AVAR
January 2023
Volume: 2, No: 1, pp. 111 – 152
ISSN: 2752-3527 (Print) ISSN: 2752-3535 (Online)
journals.tplondon.com/avar
TRANSNATIONAL PRESS® LONDON

Received: 16 December 2021 Accepted: 4 October 2022
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33182/aijls.v2i1.2059

Discourse and Intercourse: Women's Speech and Sexuality in the House of the Father

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Abstract

In this article, I consider three narratives, Genesis 38, 2 Samuel 13, and Judges 19, in which biblical authors deploy women's speech at moments of crisis in the plot. These moments are caused by women's precarious location in the bêt ʾāb, which I theorize using the framework of the Patrimonial Household Model (PHM). I assess the women characters' speech through the lens of Laura Mary Elizabeth Hare's sociolinguistic analysis of gendered speech in biblical narrative. While Tamar in Gen 38 uses manipulation and "masculine" speech to successfully re-insert herself into the bêt ʾāb, Tamar in 2 Sam 13 is the victim of men's manipulation and her "feminine" speech fails to protect her. The secondary wife in Judges 19 has no verbal speech, only speech-acts, which leaves her almost but not entirely at the mercy of men's discourse. I argue that the biblical authors understood women characters as able to exercise some amount of agency through their leveraging of normatively masculine speech, but only for the purpose of re-establishing the social order of the PHM.

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Keywords: *Women; gender; speech; house of the father; Patrimonial Household Model*

Introduction

In the biblical imagination, a person's identity is inextricably linked to their communal ties.[2] Many biblical texts imagine the nexus of this community to be the *bêt ʾāb*, or "house of the father." God famously commands Abraham to go forth from his *bêt ʾāb* in Gen. 12:1, though he returns to that same *bêt ʾāb* to find a wife for his son in Gen. 24:38. Numbers 1:2 commands a census of the entire people of Israel according to their *bêt ʾāb*, suggesting that it was a central organizing principle of the community even on a grand scale. The *bêt ʾāb* is central to issues of inheritance, such as in Gen. 31:14, where Rachel and Leah demand their portion or inheritance from their *bêt ʾāb.* The role of the *bêt ʾāb* in interfamilial conflict is demonstrated in places like Judges 11, when Jephthah's brothers drive him out of the *bêt ʾāb* and deny him inheritance because he is he is the son of "another woman" (*ʾîšâ ʾaḥeret).*[3]

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[2] I am grateful to Dr. Jacqueline Vayntrub for her extensive feedback on this paper, which greatly strengthened it from its original form, as well as my fellow doctoral students in the NEJS department at Brandeis for their thoughful comments (especially Anthony Lipscomb, who suggested the title). I am also thankful.

[3] In Judges 11, we see the tension between the kinship unit based on the father, and the kinship unit based on the "uterine family," the "house of the mother," or *bêt ʾēm.* Cynthia Chapman defines the *bêt ʾēm* as "comprising a mother and her biological and adopted children...distinct

The scholarly consensus view is that "*bêt ʾāb* was a kinship designation that encompassed both shared residence and dependent, possibly biological relationships to a founding male ancestor."[4] In J. David Schloen's framework outlined in *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, the "house of the father" could refer to both a physical structure and to a symbolic social unit. As a physical structure, the ancient household had three components: the material, which included the family's dwelling, possessions, and land; the human, which included a close kin group of up to three generations; and the performative, which included the social, political, and religious activities of the humans in the household.[5] As a symbolic social unit, the *bêt ʾāb* provided an organizing principle for the whole society. Schloen calls this principle the Patrimonial Household Model, or PHM, in which "the familiar patriarchal household served as the universal paradigm for all social relationships, whether economic, political, or religious."[6] This "symbolic social unit" functioned as

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within yet supportive of the house of the father upon which it depends. In its most basic form, a *bêt ʾēm* represents a social and spatial subunit nested within the larger house of the father." *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 51. The *bêt ʾēm* will be addressed in greater depth later in this paper. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[4] Chapman, *The House of the Mother*, 21.

[5] Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 104-105, 112.

[6] David J. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 54. Schloen bases his conception of the PHM on

a "root metaphor" in which human beings played roles modeled after "traditional household relationships—'father,' 'son,' 'brother,' 'master,' 'servant,' 'heir,' etc...[which] were creatively applied in a wide variety of situations beyond the ordinary household, serving to mediate and motivate social action of many kinds."[7] In the ancient Near East, the *bêt ʾāb*, in both its real and imagined forms, provided the framework upon which the social interactions between men, women, and children operate.

Recent studies of kinship models of the ancient Near East have approached the topic with greater consideration of gender issues. In her 2013 dissertation "Reconceiving the House of the Father: Royal Women at Ugarit," Christine Neal Thomas points out that a significant flaw in Schloen's framework of the PHM is that it fails to consider the gendered implications of the terms used— "father," "son," and "brother," among them. Thomas contends that the "inasmuch as they draw their significance

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Max Weber's idea of "patrimonialism." Weber defines "patrimonial domination" as an "ideal type" system in which "domestic authority [is] decentralized through assignment of land and sometimes of equipment to sons of the house or other dependents." Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* [orig. German 1922], ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 1006-1110, Vol. 2 at p. 1011. Schloen distinguishes between the PHM and patrimonialism: "'The term 'patrimonial household model,' as opposed to 'patrimonialism,' in general, thus serves to distinguish societies that exhibit the 'household' understanding of the social order in a relatively pure form from more rationalized societies that retain patrimonial elements—in some cases to a high degree— but whose internal structure is based on a greater symbolic differentiation between center and periphery." Schloen, *House of the Father,* 52. Schloen is also dependent on Lawrence Stager's use of Weber in his analysis of Iron Age Israelite society, as in "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *Bulletin for the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260 (1985): 1-35.

[7] Schloen, *The House of the Father,* 1.

from a symbolic system based on biological and social reproduction, they depend on the unarticulated female markers— 'mother,' 'wife,' 'sister,' 'daughter.'"[8] Thomas concludes that a gender analysis is necessary to make visible the work that these identities are doing in the symbolic system of the PHM. Such gender analysis suggests that "women are as fundamental to the symbolic function of patrimonialism as they are fundamental to the material life of households."[9] While Thomas' project focuses on royal women in Ugarit, her conclusions can be applied to the social world imagined in biblical narratives, which is also based on the idea of the "house of the father." Cynthia Chapman disrupts the focus on the *bêt ʾāb* in ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies in her 2016 book *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*. Her study centers the role of maternal kinship relationships in the Hebrew Bible, in particular the *bêt ʾēm,* or "house of the mother," as a nested sub-unit of the *bêt ʾāb.* Chapman ultimately provides "a more robust picture of the biblical house of the father, refusing to reduce it to a simple patriline and instead uncovering the presence and significance of maternal kin at all levels of social organization."[10] Highlighting the role of the *bêt ʾēm* in narratives about women's familial relationships within the PHM complicates simplistic ideas about

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[8] Christine Neal Thomas, "Reconceiving the House of the Father: Royal Women at Ugarit" (PhD Diss, Harvard University, 2013), 12.

[9] Thomas, "Reconceiving the House of the Father," 43.

[10] Chapman, *The House of the Mother*, 19.

patriarchy and patrimonialism. In the following analysis, I will follow Chapman in calling attention to the role the *bêt ʾēm* plays in how women navigate their place in the PHM.

This paper primarily considers "house of the father" as the common dwelling of a single household, and analyzes the implications activities in this unit have for the larger understanding of the *bêt ʾāb* in the biblical imagination. Women are active characters in narratives about the *bêt ʾāb* and thus hold symbolic significance in the PHM. All three figures discussed in this essay—Tamar of Gen 38, Tamar of 2 Sam 13, and the Levite's secondary wife in Judges 19— are wholly dependent on their place in the *bêt ʾāb* for security and survival.[11] The biblical text makes explicit that dependent women within this household unit, such as daughters and wives, were owed certain protections. In Pentateuchal law, "the legal status of a woman is

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[11] Of the three narratives, two of the three women receive no protection from their *bêt ʾēm*. The *bêt ʾāb* of Tamar is twice mentioned in Gen 38, when Judah commands her to return to her father's house after the death of Onan and it is confirmed that she returns and lives there in v. 11. No mother or uterine siblings appear in the text. In 2 Sam 13, Tamar is introduced by her relationship to men: she is לאבשלום בן דוד אחות יפה "the beautiful sister of Absalom, son of David." Chapman points out that "the identification of Tamar as 'the sister of Absalom' in the opening verse of her story signals the importance of the uterine sibling relationship to the story that follows." Chapman, *The House of the Mother*, 98. It is Absalom who takes responsibility for Tamar and ultimately avenges her rape, although after a substantial delay of two years. The secondary wife in Judges 19 flees from her husband to her *bêt ʾāb* in v. 2; the term אבי הנערה or "the girl's father" is repeated five times in vss. 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9, perhaps emphasizing her place in her father's house. No mention is made of her *bêt ʾēm*; i.e. her mother or uterine siblings.

understood first of all in terms of male claims and obligations."[12] Exodus 21:10 names שארה כסותה וענתה (probably "food, clothing, and marriage rights")[13] as obligations of a husband to his wife, which he cannot diminish even if he takes a second wife. Women who were not under male protection, such as that of a husband or father, were "particularly economically and socially vulnerable...especially...to forced enslavement."[14] Childless women would be especially vulnerable. Producing children (specifically sons) ensured women a place in their husband's *bêt ʾāb,* but those without children occupied a more precarious social position and were more easily ejected from the PHM.[15]

The narratives of Genesis 38, 2 Samuel 13, and Judges 19 depict women figures attempting to remain in or re-enter the *bêt ʾāb* through the strategic deployment of speech, in order to gain the safety and security afforded by the patrimonial social structure. My analysis of their speech will be informed by Laura Mary

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[12] Carolyn Pressler, "Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free: Views of Women in the Slave Laws of Exodus 21:2-11," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by Bernard M. Levinson, et al. (Bloomsbury Publishing Place, 2009), 160. "The exception is the mother, whose status is defined largely in terms of her authority over her offspring." See also Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Laws* BZAW, 216 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1993), 79-94.

[13] "Without philological evidence, however, the meaning of the term remains uncertain. One can say that the purpose of vv. 10-11 was to ensure that the slave [*sic*] wife was provided with basic necessities or else set free." Pressler, "Wives and Daughters," 160.

[14] Pressler, "Wives and Daughters," 167. See this chapter (147-172) for Pressler's discussion of the Covenant Code's legal treatment of wives, daughters, and enslaved wives.

[15] For a discussion of barrenness in the Hebrew Bible, see Kristine Henrickson Garroway, "What to Expect When You're (Not) Expecting" in *Growing Up in Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 27-47; and Joel Baden and Candida Moss, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Elizabeth Hare's 2018 dissertation from the University of Toronto, "Gendered Speech: A Sociolinguistic Study of Conversations between Men and Women in Biblical Narrative."[16] This project effectively combines a sociolinguistic and gender studies approach to the Hebrew Bible.[17] Hare concludes that "the methodology of variationist sociolinguistics can be applied fruitfully to speech in the Hebrew Bible." Through her research, she finds that "in general... women's speech is more deferential, indirect, past-oriented, and explanatory, while men's speech is non-deferential, direct, future-oriented, and imperative."[18] In this article, I build on Hare's conclusions by applying her method of analysis specifically to situations in which women's position in the *bêt ʾāb* is at stake. In three case studies, I find that women figures who exhibit normatively masculine speech patterns successfully re-insert themselves into the *bêt ʾāb* and thus the PHM, and women figures who attempt to use normatively feminine speech patterns (or who are deprived of verbal speech and are limited to speech-acts) when in precarious social positions are not successful in re-inserting themselves in the social order. These findings have important implications for how

[16] Laura Mary Elizabeth Hare, "Gendered Speech: A Sociolinguistic Study of Conversations between Men and Women in Biblical Narrative," (PhD Diss., University of Toronto 2018).

[17] Hare offers a helpful review of sociolinguistic studies of the Hebrew Bible in "Gendered Speech," 9-14.

[18] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 24. Further, narrative texts which show dialogue between men and women exhibit the same patterns as found by sociolinguistic studies of modern languages: "Women tend to be more polite and formal than men (e.g., Holmes 1995; Brown 1980; Ide et al. 1986)...their speech is more self-oriented (e.g., Newman et al. 2008), and...women use more indirect and open-ended speech than men (e.g., Holmes 2013, 40-50; Jenkins and Cheshire 1990)." Hare, "Gendered Speech," 406.

biblical authors understood the power of speech for women in the ancient Israelite social structure. While the narratives of Genesis 38, 2 Samuel 13, and Judges 19 ostensibly play out on the household level, their repercussions reverberate into larger units of the PHM, such as clans (as in Gen 38 and Judges 19), the house of the king (as in 2 Sam 13), and the biblical conceptualization of the "house of the father" writ large.[19]

Genesis 38

Genesis 38 narrates an incident in the *bayīt* of Judah, one of the sons of Jacob and Leah. Judah, separated from his brothers, marries a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua, and she bears him three sons. As is the responsibility of the patriarch of the *bêt ʾāb,* Judah procures a wife, Tamar, for his eldest son, Er. However, Er is רע בעיני יהוה ("wicked in the eyes of the Lord") and God puts him to death.[20] Judah then instructs Onan, his middle son, to perform the duty of Levirate marriage and conceive a child with Tamar. Onan, however, spills his seed on the ground instead of consummating his relationship with Tamar, and thus God, displeased, kills him as well. After the deaths of his two elder sons, Judah, fearful for his youngest son Shelah's life, instructs Tamar to return to "the house of her father" (בית אביה) until Shelah grows up. Tamar obeys, but after some time has passed,

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[19] "As a collection of writings written and edited over centuries, the Bible preserves the origin stories for foundational houses that date to multiple periods: the houses of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the house of Levi; the house of Israel; and the house of Judah." Chapman, *The House of the Mother,* 22.

[20] Unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent translations are my own.

she sees that Shelah is grown and Judah has not yet given him to her in marriage. Taking matters into her own hands, she dresses as a *zônâ*[21] and has sexual intercourse with Judah himself. When Judah discovers that she has "acted as a *zônâ*" and prepares to burn her for her indiscretion, she reveals that it is he with whom she has slept. He admits that "She is more righteous than I," and rescinds his punishment. Tamar is ultimately rewarded with the

[21] I have chosen to leave this term untranslated because the standard translations fail to capture its particular resonances. The common translation "harlot" is a misnomer here. Standard lexicons translate ז–נ–ה in the *qal*, of which זוֹנָה is the feminine participle, as "to commit fornication, be a harlot" (Brown-Driver-Briggs), to "be or act as a prostitute" (Dictionary of Classical Hebrew), or "to commit fornication" (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament). (The King James Version of the Bible translates this as the very vivid "go awhoring.") The larger sense of the term, however, is "to engage in sexual relations outside of or apart from marriage." Phyllis Bird, "To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry into a New Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 76. A woman's sexuality was understood to belong to her father, before marriage, and her husband, after marriage—i.e. to the patriarch of whatever "house" (בית) she found herself in at the time. The first use of ז–נ–ה in this chapter, in verse 15, refers to a person who habitually engages in sexual activity outside of marriage—an "ostracized but tolerated purveyor of sexual favors for men" (Bird, "To Play the Harlot," 78). The second, in which Tamar is said to have "acted as a *zônâ*" and is pregnant as a result of "*zənûnîm*" (v. 24), "describes the activity of a woman whose socio-legal status...makes such activity a crime" (Bird, 78). Tikva Frymer-Kensky understands Tamar to be acting as if she is "outside the constraints of family life," and is threatened with punishment because she still has relationships with the *bêt ʾāb* of both Judah and her father. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 270. The irony here is that Tamar is, in reality, outside the social structure of both, and is "acting as a *zônâ*" in order to regain entry to the PHM. See also Bird's recent monograph, *Harlot or Holy Woman? A Study of the Hebrew Qedesǎh* (Eisenbrauns, 2019), esp. ch. 6, "*Qedesǎh* in the Hebrew Bible," on the significance of Judah naming Tamar a *qedesǎh* in Gen 38:21-22.

birth of twins, a statement of implicit approval on behalf of the biblical narrator.[22]

This narrative has received considerable attention from biblical scholars over the years, particularly in the way that it deals with levirate marriage. Deuteronomy 25:6 establishes the institution of levirate marriage in the legal literature of ancient Israel:

> When brothers reside together and one of them dies, and he has no son, the wife of the dead man will not go out to a strange man. Her husband's brother will go into her and take her as a wife and perform the duty of levirate marriage. And the firstborn which she bears will be raised up in the name of his brother, the dead man, so that his name will not be wiped out in Israel.

Levirate marriage exists at the nexus of land, family, and name that existed in the biblical imagination. Levirate marriage was designed to ensure a deceased man would have a line of descendants that continued to reside on his ancestral land and care for the deceased's body in the afterlife.[23] In this way,

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[22] In the Hebrew Bible, the birth of twins was viewed as a divine blessing or reward, even moreso than a singleton birth. See Gen 25, Song of Songs 4.

[23] See Herbert Chanan Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land, and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 1-54. Simeon Chavel argues for separately considering the practices of land redemption and levirate marriage, which are intertwined together in places such as the book of Ruth. He states, "Land redemption supports the living farmer, one who sold some or all of his land and perhaps himself as well due to hard economic conditions. Levirate marriage functions in very restricted circumstances, in which a married man living on an undifferentiated estate dies

levirate marriage is dependent on the childbearing woman's body in creating and maintaining both the real and imagined "house of the father."

Genesis 38 dramatizes the institution of levirate marriage in a way that reveals male anxiety about the practice. The text tells us explicitly that Onan did not want to bear a child with Tamar in order "not to provide offspring for his brother" (Gen 38:9). In response to Onan and Judah's reluctance to fulfill their Levitical obligations, commentators have lauded Tamar's ingenuity in getting what she rightly deserves: "She had the stuff, it was felt, to be the mother of a virile clan, which is clearly the main theme of the story."[24] Tamar's motivations, however, also have an element of the self-serving. Tikva Frymer-Kensky observes that Tamar, as a widow with no children, is socially trapped in a no-man's-land between her husband's and her father's house. Tamar's liminal status is brought into relief when Judah sends her back to בית אביה ("the house of her father"). Frymer-Kensky calls this a "contradiction in terms": as a childless widow, Tamar is under no man's protection "and is, for better or worse, 'free,'" but as a widow in her father's house she is under her father's

without yet having established what counts formally as a full and proper household. The former deals with poverty, land ownership, and means of sustenance; the latter, with death, marriage, and building a family. The particulars differ completely as well. The obligation of land redemption applies to all kin, in order of blood relation, whereas levirate marriage applies only to the blood brother, and even more restrictively, the one who lived on the undivided state together with the deceased. Anyone else is designated an outsider." Chavel, *Oracular Law and Priestly Historiography in the Torah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 57.

[24] E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 300.

"supervision" but her father-in-law's "jurisdiction."[25] To resolve this contradiction, the text presents her as acting as completely outside the constraints of family life—as a *zônâ*—which has the ironically intended goal of her regaining entry into Judah's *bêt ʾāb*. Recently, Jacqueline Vayntrub has expanded on the botanical resonances of Tamar (noted also by Frymer-Kensky and Mark Leuchter).[26] Vayntrub creatively compares the transgressive sexual behavior of Tamar (a term also referring to a "date palm") in Genesis 38 (and, we shall see, in 2 Sam 13), which violates family norms, to the botanical date palm, with its twisting, invasive roots—thus do these two Tamars attempt to entwine their roots with the patriarchs of their "houses of the father."[27] In my analysis, I use a sociolinguistic approach to evaluate why and how Tamar was effective in gaining re-entry to the *bêt ʾāb*, or PHM.

A childless widow like Tamar would have been especially motivated to re-insert herself in her deceased husband's *bêt ʾāb.* A woman in her position was in a socially precarious situation. As Susan Niditch observes, in the PHM, women in between the categories of daughter, wife, and mother "are without patriarchal protection and are in a sense misfits in the social

[25] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 268.

[26] See Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 266, and Mark Leuchter, "Genesis 38 in Social and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 no. 2 (2013): 222-223.

[27] Jacqueline Vayntrub, "Tamar and Her Botanical Image," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139 no. 2 (2020): 301-318.

structure."[28] No longer a virgin, a childless widow does not belong in her father's house; the PHM demands that her rightful place is producing children in the house of her husband's *bêt ʾāb*. The birth of a child through her husband's line would secure her position in his household.[29] A father would be obligated to protect and provide for his children and their mother. When they came of age, sons, specifically, would be obligated to protect and provide for their mother within their own *bêt ʾāb*.[30] The refusal of Judah to allow Shelah to perform the role of levir with Tamar thus creates a tension in the biblical worldview that cannot abide.[31]

The narrative depicts Tamar as taking bold steps to resolve this tension. The author portrays her as having "linguistic flexibility," using speech patterns that are typically coded as

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[28] Susan Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *Harvard Theological Review* 72 no. 1/2 (Jan-Apr 1979): 145.

[29] Niditch, "Wronged Woman," 144.

[30] Dvora E. Weisberg, "The Widow of Our Discontent: Levirate Marriage in the Bible and Ancient Israel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 no. 4 (2004): 410.

[31] Deuteronomy does provide a response to the question of what if the deceased man's brother does not wish to marry his brother's widow: a public shaming ritual in which the widow pulls off his sandal and spits in his face (and then, presumably, is free to marry again, though the text does not specify). It has no answer, however, to a situation like that described in Gen 38, where the deceased man's father hesitates or refuses to allow his son to marry his daughter-in-law. Gen 38 seems to be a kind of legal narrative in which a possible solution to this conundrum is proposed: the widow can go "straight to the source," i.e. the father, in order to achieve the purpose of levirate marriage, which is bearing an heir for the deceased man. This does not seem to be quite what happens in Gen 38, however. Er is nowhere named as the father of Tamar's twins. Perez is the first in the line in the genealogy of Ruth 4:18-22 (i.e. his father is unnamed), and in the gospel of Matthew Judah is named as Perez and Zerah's father (Matt 1:3). Tamar does achieve the secondary goal, however, of securing her place in Judah's household through the birth of her sons, cf. Ruth 4:12: "May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

masculine, to explain why her effort to gain re-entry into the PHM is successful.[32] Judah and Tamar begin their narrative relationship using speech which is typical for their gender. Hare, as noted above, observes that "in general… women's speech is more deferential, indirect, past-oriented, and explanatory, while men's speech is non-deferential, direct, future-oriented, and imperative."[33] The first words that Judah speaks to Tamar are in the imperative, as would be expected from a patriarchal head of household to a subordinate woman: שבי אלמנה בית אביך עד יגדל שלה בני ("Remain a widow in the house of your father until my son Shelah grows up") (Gen 38:11). Tamar silently acquiesces. However, though she may not speak while in her father's house, her powers of observation have not decreased. Tamar hears that Judah will be taking a trip to the sheep-shearing.[34] She removes

[32] The term "linguistic flexibility" comes from J.C. Chambers, "Linguistic Correlates of Gender and Sex," *English World-Wide*, 13 no. 2 (1992): 173-218. "The empirical evidence clearly shows women as much more able performers than men in the whole spectrum of sociolinguistic situations…they command a wider range of linguistic variants…they have the linguistic flexibility to alter their speech as social circumstances warrant." Chambers, "Linguistic," 199.

[33] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 24.

[34] "Tamar fully anticipates Judah's decision to engage in sexual union during the sheepshearing festival, since sexuality and fertility were concepts celebrated during this time." Leuchter, "Genesis 38," 220. Leuchter bases his claim on the work of Geoghegan and Astour. Astour claims that the sheepshearing was a major feast in the tribe of Judah, and "it is known that feasts of the pre-exilic period were accompanied by ritual fornication with the magic intention of securing rich crops and increase of herds." He cites Hosea 4:13-14 and Hos 4 13-14 on the "connection of sacred prostitution with festive sacrifices," and Hos 9:1-2 on the "practice of fornication on threshing floors in order to obtain rich harvest." Michael C. Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigal Motifs, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 2 (June 1966): 192-193 and 193 n.47. Geoghegan argues that "a close analysis of the biblical text reveals that

"her widow's garments," wraps and veils herself, and waits for him on the road she knows he will take.[35] The setting of Tamar's waiting is significant. Genesis 38:14 states that she sat down at "the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah." Scholars have noted the ironic name of the place of the encounter between Judah and Tamar: עינים also means "eyes," but Tamar is deliberately disguising herself to mislead Judah's eyes. I would add that the entrance to Enaim serves as an "interstitial" or liminal space in the narrative comparable to the gates of a city, or the doorway of a house or room. In the Hebrew Bible, demarcations between different spaces serve as conceptual, and not just physical, boundaries: "It is also clear that the division the city walls...make between the outer and inner domains forms an

sheepshearing in ancient Israel was much more than a pastoral duty; it was a significant celebration, characterized by feasting, drunkenness and the settling of old scores. As a result of these associations of revelry and revenge, sheepshearing became an ideal backdrop - both literary and actual - for events in Israel's past involving the repayment of debts or the righting of wrongs"; the events between Judah and Tamar in Gen. 38 are one of the events that he analyzes as an example of this phenomenon. Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, "Israelite Sheepshearing and David's Rise to Power," *Biblica* 87, no. 1 (2006): 55, see also 57-58. In his analysis of the connections between the Judah and David narratives, Craig Y.S. Ho notes that one of the parallels between their narraives is that both wronged Tamar's are ultimately vindicated at a sheepshearing festival, a claim first made by Blenkinsopp (J. Blenkinsopp, "Theme and Motif in the Succession History (2 Sam. xi 2ff) and the Yahwist Corpus," *Volume du Congrès, Genève 1965, SVT* 15 (Leiden, 1966), 44-57, at p. 53). See also Craig Y.S. Ho, "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and David: A Study of Their Literary Links," *Vetus Testamentum* 49 (1999): 518, 519–20.

[35] Other sources attest that widows in biblical Israel would have worn particularly distinctive clothing (which they might cast off to effect manipulation of anyone who looked upon them). See, for example, Judith 8:5, 10:3, and 16:8.

important *conceptual*-and not just practical-distinction."[36] As we shall see in 2 Sam 13 and Judges 19, these physical markers of inside/outside spaces also serve as figurative markers of women's symbolic belonging inside/outside the *bêt ʾāb.* Tamar's encounter with Judah in this interstitial space is appropriate as she negotiates to enter the conceptual space of his *bêt ʾāb.*

Upon seeing Tamar at the entrance to Enaim, Judah mistakes her for a *zônâ*—the text tells us that this is because she had "covered her face."[37] This (mis)recognition immediately impacts the way Judah speaks. While before he had commanded Tamar to dwell (שבי) in her father's house, now their relationship has shifted. He uses softer language here, adding the enclitic particle נא (roughly translated as "please") to his command "Come" (הבה), and asking "Let me come into you," using the cohortative (אבוא אליך).[38] The use of נא signals that Judah's actions are outside of social norms;

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[36] Daniel A. Frese, *The City Gate in Ancient Israel and Her Neighbors: The Form, Function, and Symbolism of the Civic Forum in the Southern Levant* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 242. Routledge notes another irony of Tamar's encounter with Judah at the city gate: She could have brought a legal claim against him at this place where it was practice to do so, but she instead deceives him. Compare with Boaz's "proper" use of the city gate to enact levirate marriage with Ruth. Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 174. Cited in Frese, *City Gate,* 129 n. 5.

[37] Veiling signals that Tamar is a *zônâ*, rather than disguising her identity (though it appears to do that as well). John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 453.

[38] "The *cohortative* expresses the direction of the will to an action and thus denotes especially self-encouragement...a resolution or a wish." *Gesenius's Hebrew Grammar*, edited and enlarged by E. Kautzasch, translated by A.E. Cowley (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006), § 48e. BDB calls נא "a particle of entreaty or exhortation," hence my translation of "please." Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Snowball Publishing: 2010), s.v. נא.

Hare notes that in biblical narrative, men use this particle with female relatives when the men "are not behaving as they should" (as here).[39] Fokkelein van Dijk-Hemmes notes that "Judah's desire makes him dependent on Tamar," causing him to speak in a non-commanding, exhortative manner.[40] Tamar responds to Judah with a direct question: מה תתן לי כי תבוא אלי ("What will you give to me so that you can come in to me?") (38:16). In general, as well as within families, it is men who typically ask women direct questions that demand answers. Men are twice as likely as women to use an interrogative in their speech.[41] In only two cases—here in verse 11 being one of them—does a woman ask a male family member a direct question.[42] In this scene, Tamar knows that Judah is a familial relative, but Judah does not know. This difference in the degree of awareness creates a shift in the power dynamic from Judah to Tamar. Freed from the expectations of familial relationships, it is possible that Tamar's assumed identity as a *zônâ* emboldens her speech, as Hare explains: "Women are slightly more likely to ask a direct question that expects an answer of a male authority figure than of a male relative."[43] The biblical authors therefore felt perhaps

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[39] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 169. See also Wilt, who argues that this particle is associated with emotional duress, power relationships, and threat to face. Timothy Wilt, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Na'," *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 2 (1996): 237-255.

[40] Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy: Between Rape and Seduction (2 Samuel 13 and Genesis 38)," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 150.

[41] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 61.

[42] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 136. The other example is 1 Kings 21:5, Jezebel to King Ahab.

[43] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 243.

freer to depict her as using more direct and normatively masculine speech.

Judah promises that he will send Tamar a kid from his flock, using ʾ*ānōkî* for the first-person singular pronoun. It is possible that Judah uses this self-referent, as opposed to ʾ*ānî*, because of the context of a polite request.[44] In general, ʾ*ānōkî* is used by a lower-status person when speaking to a superior. While among family members, ʾ*ānōkî* is preferred by both men and women (which may suggest it is more informal), because in this narrative Judah does not know Tamar is a family member, his use of ʾ*ānōkî* suggests the text is trying to depict him as subordinate to her.[45] Tamar's masculine speech patterning has allowed her to assume a position of authority and power over Judah. Having been given the upper hand, Tamar negotiates a pledge of Judah's signet, cord, and staff until she receives the kid from Judah. The request for these specific items is no accident; they are symbols of Judah's identity and very personhood.[46] Judah surrenders his belongings, lies with her, and she conceives.

Once Tamar has completed her deception, she and Judah return to their typically gendered speech patterns. After their tryst, she

[44] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 24. See also E. John Revell, "The Two Forms of First Person Singular Pronoun in Biblical Hebrew: Redundancy or Expressive Contrast?" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40, no. 2 (1995): 199-217.

[45] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 120.

[46] The seal in particular "served as the legal and religious surrogate for the person who wore it." Speiser, *Genesis*, 50. Frymer-Kensky likens the items to Judah's "credit card." Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 272.

"got up and went away," replacing her veil with her widow's garb, and presumably returns to her father's house, where her status is still in question. Now, however, she is carrying her father-in-law's offspring. After about three months, Judah, hearing that his daughter-in-law is "pregnant by *zənûnîm*," commands in the imperative "Bring her out [הוציוה], and let her be burned [ותשרף]" (38:24).[47] The use of the imperative is typical of a male authority figure towards a female subordinate, including a member of his family.[48] Tamar, however, has the last word, and sends a message to Judah as she is being brought out: "By whose [items] these are, I am pregnant...Recognize, please [הכר נא], whose these are: the seal, and the cord, and the staff" (38:25). Tamar no longer speaks using masculine authority; her speech is indirect, for she does not announce to the town that it is Judah's baby she is carrying. Additionally, her imperative "Recognize" (הכר) is softened with pleading (נא). Hare notes that when women use the enclitic particle when speaking to a male family member, "the context is generally an inappropriate action, whether by the female speaker or by the male interlocutor."[49] Though her overall speech patterning is deferential, In just one syllable Tamar's words subversively signal to the reader that Judah's behavior has been

[47] Lev. 21:9 states that when a priest's daughter "defiles herself by *zənôt*" (תחל לזנות) she should be burned. When a jussive follows and is dependent upon an imperative, as here in Gen 38:24b, (הוציאוה ותשרף), Gesenius states that it "express[es] an intention or an assurance of a contingent occurrence." *Gesenius,* § 109f.

[48] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 243.

[49] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 169.

inappropriate, from the moment he refused to give her his son to marry, to his call for her to be burnt.

In case the reader might start to think that Tamar is calling attention to her own inappropriate behavior, the text quickly clarifies who is in the wrong. At the same moment Judah recognizes his belongings, he also recognizes the error of his ways. He immediately takes action to reincorporate Tamar into his *bêt ʾāb.* Judah admits that "She is more righteous than I" (צדקה ממני).[50] Tamar's speech simultaneously resolves the dramatic tension of the narrative and the contradiction of her own liminal position outside the PHM. The text states that Judah did not lie with her again, reaffirming the biblical social norm where fathers-in-law do not have sexual relationships with their daughters-in-law. The birth of her twin sons, Perez and Zerah, described in vv. 27-30, reintegrates Tamar safely into the *bêt ʾāb* of Judah.[51] The work of the *levir* is thus completed, and Tamar has no need to lie with Judah again. As the mother of his children,

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[50] Frymer-Kensky acknowledges that there is another possible translation of this phrase: "She is righteous. It [the offspring] is from me." This admission would validate Tamar's innocence since the prohibition on incest is suspended for levirate marriage. "She is more righteous than I," however, is still the most probable translation. Frymer-Kensky, *Reading* 274.

[51] Multiple sources from the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East attest to the power of childbearing to secure a woman's status in her husband's household. It could increase the status of a woman who was part of a polygynous marriage. Documents from Nuzi, Alalakh, and a Neo-Babylonian marriage contract protect the rights of the first wife if she bore a child after the secondary wife did. This principle is found in the biblical legal codes of Deut. 21:15-17 and in biblical narrative in Genesis 29-30. See Bruce Wells, "The Hated Wife in Deuteronomic Law," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 131-146, at p. 139. Even enslaved women could be accorded some protection by bearing children for their master. See Raymond Westbrook, "The Female Slave" in *Gender and Law,* esp. pp. 215-220.

she is now owed protection and security within his household.[52] In the PHM, she has regained her place as a child-producing woman in the house of a patriarch. Her appropriation of typically masculine speech patterns has effectively repaired the disruption of the social fabric of the PHM. Later biblical tradition decisively rewards her manipulation by making her the ancestor of King David.[53]

Samuel 13

The parallels between Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 13 are well attested in scholarship. Craig Y.S. Ho has carefully outlined them in his 1999 article "The Stories of the Family Troubles of Judah and Tamar: A Study of Their Literary Links." He identifies a "four-fold parallel" between the two stories:

1) Both victims are of the same name; 2) Both victims are victims of a sex-related insult—one is denied while the other is forced—by a male family member; 3) *Both are forced to leave their ordinary residence and stay in another house* [emphases mine]; and 4) Both are vindicated at a sheep-shearing festival.[54]

[52] Weisberg notes that Perez and Zerach are considered as Judah's sons: "In all genealogies that mention Perez and Zerah, they are described as the sons of Judah; there is no mention of their connection to Er. See Gen. 46.12; Num. 26.20-22; 1 Chron. 2.4." Weisberg, "Widow of our Discontent," 416 n. 33.

[53] Ruth 4:18-22: "These are the generations of Perez [the son of Tamar]. Perez bore Hezron, Hezron bore Ram, Ram bore Amminadab, Amminadab bore Nachshon, Nachshon bore Salmah, Salmon bore Boaz, Boaz bore Obed, Obed bore Jesse, and Jesse bore David."

[54] Ho, "Family Troubles," 518.

Vayntrub analyzes these parallels in terms of their botanical imagery. She notes that many scholars, beginning with Niditch in 1979, have identified a common thematic thread between the two narratives that centers on family disruption.[55] Vayntrub likens this disruption to that caused by the roots of a date palm, a *tāmār,* the namesake of the two featured women in Gen 38 and 2 Sam 13, which is "beautiful and desirable above ground but strategic and invasive below ground."[56] Niditch has noted that while the union of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 "repairs [the social fabric]"—what I describe here as the PHM—the rape of Tamar by Amnon in 2 Sam 13 is "destructive of the social fabric."[57] My analysis focuses on the sociolinguistics of these narratives in order to explain why the social structure of the PHM in 2 Sam 13 cannot be repaired.

In 2 Samuel 13, Tamar begins the narrative safely within the PHM. As a "virgin" (בתולה) princess in her *bêt ʾāb*, which is also the palace of King David, access to her is presumably severely restricted.[58] Nestled within the *bêt ʾāb* of King Daviod is the *bêt ʾēm* of Tamar's mother, Queen Maacah, to which she also belongs and which she shares with her uterine brother Absalom.[59] Thus

[55] Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted," 1979; Gary Rendsberg, "David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 438-436; Yoël Arbeitman, "Tamar's Name or Is It?" *ZAW* 112 (2000): 341-55. Cited in Vayntrub, "Botanical Image," 302 n. 2.
[56] Vayntrub, "Botanical Image," 317.
[57] Niditch, "Wronged Woman," 149.
[58] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 158. The text does not specify where Tamar is living, but it is suggested she lives with her father when David "sends home" (הַבַּיְתָה) for Tamar in 2 Sam 13:7.
[59] See Chapman, *House of the Mother,* 98-102.

when her half-brother, Amnon, becomes sick with desire for Tamar, he must resort to manipulation in order to be alone with her. Observing Amnon's lovesickness, his friend Jonadab proposes a plan that will enable Amnon to lure Tamar to his room.[60] (Jonadab leaves unsaid the implications of their seclusion.) When Amnon claims to be ill, King David — Tamar and Amnon's father and head of their *bêt ʾāb* — agrees to send Tamar to care for Amnon, and so she prepares food to bring to him.[61] The irony here is that her visit to Amnon is both "totally innocent and socially approved."[62] David, Amnon, and Jonadab collude, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in the tragedy that is about to befall Tamar. She is the victim of a system in which men's discourse dictates the course of women's lives.

[60] The designation of "friend" (רע) suggests "more than an intimate acquaintance...a matchmaker and adviser in affairs of the heart." Kyle P. McCarter, Jr. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary,* The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 321. A "friend" plays a similar role to Judah in Gen 38:20 and to Samson in Judges 14:20. In his book *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible,* Saul Olyan describes the biblical nouns that are commonly translated "friend" to suggest that "we can say that ideally friendship is a relationship between people who choose to associate or affiliate with one another and that it involves positive feelings described by texts as 'love.'" Saul Olyan, *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (Yale University Press, 2017), 5. In the case of the friendship between Amnon and Jonadab, Olyan argues that Jonadab is a complex character whose motivations and loyalties are not easily understood: "Jonadab who not only encourages his friend Amnon to pursue his baser impulses, but also does not remain loyal to him, withholding knowledge of Absalom's plan to kill Amnon and not playing the role of comforter to David once Amnon has died, possibly because he is now Absalom's friend and confidant rather than Amnon's." Olyan, *Friendship*, 83.

[61] On the significance of the food Tamar brings to Amnon, and the larger nexus between food, women, and sexuality, see Esther Brownsmith, "Inconspicuous Consumption: Conceptual Metaphors of Women as Food in the Deuteronomistic History" (PhD Diss, Brandeis University, 2020).

[62] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 160.

When Tamar enters Amnon's room (חדר), he immediately takes control using normatively masculine speech. Amnon sends everyone away, and orders Tamar to "Bring the food into the room" (הביאי הבריה החדר), using the imperative form of the verb with no "please" to soften it.[63] Upon crossing the boundary into Amnon's space, Tamar enters into the sub-unit of his *bêt ʾēm*, "a physical entity delineated within 'the house of David,'" where she has no authority and no mother or uterine siblings to offer her protection.[64] In his sphere of authority, Amnon again commands "Come, lie with me, my sister" (בואי שכבי עמי אחותי), using a series of imperative verbs to reinforce his authoritative status. While in other texts of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Song of Songs, the word "sister" is a term of endearment for one's beloved (see, for example, Song 4:9-10), here it serves to remind the reader of the familial relation between Tamar and Amnon.[65] Hare observes that the usage of names and kinship terms "reminds the character's interlocutor of the intimacy of their relationship and thus of the character's right to speak in such a way."[66] Amnon here uses language about his relationship with

[63] Men make significantly more use of the imperative than women (18.95% of their verbs vs. 13.44%). Hare, "Gendered Speech," 67.

[64] Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 99.

[65] A. Graeme Auld, "Contexts for Tamar: Samuel and the Song of Songs," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum,* ed. David J.A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 27-28.

[66] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 93.

Tamar as a "power play" as he attempts to convince her to lie with him.[67]

It is not clear whether it is this reminder of their familial relationship, or the extramarital nature of Amnon's desire, that causes Tamar to protest.[68] But protest she does, and vehemently. In verse 12, she cries out to Amnon: "No, my brother, do not devalue me [תענני], for thus is not done in Israel, do not do this disgraceful thing [נבלה]!" Tamar uses a kinship term, אחי ("my brother") in an attempt to appeal to Amnon's and her relationship, this time to convince him to reconsider and cease his actions. After appealing to their familial bond, Tamar attempts to discourage Amnon by invoking what Frymer-Kensky calls "Israel's moral vocabulary."[69] She tells her brother not to "devalue" her, using the verb (ע–נ–ה) that describes a range of traumatic experiences in the Hebrew Bible, from the foretelling of Israel's enslavement in Gen 15:13, to the sexual humiliation Dinah suffers at the hands of Shechem in Gen 34:2. It connotes a moral outrage that violates the way in which "a daughter of Jacob, an Israelite girl" should be treated within the PHM.[70] Tamar also calls Amnon's attempt to lie with her a "disgraceful

[67] "Another pair of symmetrical kinship terms occurs in 2 Samuel 13—another tragic story. Amnon and Tamar address each other as 'my sister' and 'my brother' before he rapes her, as each tries to convince the other to see things their way." Hare, "Gendered Speech," 97.

[68] Lev 18:9, Lev 20:18, and Deut 27:22 all prohibit sexual relations between a man and his father's daughter (בת אביו). However, it is unclear if those prohibitions would have been in effect at the time of the composition of the book of 2 Samuel. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 324.

[69] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 161.

[70] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 161.

thing" (נבלה). The term נבלה is used in Gen 34:7 to describe the sexual outrage of the rape of Dinah, in Judges 19:23-24 to describe the attempted rape of the guests, and in Judges 20:6 and 20:10 to describe the gang rape of the Levite's secondary wife.[71] The overall effect of this language is Tamar charging Amnon with a "serious [violation] of custom...that threaten[s] the fabric of society" as well a "violation of the sacred taboos that define, edge, and protect the structure of society."[72] Should Amnon lie with Tamar outside of marriage, he will threaten the patriarchal social structure of the *bêt ʾāb* on multiple levels: their own family, the royal household, and by extension, the entire people of Israel.[73]

The biblical authors depict Tamar as using normatively feminine speech in her attempt to sway Amnon from his course. She challenges Amnon, "And me, where would I take my shame? And you, you would be like one of the scoundrels in Israel." In biblical narrative, women are more likely than men to use a vocative with a subject pronoun and finite verbs.[74] After Tamar uses the vocative "My brother!" at the beginning of verse 12, she follows

[71] This term categorizes Amnon's act as a "social transgression that undermines male authority over a woman's sexual activity...In Deut 22:21, a woman who acts sexually of her own accord, before and outside of marriage and while still under the control of her father is to be stoned, 'For she committed a detestable act [נבלה] by fornicating while under the control of her father [*lit*., (in) her father's house].'" Vayntrub, "Botanical Image," 314.

[72] McCarter, *II Samuel*, 322-323.

[73] Lev 21:9 attests to the view that the sexual violation of a daughter reflects upon and "stains" her *bêt ʾāb*: "When the daughter of a priest profanes herself through *zənôt*, she profanes her father; she shall be burned in fire."

[74] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 127. See also Judges 11:35 and 37 and 1 Kings 1:17.

it with the subject pronouns אני and אתה to emphasize "I" and "you." These subject pronouns call attention to the fact that Amnon's actions would be harmful to both of them.[75] Though this Tamar asks her male interlocutor a question just as the "other" Tamar did in Gen 38, there is a significant difference in their use of an interrogative: Tamar's question in 2 Sam. 13 seems to be rhetorical, which is much more typical for women to use than direct questions which expect an answer, and much more common for women to use than men.[76] The content of Tamar's question, "Where would I take my shame?" can be understood in the context of the *bêt ʾāb*. An unmarried woman who is not a virgin occupies a liminal position in the PHM. She would not truly belong in the house of her father, and she would not be able to take refuge in the house of her husband or son, having neither.

Tamar finally attempts to reason with Amnon, begging "Now, please speak [דבר נא] to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." As in Genesis 38, this נא is in the context of an "inappropriate action" by the male interlocutor—in this case, Amnon.[77] Tamar's speech is phrased as if she already knows her speech will not move Amnon from his inappropriate behavior, and her only hope is to plead, דבר נא, with a man to speak with another man. It is not clear what Tamar's purpose is here—perhaps she believes that David would sanction their marriage,

[75] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 128.

[76] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 134.

[77] Hare, "Gendered Speech," 169.

or perhaps she is just stalling.[78] Whatever her reasoning, her speech fails. Unlike the Tamar of Gen 38, whose linguistic flexibility allowed her to manipulate Judah and command him to do her bidding, the stubbornly feminine speech pattern of Tamar of 2 Sam 13 is not effective. The text explicitly states that "[Amnon] was not willing to listen to her voice" (ולא אבה לשמוע בקולה). In quick succession, he "devalued her and lay with her" (ויענה וישכב אתה).

Tamar's humiliation does not end there. Unlike the linguistically similar narrative in Gen 34, where Shechem, after devaluing Dinah 'loved' her and "spoke to her heart," Amnon feels hatred for Tamar and uses a series of imperatives to order her "Get up, get out!" (קומי לכי).[79] Tamar has no impassioned speech for Amnon this time; her capacity for language has already been diminished. Frymer-Kensky points out that she cannot even speak a

[78] Why would Tamar encourage Amnon to speak to her father, rather than simply refusing his advances? Frymer-Kensky theorizes that one possibility is that the Levitical laws prohibiting incest (see Lev 18:8-18 and 20:11-21) were not in effect at this time, or that such laws or customs, as they existed, only prohibited marriage between full siblings, and not half-siblings, as Tamar and Amnon were. Perhaps they did not apply to the royal family, or Tamar thought David would be willing to overlook them and give her to Amnon in marriage. Another possibility is that the incest laws *were* in effect and *did* apply to the royal family, and Tamar has no expectation of David overturning them. In this case she would simply be stalling, making a desperate bid to stave off Amnon's lust until she could flee. See Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 161-162. I offer that in the biblical worldview, Tamar's only option for any sort of survival is repairing this breach in the PHM and re-entering it in whatever way she can.

[79] On the relationship between a young woman's virginity, financial value, and rape, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," in *The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies: Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and Bernard M. Levinson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

grammatical sentence: she stammers "Don't!" (אַל).[80] Tamar pleads for Amnon not to throw her out (לשלחני), for this would be a "greater evil" than the rape itself. The text here may perhaps be alluding to the laws in Exod 22:15, which specifies that a man who rapes a woman must marry her, or Deut 22:28-29, which repeats this statute, and adds that he is never permitted to divorce her (lit. "send her away," שלחה).[81] To the extent that these laws reflect Israelite social norms, they suggest that Tamar would have been entitled to marriage to Amnon, and to the safety and security that would come with being a part of his *bayīt*. Amnon, however, refuses Tamar even this basic dignity. He expels her from his *bêt ʾēm*, by ordering his servant to 'put out this one [zot] and lock the door' (v. 17). Vayntrub observes that Amnon no longer refers to her as his sister, as a member of his bayit, but rather depersonalizes and distances her by using the feminine demonstrative pronoun. She is now dependent on the protection of her own kinship networks for her survival.

In response to Amnon's commands, Tamar is reduced to mere sound, and "went about, crying aloud" (ותלך הלוך וזעקה). The verb of "crying aloud" used here (ז–ע–ק) is the same term used for the oppressed who cry out to God (Exod 2:23), or for a petitioner to

[80] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 164. McCarter notes that the MT is unintelligible as it stands and suggests it is a textual corruption; we should rather read "Don't, brother!" with the LXX. *II Samuel*, 317-318.

[81] As horrific as this may sound to modern readers, it was a means of protection for the violated woman who otherwise would be an outcast in the PHM.

the king (2 Sam 19:28).[82] Saul Olyan characterizes this behavior as "non-petitionary mourning behavior associated with a personal catastrophe."[83] While her mourning is not directly petitionary, and indeed even though she has no articulated language, Tamar still expects to be heard. Vayntrub observes that her behavior is strategic:

> Tamar engages in what otherwise would appear as ritual acts of mourning, putting ashes on her head, tearing her garment, waving her hands, and wailing loudly. Her 'shame' is externalized to such an extent that she attracts the attention of Absalom, and it is only through this public display that Absalom is made aware of Amnon's misdeeds.[84]

It is Absalom's awareness that leads to the final blow that destroys the *bêt ʾāb* of David and his sons.

While Tamar's vocal performance brings Absalom's attention to her plight and allows him to exact his revenge on Amnon, Absalom ultimately robs Tamar of even her wordless voice. He orders her to "keep silent" (החרישי) about Amnon's violation. In

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[82] Frymer-Kensky notes its parallel, צ–ע–ק, is also found in Deut 26:7 and Ex. 22:22 (the oppressed crying out to God) and 2 Kings 8:5 and 2 Kings 6:26 (petitioning a king). Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 166.

[83] Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 100. This type of mourning falls under what Saul Olyan categorizes as "calamity mourning," "mourning when disaster strikes that is not characterized by any evident petitionary purpose." Olyan, *Biblical Mourning,* 98.

[84] Vayntrub, "Botanical Image," 315.

using this verb, the text has Absalom commanding Tamar "not to speak of the event, but also not to think about it, certainly not to act on it. Her unlikely silence is therefore not only a restraint from speaking about the matter, but also from mourning or even thinking about it."[85] Tamar's normatively feminine speech is hence taken to the extreme, from passive language to total silence. Tamar obeys Absalom, remaining "desolate" in "the house of Absalom her brother" (בית אבשלום אחיה), and is never heard from again. Her silence eventually enables Absalom to arrange for Amnon to be killed without arousing the suspicion of anyone in their household.

Amnon's rape of his sister and expulsion from his *bêt ʾēm*, a sub-unit of their *bêt ʾāb,* set into motion a chain of events that impacts the entire people of Israel, culminating in Absalom's violent death at the hands of his father's troops in 2 Sam 18:9. In Vayntrub's words, Amnon's actions "catalyze the family's downfall, the retribution predicted by the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 12:10 for David's destruction of Uriah's house: 'Now the sword will never leave from the midst of your house, for you spurned me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own wife.'"[86] Tamar's utilization of normatively feminine speech patterns failed to re-position her in David's *bêt ʾāb* and in the PHM of Israel. This destabilization of their household ultimately

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[85] Sonja Noll, *The Semantics of Silence in Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 34. See pp. 13-74 for more on the connotations of חרש.

[86] Vayntrub, "Botanical Image," 311.

leads to the violent destruction of the royal *bêt ʾāb* and thus the entire *bayīt* of Israel.[87]

Judges 19

Judges 19 is a quintessential example of what Phyllis Trible calls a "text of terror." It is "a story we want to forget but are commanded to speak...To hear this story is to inhabit a world of unrelenting terror that refuses to let us pass by on the other side."[88] What Trible captures with these words is the general reader response to the story of the horrific sexual abuse of a woman, called only a *pîlgesˇ* (which I translate as "secondary wife")—abuse which results in her death and causes violent upheaval among the *bayīt* of Israel.[89] Scholars, especially feminist scholars, have long focused on the deafening silence of the

[87] There are remarkable parallels between 2 Sam 13 and 1 Sam 25, another narrative set during the reign of King David. In 1 Sam 25, Abigail, the wife of Nabal "the scoundrel," brings food to David in an attempt to curry favor with the man in power. Like Tamar, she gives an impassioned and eloquent speech (though hers is not given under threat of rape). Unlike Tamar, she succeeds in gaining entry to the *bêt ʾāb* in a broader sense: After her husband dies just a few days later, she marries David and thus enters not only into the household of her husband, but the royal household of the king. Further studies should more closely examine this narrative through the lens of speech and its relationship to the PHM.

[88] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 65.

[89] HALOT and BDB define פילגש as "concubine" but DCH glosses as "secondary wife;" I prefer the latter reading because it avoids the pejorative connotations of "concubine." In addition, the Levite is referred to as her "husband" in 19:3 and her father as the Levite's "father-in-law" in 19:4, 7, and 9, suggesting a marriage relationship. Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 236.

secondary wife. She says not a word during the entire course of the narrative, as Helen Paynter poetically outlines:

> She gives no explanation to us of her flight to her father's house. Her response to the arrival of her husband/master is not recorded. Her wishes about staying or leaving her father's house are not consulted. Her opinion on whether to rest at Jebus or Gibeah (or elsewhere) is not obtained. Her fear at the arrival of the mob is not expressed. Her protest at her incipient danger is not heard. Her screams do not reach our notice. Her cry for readmittance to the house is not audible. Her dying gasps do not disturb our peace.[90]

Her silence has understandably caused many to criticize this narrative for its violent misogyny. Cheryl Exum has called her silencing "textual rape," which compounds the trauma of the physical rape the woman experiences.[91] Exum argues that the woman is used as a mere instrument in order to make a point about the depravity of the days of the Judges—she is not given any value as a person.[92] It is possible, however, to hear what the secondary wife is telling us *without* speaking. Though the woman's lack of speech makes using Hare's framework difficult, scholars such as Mieke Bal and, more recently, Helen Paynter

[90] Helen Paynter, *Telling Terror in Judges 19: Rape and Reparation for the Levite's Wife* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 45-46.

[91] See Cheryl Exum, "Raped by the Pen," in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997), 170-201.

[92] Exum, *Fragmented Women,* 197.

have considered how the secondary wife communicates to readers through her body and her speech-acts. In my analysis, I will explore what the secondary wife's body is telling readers, and how her "speech" impacts her place in her *bêt ʾāb* and the larger *bayīt* of Israel.

There are two features of this narrative worth examining from a framework of gendered speech: the speech of the men who act upon the secondary wife, and the speech-acts, or body language, of the woman herself. Judges 19 begins with the secondary wife of a Levite man spurning him and leaving their home. While she says nothing about why she is fleeing, her act is a clear communication of rejection of her husband, especially if we read "תזנה" in verse 2 as "תזנח"—she "became angry" rather than "she acted as a *zônâ*."[93] The secondary wife physically leaves the protection of her husband's house and returns to her father's house, her *bêt ʾāb*, where she is ostensibly re-established (though only temporarily), as she remains there for four months. It is significant that, as in the cases of Tamar in Gen 38 and Tamar in 2 Sam 13, she is presumed to be childless, as no son or daughter is mentioned. As we have seen, a childless woman occupies a more precarious place in the PHM than a woman with children (and, more precisely, sons).

[93] The question of how to read "תזנה," per BHS, depends on the textual tradition from which one is reading. If the Hebrew is correct and תזנה is from the verb ז–נ–ה, it would mean that the secondary wife had "acted as a *zônâ*." However, it is possible it is a scribal error and should read "תזנח," meaning "to spurn, reject." The Septuagint agrees with this reading and has "ὠργίσθη, from ὀργίζω," "to be angry."

The first mention of verbal speech in this story comes in v. 3, after the Levite's secondary wife has fled to her father's house. The Levite (after delaying quite some time) follows after her in order to "speak to her heart" (לדבר על לבה). Frymer-Kensky notes that this phrase is used "to describe the act of a superior who reassures his alienated or anxious subordinate partner."[94] It alludes to another scene of rape (Gen 34, in which Shechem spoke to Dinah's heart in v. 3) and foreshadows what is to come.[95] The secondary wife has attempted to re-insert herself into the structure of her own *bêt ʾāb*, but the Levite wants her to return to his own house—and he has the power to coerce her to do so.

In verses 3-9, it is the relationship between the two men that is emphasized through their exchange of speech, and the role and voice of the secondary wife is minimized.[96] As the two men eat and drink, and the father urges her husband to stay more and more nights in his home, the secondary wife is silent. At the same time, the text does not let readers forget that she is a part of his *bêt ʾāb.* He is identified as אבי הנערה, "the girl's father" five times in vss. 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 (even somewhat awkwardly paired with another kinship term, חתנו, "the man's father-in-law," in vss. 4

[94] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading,* 120.

[95] The phrase לדבר על לבה is also used in Hosea 2:16 (2:14 English) to describe how the Lord, metaphorized as a husband, attempts to entice his unfaithful wife Israel after he punishes her for her infidelity.

[96] On the relationships between men in this chapter, see Barbara Thiede, "Judges 19-21: The Warrior God and His Levite Soldier," in *Male Friendship, Homosociality, and Women in the Hebrew Bible: Malignant Fraternities* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 110-133.

and 9),[97] perhaps emphasizing her place in her father's house. Trible notes the irony here: "A journey 'to speak to her heart' has become a visit to engage male hearts, with no speech to her at all."[98]

After several days of eating and drinking with her father, the Levite and his secondary wife set off on their journey back to Ephraim, to the Levite's tent (rather than house, as specified in v. 9). On their way, they stop at Gibeah for a night, and a man (another Ephraimite) takes them in. The Ephraimite host continues the trend of ignoring the presence of the Levite's secondary wife. Verse 21 states that he brought *him* (in the masculine singular, ויביאהו) into his house. While the Levite may be physically and figuratively safe in this *bayīt,* the text clearly signals that his wife is not.[99] This is terribly confirmed in the next scene, in which the men in the town surround the Ephraimite's house, pound on his door, and demand to have intercourse with the male guests in his house. Instead, he offers his virgin daughters and the Levite's secondary wife, stating, "Humiliate them, and do to them whatever is good in your eyes" (ענו אותם ועשו להם הטוב בעיניכם). At these words, the Levite then put out (ויצא)

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[97] Boling cites a private communication with David Noel Freedman in which they discuss that the repetition could be a sign of mixed sources, but it forms a "neat inclusio" in these verses: "The construction is pyramidal, with the double title in vss. 4 and 9, 'the father of the young woman' in vss. 5-6 and 8, and 'his father-in-law' in vs. 7...the double identification at the beginning is necessary because of the ambiguity of the unpointed *htn*, which may be either 'father-in-law' or 'son-in-law.'" Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary,* The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 274.

[98] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 69.

[99] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 73.

his wife from the Ephraimite's house. This act is both a physical expulsion and a symbolic expulsion from the shelter of the PHM—the secondary wife is now completely vulnerable. Outside of the house and the safety of the *bêt ʾāb*, the gang of men "knew" (וידעו, though that does not really convey the force of the violence) and "humiliated" (ויתעללו) her all night, finally abandoning her broken body just before dawn.

After a night of rape and abuse, the Levite awakes to find that his secondary wife is lying at the door, with "her hands on the threshold" (וידה על הסף). In this scene, it is possible to understand the secondary wife's body as "speaking," even without a voice, and even lifeless. Mieke Bal reads the woman's hands as both "accus[ing] and implor[ing]" her husband, making one final "claim to safety" in the house.[100] Like Tamar in 2 Sam 13 who begs Absalom not to expel her from his room, the secondary wife has no choice but to seek re-entry into the social structure which has so horribly mistreated her—there is no other place for her to go in which she will find protection. Her husband, however, has no regard for her speaking body. He commands only קומי ונלכה ("Get up, let us go"), recalling Amnon's callous imperatives wielded at Tamar after he rapes her in 2 Sam 13:15 (קומי לכי). This is the only place the man speaks directly to his secondary wife in the narrative, and he does so with little regret or apology for his actions (as might be suggested by a נא), let alone warmth or care. There is no answer—verbally, that is. The Levite takes her body

[100] Mieke Bal, *A Mieke Bal Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 352.

and returns home to, as it is implied, his *bêt ʾāb*. Here, the secondary wife's body is violated once again: the Levite carves her into twelve pieces to send throughout the territory of Israel. Bal argues that the woman's body is "used as language" by the Levite when he dismembers her.[101] She sends a message to Israel, but not one of her choosing.

In Paynter's view, the woman speaks both *to* and *about* Israel. Her death is a "critique of Israel's moral conduct," and as in Genesis 4:10 after the death of Abel, her blood "cries out powerfully for justice."[102] As the Levite sends the pieces of her body to the different tribes of Israel, he accompanies them with a message, "Speak" (דברו). The entire house of Israel is now responsible for speaking on behalf of the abused and broken woman, who was never given a chance to speak any words of her own choosing for herself. As in 2 Sam 13, the violation of the woman's body by a member of her own *bêt ʾāb* results in the destabilization of the larger *bêt ʾāb* of the house of Israel.[103] Judges 20 describes the civil war that ensues between the Benjaminites and the other tribes of Israel as a result of the crime the Benjaminites committed against the Levite's secondary wife in Gibeah, which nearly

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[101] Bal, *A Mieke Bal Reader,* 342.

[102] Paynter, *Telling Terror,* 50, 49. Gen 4:10 specifically refers to the "voice" of Abel's blood (קול דמי אחיך) crying out from the ground, strengthening the idea that in the biblical worldview, even a broken and lifeless body can speak.

[103] Tamar is violated by her half-brother, a member of her household *bêt ʾāb* and the Levite's wife is violated by a member of her national *bêt ʾāb,* a member of a tribe from the house of Israel. Compare the rape of Dinah in Gen 34 by an outsider, a Schechemite, which does not result in tribal or national destruction to the Israelites.

results in the extinction of the entire tribe of Benjamin. Once again, the violence done to a daughter of Israel by one of their own reverberates throughout the nation.

Judges 19 is an example, albeit extreme, of the ways in which women who fail to marshal typically masculine language are left outside of the PHM. They are physically ejected outside of the walls of the *bêt ʾāb* and thus their bodies are vulnerable to horrific abuse. While their speech-acts may communicate important messages to the people of Israel and to the story's audience, they cannot protect themselves without using their voices.[104]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered in three narratives how biblical authors show women using speech as a strategy to reintegrate themselves into the *bêt ʾāb*. Schloen's framework of the Patrimonial Household Model and Hare's work on gendered speech in biblical narrative provide productive lenses through which to analyze women's speech in these narratives. Genesis 38 provides an example of how biblical women can successfully use speech to their advantage. In this narrative, Tamar demonstrates linguistic flexibility and utilizes normatively masculine speech patterns to compel her father-in-law to participate in a form of

[104] Many commentators see this narrative as a political polemic, to illustrate the need for a monarchy in Israel, as an anti-Saul polemic (Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002)), or to anticipate the war against the Benjaminites (Boiling, *Judges*)). Even in her afterlife, the secondary wife's body is used to tell the story men want to hear.

levirate marriage, which will ensure her a place in his *bêt ʾāb*. Her actions resolve the narrative tension that had left her in a liminal space outside the *bayīt* of Israel, and the biblical authors seem to celebrate this, rewarding her with twin sons and making her an ancestor of King David.

Second Samuel 13 provides a counter-example in which a woman becomes a victim of men's manipulation and fails to protect herself through speech. In this narrative, Tamar attempts to convince her half-brother not to rape her, an act that will, if he does not marry her afterwards, effectively condemn her to a liminal position forever outside of her *bêt ʾāb*. Her normatively feminine speech patterns, however, prove ineffective against the commanding masculine speech of Amnon and Absalom. As a result, the biblical authors consign her to oblivion. She bears no children and is never mentioned in the biblical texts again after the conclusion of 2 Sam 13. In addition, the *bayīt* of Israel is thrown into chaos and confusion as a result of Tamar's rape and destabilization of her *bêt ʾāb*, as Absalom her brother avenges Tamar by arranging from the murder of Amnon, and who himself is later killed in a rebellion against their father, King David.

Finally, the narrative of the Levite's secondary wife in Judges 19 demonstrates the biblical understanding of what happens when a woman is robbed entirely of her voice. The only speech in this narrative is between men, often about or to the secondary wife, but never in dialogue with her. Men are able to dictate the course of her life (and death) through normatively masculine speech

patterns, and all she is left with is speech-acts performed by her body. While these acts communicate a strong message to and about the people of Israel, they are not words of the secondary wife's choosing, and they are unable to bring her safely back inside the PHM.

Reading these three narratives in conversation with each other suggests that the biblical authors saw value in women's speech—so long as it was used for the purposes of re-establishing the social order of the PHM. Genesis 38, 2 Sam 13, and Judges 19 describe disruptions in Israel's *bêt ʾāb*, but women's speech (or lack thereof) leads to very different outcomes in each narrative. A sociolinguistic and gendered analysis reveals that only by demonstrating linguistic flexibility and utilizing masculine speech patterns did the biblical authors imagine that women could effectively re-insert themselves into the *bêt ʾāb,* and could the PHM continue to stand.[105]

[105] Other biblical texts, such as the book of Ruth or the "wise woman" of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14, could be productively examined through the lens of the PHM with gendered sociolinguistic analysis. While these texts are beyond the scope of this paper, future studies should attend to this question.