanding mothers, and specifically Rachel, as a part of the gift giving and garment making process has many merits. In the first place, it solves practical difficulties of the textile expertise needed to create the *kətōnet pasîm*. As was pointed out, women are traditionally understood to have been the ones who were trained in textile making. Furthermore, the anthropology of gift giving holds that part of the individual's social persona is invested in the gift. A gift from both parents would therefore hold elements of both parents' social personas. Not only would Joseph be imparting some of himself, but so would Rachel. This would make a gift more meaningful as the *kətōnet pasîm* embodied the personhoods of the creators and givers. The desecration of the gift is also more impactful (Gen 37:31). Joseph's brothers rend the coat and cover it in animal blood. In doing so, they dishonor not only their father, but also their co-mother.[90]

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[89] Mayer Gruber, "Breast-feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and Old Babylonia Mesopotamia," *JANES* 19 (1989): 61–83.

[90] Such a reading could have new implications for how the brothers are understood, they may well fall into the category of the "rebellious son." For more on the biblical construction and development of this legal category see Joseph Fleishman, "Legal Innovation in Deuteronomy XXI 18–20," *VT* 53 no. 3 (2003): 311–27. Notably, Joseph's brothers in this story are all his half-brothers. Furthermore, the only two named brothers are half-brothers from Leah the unloved/hated wife (Gen 29:31). Dishonoring the loved wife (Rachel) by desecrating a gift she helped make might also be a way of "throwing shade" on Rachel and highlighting a dislike they inherited for all things Rachel.

Including Rachel in the *making* process means we need to think about her with respect to the counter-gift process as well. One might argue that because she was a woman no counter-gift was required. Indeed, if we were to follow Mauss's theory exactly, rather than as providing a set of questions and a heuristic category by which to think about gift giving, then the answer would be simply that Rachel deserves no counter-gift because she would not have been a part of the gift process at all. However, as has just been argued, women in ancient Israel were a part of the textile making process, and ergo that a woman's social persona could be a part of the gift. Can we then see within the biblical text any evidence of a counter-gift that might acknowledge women as a part of the gift giving system? If my reading of Genesis 45:23 is correct and Joseph does return a *delayed* counter-gift, it is reasonable to ask where Rachel's gift is. The argument of a delayed counter-gift for Rachel is a little more complicated. It is possible that Joseph intended to delay in giving his mother a counter-gift just has he had with his father. The only problem is that Rachel dies before Joseph comes of age and into a position where he could repay such a gift. One might argue, then, that the responsibility to return a gift is now moot. This might be the explanation that an ancient audience would expect. However, this solution is simplistic.

Another more elegant option, also based on the option of delay, presents itself. I would argue that a counter-gift was required, both for Jacob and for Rachel. In the case of the delayed counter-gift laid out above, Joseph returns gifts to his father after he has reached a position in life that affords him the means needed (Egyptian vizier). Joseph repays Jacob seemingly two-fold for his tribute in 43:11. Yet, as posited, Joseph's counter-gifts are meant to repay both the gift in 43:11 and the original gift in 37:3. But, during Joseph's reunion with his brothers, Joseph also gives a gift to Benjamin (Gen 45:22). This gift is not a gift on par with the ones given to his brothers, this gift specifically includes *five changes of clothing*; once again, textiles enter the

narrative in a meaningful way.[91] Joseph's gift to Benjamin seems to initially transgress the rules of gift giving.[92] First, Joseph gives a gift that is too grand; one change of clothing would be sufficient. Second, in giving a grand gift Joseph gains the upper hand, now Benjamin is indebted to him. Third, the inappropriate gift could result in Benjamin's dishonor if he cannot return a gift of equal value. Joseph, a clever man, would appear to have committed a social faux pas.[93] Yet, if we keep in mind who Benjamin is, then the five garments Joseph presents to him take on a more significant role than first expected. Benjamin is the only other son of Rachel and is still living under his father's protection (Gen 42:4). Losing Joseph almost broke Jacob's heart and losing Benjamin would accomplish nothing less (Gen 42:36–38; 44: 19–23). Jacob's attachment to the sons of Rachel over the sons of Leah appears to be a case of transference of love for one wife over the next. Jacob's comment that Benjamin was "the only one left" is a heart wrenching acknowledgment that Rachel and Joseph are both gone. In the narrative Benjamin has become the living memory of Rachel; moreover, I read him as the proxy through which Joseph returns his counter-gift to his mother. Like the original gift, the gifts to Benjamin are textiles.[94] Now the five changes of clothing are not a grand gift, but a meaningful counter-gift on par with the value of the *kətōnet pasîm*.[95]

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[91] Joseph *nātan* "gives" gifts. BDB 678. Here the sense of the word combines BDB's meaning a) to give personally, deliver or hand to and meaning b) to bestow upon. Joseph hand delivers a gift that bestows the counter gift on Benjamin.

[92] The rules of gift giving are laid out in Matthews, "The Unwanted Gift," 95.

[93] Westermann notes the unstated relationship between the gifts of clothing and the *kətōnet pasîm* (*Genesis 37–50*, 147). Joseph's gifts are ones of forgiveness, reconciliation, and blessing. This view is followed by Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 586–87 and Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 429. The significance of the clothing often fades to the back of the recognition scene in chapter 45. For example, Speiser and von Rad do not reference the clothing at all in their commentaries.

[94] Targum Onqelos reads "long robes of clothes," based on the Greek and Latin *stola*. The *stola* is a garment that is goes down to the ankles (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 585). Targum Onquelos' reading makes the connection more obvious here between the clothing given to Benjamin and the *kətōnet pasîm* given to Joseph.

[95] The issue of who is in Joseph's workshop is another question worthy of asking, but one that is outside the limits of this paper. Considering that most textile remains from Canaan are wool and most from Egypt are linen, an interesting picture develops. An ancient audience might understand Joseph's special garment to be woven from the family livestock and livelihood, which would speak to the family's

Summary

Gift giving in ancient societies operated much differently than it does in the Western. The gift giving act was one piece of a much larger process. A gift carried with it some of the giver's own social persona. The materiality of an object, such as a textile, is complex. A textile is not something purchased off a store shelf, but an item that communicates some of the persona of the giver. Again, unlike clothes purchased at a department store, clothes in biblical times were produced over a long period of time. Raw materials must be acquired and made into usable thread, after which a knowledgeable hand must weave it into a piece of fabric that can be fashioned into a garment. The story of the *kətōnet pasîm* in Genesis 37 is not a simple story of a father giving a beloved son a gift. It is a story of *making* in which we might understand the father and mother to participate.

As producers and givers of the gift, the father and mother both require a counter-gift. The expected counter-gift is noticeably absent. A childist reading explored different reasons for the missing counter-gift to each. These readings stand out as childist because they focus on the age of the gift's recipient as a primary factor. In doing so, the readings flip previous readings from an adult-centered reading to a child-centered one. The first reason explored was that the gift was ignored. As a *naʿar* Joseph displayed many qualities of a child, chief among which are a lack of self-awareness and dependency. Joseph's youth made him unaware of the expectation to return a gift, so he did not. A delayed counter-gift was also investigated. This option seems to carry the most weight, especially when age is factored into the equation. Joseph was given a gift arguably produced by both parents, a gift that communicated their love for him and his status within the house. To return a gift so grand would require both the means and knowledge to acquire an appropriate gift. Delaying the gift until he reached manhood would be a logical choice. At this point

investment in the man who would later assume the patriarchal role and save them from famine. On the return end, if the clothing Joseph gives to his brothers is woven of Egyptian flax, it speaks to the wealth of Egypt going to Joseph's family. This exchange of wealth is foreshadowed throughout the Joseph novella, especially with Joseph's administration of Egypt. Many thanks to Christine Palmer for pointing this out.

Joseph would be able to repay both his father and mother. Taking a closer look at the reconciliation scenes in Genesis 42–45 uncovered what might qualify as exorbitant gifts given to Jacob and Benjamin. Following the rule of gift giving, these elaborate gifts should have brought dishonor as they were too grand to repay. However, a childist approach helps solve the presence of these gifts by remembering the debts the youth Joseph carried into his adult life. These elaborate gifts were counter-gifts for the *kətōnet pasîm*. In Genesis 45:23 Joseph repays his father both for the textile, the *kətōnet pasîm*, and for his second gift (given in 43:11). Joseph gives a change of clothing to each of his brothers (Gen 45:22) but gives more clothing to Benjamin. With his mother's death, Joseph gives to Benjamin the counter-gift that should have been hers.[96] In reading the narrative of the *kətōnet pasîm* with a focus on age, the materiality of the object, and gift giving, the *kətōnet pasîm* truly becomes a gift that keeps on giving.

[96] The gifts given to his brothers would initiate a new chain of gift giving between the brothers and Joseph. The tables are now turned as the brothers are indebted to Joseph and must repay him with a counter-gift.