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MARIAN BROIDA, CLOSURE IN SAMSON

CLOSURE IN SAMSON

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INTRODUCTION

Long considered a series of “loosely connected and grossly editorialized traditions” about the hero Samson,¹ Judges 13–16 has been seen as increasingly unified in recent decades, with studies arguing for the coherence of its structure, theme, and even plot.² A 1974 essay by James Crenshaw extols the narrator’s skill at achieving a unified composition organized around a universal theme, “the conflict between filial devotion and erotic attachment.”³ Cheryl Exum’s series of articles published between 1980 and 1983 reveals structural and thematic webs connecting scene to scene, episode to episode, and cycle to cycle, many of them lifting up the theological message that despite his strength Samson is nonetheless utterly dependent on the Lord for life and death.⁴ A 1990 essay by Robert Alter describes the structural, thematic, and even psychological connections between episodes forged by the root פֶּעַם, which underscores Samson’s compulsive drive toward foreign women.⁵ Yairah Amit’s 1999 study of editing in the book of Judges emphasizes “how the cycle’s author shaped its units so as to coalesce into a single whole” in order to contrast Samson’s great promise as a

¹ J. Crenshaw, “The Samson Saga: Filial Devotion or Erotic Attachment?,” *ZAW* 86 (1974), 470–504 (503).

² Kim is unusual in arguing for a unified plot. His description stretches the definition of “unified” to an extreme, however, since he argues the plot has both cyclical and linear patterns with three resolutions. J. Kim, *The Structure of the Samson Cycle* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993), 406–410.

³ Crenshaw, “Samson Saga,” 471.

⁴ J. C. Exum, “Aspects of Symmetry and Balance in the Samson Saga,” *JSOT* 19 (1981), 3–29; J. C. Exum, “Promise and Fulfillment: Narrative Art in Judges 13,” *JBL* 99 (1980), 43–59; J. C. Exum, “The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga,” *VT* 33 (1983), 30–45. Crenshaw makes a similar point.

⁵ R. Alter, “Samson Without Folklore,” S. Niditch (ed), *Text and Tradition. The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (SemeiaSt; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 47–56.

deliverer against his actual failure.⁶ This sea-change undoubtedly reflects several trends, including a shift from form and source criticism to literary analysis, increased sensitivity to biblical narrative conventions, and a desire to read biblical narratives as unified works. Yet the recent focus on the text's unity would seem to ignore a basic question: Why, if Judges 13–16 is so coherent a narrative, has it been viewed for so long as a string of loosely-connected stories?⁷

In this paper I describe how an imaginary reader of Samson might experience closure at the end of the narrative as well as at the end of each of its constituent units. In doing so, I examine the forces that make the narrative units and episodes discrete as well as those bringing them together. I argue that if Judg 3:2–16:31a fails to strike the reader as a unified story, the reason lies with overly-strong literary devices closing its units, together with too-weak connective ties linking the whole, particularly in the domains modern Westerners prize: plot and character development. At the end of the paper I propose a few rather small redactional changes that would have united the episodes more strongly, and hazard a guess or two as to why the redactor or redactors refrained from their use. My hope is that this paper will provide a step toward the development of a poetics of closure within biblical narrative.

PART I: A FEW WORDS ON CLOSURE

Closure, in B.H. Smith's words, is a satisfying feeling of "finality, completion, and composure" the reader experiences at the conclusion of a literary work.⁸ Closure works largely through fulfillment

⁶ Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges. The Art of Editing* (trans. J. Chipman; Biblical Interpretation Series, 38; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1998). The original Hebrew version of the book came out in 1992.

⁷ I concur with the majority of scholars who believe the Samson narrative incorporates a number of once-independent stories, and owes its current form to redaction. My focus is on the MT version.

⁸ B.H. Smith, *Poetic Closure. A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 36. She primarily analyzes poetry, but much of what she says is relevant for narrative. Along with Frank Kermode's ground-breaking book *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; repr. with new epilogue, Oxford University Press, 2000), Smith's work led the way for a generation of research into literary closure. Not all accept her definition. Don Fowler notes five ways modern literary critics use the term "closure," including "(1) the concluding section of a literary work; (2) the process by which the reader of a work comes to see the end as satisfyingly final; (3) the degree to which an ending is satisfyingly final; (4) the degree to which the questions posed in the work are answered, tensions released, conflicts resolved; (5) the degree to which the work allows new critical readings." D. Fowler, "First Thoughts on Closure," D. Fowler (ed), *Roman Constructions. Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University

of readers' expectations,⁹ generated partly by readers' recognition of literary conventions, including those specific to the work's genre, and partly by readers' broader cultural knowledge. Literary analysts have identified closure as having several types or levels. H. Porter Abbott, for example, distinguishes closure at the level of story events from closure at the level of questions.¹⁰ The latter type of closure reflects the degree to which questions raised in the story are answered.¹¹

Much of what creates closure is conformity to expectations in three domains: text, genre, and the reader's real-life experience. Readers are unlikely to feel satisfied with plot endings deemed out of keeping with the genre. At the most basic level, literary critics claim, readers expect coherence between the beginning, middle, and end.¹² As discussed further below, however, surprising events that nonetheless work within the rules of the story-world may yield tremendous closure. Readers, according to Abbott, resist closure even as they crave it. A narrative dances between holding the reader in suspense and providing a solution—outcome or answer—the reader expects.¹³

Overall, closure appears to result from a mental process on the reader's part, inelegantly termed "macroprocessing" or "coding operations at the macrolevel" by discourse analysts Teun van Dijk and Walter Kintsch, and "retrospective patterning" by Smith.¹⁴ Retrospective patterning can be thought of as an internal re-reading of the work, which may make salient some features previously

Press, 2000), 239–283; repr. from *Materiali e discussioni* 22 (1989). The quotation is on p. 242.

⁹ H. P. Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge, UK/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 188. Abbott calls the first of these two types of closure "closure at the level of expectations."

¹⁰ Abbott, *Introduction*, 156–7. In certain types of narrative, closure at the level of story or question does not occur. Texts may be purposefully left open in one way or another, to allow room for a sequel, for example.

¹¹ Such questions may strictly relate to world of the narrative itself—such as Boaz's identity in the book of Ruth—or refer to issues in the reader's world as well, e.g., the question of God's relationship to justice raised in the book of Job. The Hebrew Bible frequently leaves the latter type of question open, allowing the reader to continue to ponder.

¹² The categories "beginning, middle, and end" form part of Aristotle's definition of tragic drama. *Poetics*, vii, 2–3. Ricoeur explicitly explores the application of this definition to narrative. P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol.1, (trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.

¹³ Abbott, *Introduction to Narrative*, 53–5.

¹⁴ T. van Dijk and W. Kintsch, *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension* (New York: Academic Press, 1983); Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 13. According to van Dijk and Kintsch, 58, research subjects take extra time to read sentences at the conclusion of episodes, "above and beyond sentence-level factors influencing reading times."

merely noticed in passing.¹⁵ This process of mental review occurs most definitively at the work's end, the point from which, in Smith's words, "all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design."¹⁶ As Don Fowler notes, closure is not limited to the ending: "tension between completion and continuance" occurs at multiple points in the text, "from the level of the phrase, the line, the stanza, the chapter, the book."¹⁷ The end, however, is particularly significant, providing the point from which the reader mentally reviews the entire work in light of its conclusion. Only when all the data are in, so to speak, can the reader appreciate the structure and plot in their totality.

A well-closed narrative will not only satisfy the reader's expectations on the level of plot (with or without an element of surprise) but will also encourage a sense of the rightness of all the elements—the harmonious interplay of content and structure. Mary Douglas calls this appreciation, which partakes of the aesthetic, "repleteness."¹⁸ Repleteness depends on the degree to which the narrative conforms to cultural, generic, and individual expectations for well-written stories. Modern readers of novels, for example, tend to want characters to learn and grow over the course of the work, and may desire this feature even in genres to which dynamic character development is less germane, such as detective stories.

In this paper I focus on closure related to the plot, and on closure related to a number of specific literary devices which I will describe below.

Closure Related to the Plot

Kermode and Ricoeur both analyze narrative using categories based on Aristotle's analysis of drama. To Ricoeur, what adds to narrative's repleteness is the movement which Ricoeur calls "discordant concordance."¹⁹ Taking his lead from Aristotle, Ricoeur describes the "fusion of...surprise and necessity" which characterizes fiction.²⁰ Story events partake of this quality when, in Aristotle's words, "they come unexpectedly and yet occur in a causal sequence in which one thing leads to another."²¹ In this way narratives meet readers' dual craving, the thwarting of expectations, in surprise or

¹⁵ A point made by Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, 148.

¹⁶ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 36. She specifically includes narrative endings in her analysis.

¹⁷ Fowler, "First Thoughts," 246. See also Hamon's discussion of a hierarchy of closure within a text, including both internal and final closure, in P. Hamon, "Clausules," *Poétique* 24 (1975), 405–596 (504).

¹⁸ M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles. An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), 128–129.

¹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 42–3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43–4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 43, translating Aristotle's *Poetics* 52a4.

suspense, as well as their fulfillment. Ricoeur elaborates on this paradox in his discussion of the different kinds of mimesis that narrative requires. He defines mimesis₁ as the artist's imitation (or representation) of action, while mimesis₂ is the artist's act of creation or poetic composition.²² What characterizes action (and its imitation) is simply its successiveness: one thing follows another.²³ What mimesis₂ adds is the beginning, middle, and end: elements which Aristotle and generations of literary critics have found so essential to narrative. Beginnings, middles, and ends are not part of real-life experience, says Ricoeur, but of art; "they are not features of some real action but the effects of the ordering" of the work.²⁴ Artistic mimesis is thus not a mere "redoubling" of reality, as Plato would have it,²⁵ but a mediation between the meaninglessness of mere succession and the meaningfulness of artistic rendering thereof. Narrative imposes coherence on its imitation of life.

It is in this mediating attribute of narrative that Kermode finds its special resonance and draw. Claiming that our craving for works with coherent design comes from our angst that our own lives lack plan and purpose, Kermode sees fiction's chief function as consolation. For Kermode, fiction consoles by presenting a world in contrast to our own all-too-contingent one. In the world of fiction, seemingly banal or purposeless events are shown, at the end, to be meaningful. For Kermode, narrative fulfills this consolatory function only if it bears some resemblance to the "mere successivity" of real life—hence the need for *peripeteia*, which he calls "disconfirmation followed by a consonance," actions which seemingly lead in the wrong direction.²⁶ "The more daring the *peripeteia*, the more we may feel that the work respects our sense of reality," he writes.²⁷ In this way narrative fiction thus presents a portrait wherein the expected end arrives by unexpected means, suggesting that real life may work the same way. Closure at the level of the plot thus has a significant task—offering readers a way to see their lives as meaningful, based on their inference of a guiding hand in the real world akin to the author's hand in the story.

Literary Features Enhancing Closure

A number of features on the surface of the text add to the sense of closure readers experience at final or intermediate stopping points.

²² Ibid., 45–6.

²³ Ibid., 39.

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁵ Ibid., 45.

²⁶ Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, 18. He uses the term somewhat differently from Ska's definition in "Our Fathers Have Told Us." *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (SubBib*, 13; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990), 27–29.

²⁷ Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, 18.

These features can enhance plot closure by facilitating retrospective patterning, and many have other closural effects as well. My discussion of these features relies on the work of discourse analysts as well as on Smith's, whose study of poetic closure—much of it highly relevant to narrative as well—remains in many ways unsurpassed.

From the perspective of discourse analysis, closure requires recognition of the unity of a work (its coherence and cohesion) as well as its ending. Narrative coherence results from perceptions of structure and meaning, including consistent characterization, a causally-linked plot, and an overarching theme. Cohesion is the degree to which the meanings of different sentences or textual elements relate to each other, and is established through use of pronouns, conjunctions, repeated vocabulary, analepses and prolepses, and similar techniques. Endings provide stronger closure when they terminate a section of text viewed as unified. Closure is also strengthened when endings are signaled or embellished by specific literary features in the concluding parts of a narrative or coherent portion thereof (e.g., a paragraph or episode).

One source of closure is the "boundary marker"—a term discourse analysts use for a device signaling the end, or impending end, of a body of text (oral or written).²⁸ Boundary markers for written works may consist of themes, topics, or formal aspects of the text, potentially including phonological, syntactic, lexical, and other elements. Boundary markers tend to be specific to culture and genre.²⁹ One principle means by which they work is simply convention: readers note them in passing and expect an ending. The sense of rightness readers experience when their prediction is fulfilled adds to the markers' closural force.³⁰ An example of a formal boundary marker in biblical narrative is the end-frame for episodes in Judges, tallying the number of years a specific individual led Israel. Readers of the book of Judges recognize this device as code for "account over. Back to the Judges frame and the next story." A lexical boundary marker is the word **וְאַתָּה**, "then," which may signal closure of a smaller-scale literary unit in poetry or narrative.³¹ A common topical boundary marker is a major character's return to the place he occupied before the story began.³²

²⁸ C. Wyckoff, "Have We Come Full Circle Yet? Closure, Psycholinguistics, and Problems of Recognition with the *Inclusio*," *JSOT* 30 (2006), 475–505.

²⁹ Longacre describes cultural and generic variations in boundary markers. R.E. Longacre, "The Paragraph as a Grammatical Unit," Talmy Givón (ed), *Discourse and Syntax* (SS, 12; New York: Academic, 1979), 115–134.

³⁰ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 154.

³¹ Wyckoff, "Have We Come Full Circle Yet?"

³² S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup, 70; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 130.

As Smith points out, conventions for concluding a work often become so because they are closural in more ways than convention alone.³³ The effects on the reader thus have the capacity to transcend place and time, so that modern as well as ancient readers respond to certain closural techniques. It is no surprise, then, that boundary markers identified by Smith or analysts of western narrative discourse overlap significantly with techniques recognized by biblical scholars. Smith analyzes a number of the processes by which closural devices work, above and beyond their function as conventions. Some devices work by using repetition to “complete” a structural form: circular patterns (ABA and variants) or symmetry (ABAB) are included here, whether of small units (words, lines) or larger sections of the work.³⁴ Other techniques disrupt readers’ expectations that the work will continue by altering a pattern of repetition. Examples of such disruption include final lines which are markedly shorter or longer than average.³⁵ A very common biblical boundary marker, found at the end of unified sections of text of any length, is a change from the standard verb-subject-object (VSO) order used in mainline narrative to SVO, and a concomitant switch from *wayyiqtol* verb forms to *qatal*. Heller finds this shift consistently in the narrative works he analyzes, typically in locations where no וַיְהִי or other initial boundary marker indicates the succeeding paragraph.³⁶ Expectations of an ending can also arise from changes in the pattern of repetition of story events. This principle explains much of the closural effect of the “stair-step” or “folkloric” sequence of two or three repetitions of plot events (Cinderella’s step-sisters trying on the shoe) with a change in the next (Cinderella tries—and it fits!).

Smith argues that some literary features—not necessarily those considered boundary markers by discourse linguists—enhance closure by adding to the sense of stability at the close, thus providing a sense of “conviction and aphoristic rightness.”³⁷ One such feature is a gnomic or epigrammatic statement, typically

³³ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 30–31.

³⁴ Ibid., 27–28.

³⁵ Ibid., 42–44. Another common way to produce structural closure, particularly in poetry, is to significantly alter the pattern of repetition in the penultimate line with a return to the previous pattern at the end.

³⁶ R. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations. An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSS, 55; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 26, 54. Heller describes the function of single, independent non-*wayyiqtol* clauses as ending episodes and “divid[ing] the longer text into smaller, cohesive blocks (i.e., paragraphs) of narrative.” In Judges 13–16 I found that such clauses did not appear at the end of episodes or smaller units with the consistency he describes in his own corpus (the Joseph novella and David’s Court Narrative). When these clauses did appear, however, they occurred at the ends of unified textual blocks.

³⁷ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 159.

marked by concision and internal parallelism and commonly containing alliteration or other wordplay. Another closural technique is an unqualified or superlative assertion (“the most,” “the best”). Also closural are words such as “end,” whether referring to the end of the work or not; and allusions to sleep, homecoming, or death.³⁸ These last two categories suggest rest and stability by bringing to mind associated states or events. These features may occur at various points in a text, not only at the end; but when they occur at the end, they carry closural force.

Labov’s classic analysis of oral narrative uses different language to describe several elements with closural effects.³⁹ Adele Berlin has noted the applicability of his work to biblical literature.⁴⁰ Labov describes six parts in a “complete” narrative, of which three typically occur at the end, “signalling that the narrative is finished.”⁴¹ The most basic of these is the *result* or *resolution*, which answers the question “what finally happened?” The second is the *coda*, “bridging the gap between the moment of time of the end of the narrative proper and the present”⁴² by informing the audience of the current status of actor or narrator. Codas seal off the series of events comprising the story, indicating that “none of the events that followed were important to the narrative.”⁴³ The final closural element, the *evaluation*, shows the point of the narrative. It answers the question “So what?” Evaluations—which need not occur at the narrative’s end—work to intensify aspects of the story, slow the action, or reveal the narrator’s or another’s thoughts, among other effects.⁴⁴ Whether stated by the narrator, voiced by a character, or inferred from descriptions of activity, evaluations typically involve

³⁸ Ibid., 172–185, 197.

³⁹ W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City. Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 354–393. Many narratives lack some of these features.

⁴⁰ A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

⁴¹ Labov, *Language*, 365.

⁴² Labov, *Language*, 365.

⁴³ Ibid., 366. Etiologies function as codas at the ends of many biblical narratives, as Ska notes in “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*,” 31.

⁴⁴ Labov describes four varieties of evaluations. *Intensifiers* such as repetition, marked lexical items, ritual utterances (that is, formulaic phrases such as “and there it was”) and words such as *all* heighten and slow the action. *Comparators* contrast what did happen with what did not, by means such as questions, superlatives, comparatives, and metaphors. *Correlatives* constitute descriptive language or depictions of simultaneous events which provide a background to the main action. *Explicatives* present information meant to help the audience understand events, including new realizations by characters. Evaluation typically occurs just before the resolution but can occur elsewhere. Labov, *Language*.

syntactical changes which slow the action, thereby heightening the resolution's strength.⁴⁵

Isaac Gottlieb identifies four patterns which often occur at the end of biblical books, in a list overlapping considerably with features Smith analyzes. The book-endings which Gottlieb describes include references to death or cycles of time; words which mean *end* or *conclusion*; and the root שׁוּב. Gottlieb considers these last two patterns to work by association, claiming that words phonologically similar to terms for *end* or שׁוּב also appear frequently in closing passages.⁴⁶ Although Gottlieb examines strategies for ending biblical books, some of those he describes appear in the terminal sections of smaller units of works as well. For example, the root שׁוּב in either *qal* or *hip'il* appears at the end of the stories of the Binding of Isaac (Gen 22:19), Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:29), and Jephthah's Daughter (Judg 11:31, 35, 39), among others.

Returning to the circular pattern Smith describes, one structural closural device deserves special mention: the ring composition or chiasm (the difference being whether the central element is repeated or not; not all scholars consider this of significance).⁴⁷ Welch notes that one of the purposes of such structures is "emphasizing the feeling of closure."⁴⁸ Variant forms range from the *inclusio*—where repetitions occur only at the beginning and end—to the more elaborate form described by Mary Douglas, which includes "an exposition, a split into two halves, a central place or

⁴⁵ H. Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982) describes "narratorial comments," similar to Labov's evaluations (at least those voiced by the narrator) and including what Labov calls codas. Crouch has applied Bonheim's work to closure in biblical narrative with interesting results. W. Crouch, *Death and Closure in Biblical Narrative* (SBL, 7; New York: Peter Lang, 2000). Both Crouch and Bonheim demonstrate that such comments slow the narrative pace near the end of a story, thus providing a boundary marker in the form of discourse type.

⁴⁶ Isaac Gottlieb, "Sof Davar: Biblical Endings," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991), 213–224.

⁴⁷ Fokkelman and Martin, for example, distinguish the ABCC'B'A' chiasmic or criss-cross pattern from the ABCDC'B'A' (concentric circle) pattern of ring composition. J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative. A Practical Guide* (TBS, 1; trans. I. Smith; Leiden: Deo, 1999), 117; G. Martin, "Ring Composition and Related Phenomena in Herodotus," 14 Dec. 2004: 1–40. Cited 10 December 2007. Online: <http://faculty.washington.edu/garmar/RingCompositionHerodotus.pdf>; Biblical Narrative." In contrast, Radday diagrams the 'perfect chiasm' as ABC–D–C'B'A'. He also indicates that deviations are common. Y. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," J. Welch (ed), *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Siegburg: Gerstenberg, 1981), 50–117 (especially 52).

⁴⁸ J. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," J. Welch and D. B. McKinlay (eds), *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: Research Press), 157–174 (162).

mid-turn matched to the exposition, identifiable parallel series, and an ending.”⁴⁹ The ending contains elements found in the exposition as well as the midpoint. A second ending Douglas calls a “latch” may follow, also reflecting back on motifs in the exposition.⁵⁰ Ring compositions (as I use the term, meaning a series of concentric circles with or without a repeated center) provide built-in boundary markers; readers begin anticipating the ending once they recognize that the midpoint has been reached. Inclusions, on the other hand, merely signal the end. As with any form using distant repetition, the effectiveness of ring compositions requires the audience’s initial awareness and later recollection of re-occurring elements. Unusual or striking terminology, morphology, or syntax can draw the audience’s attention to the first use of elements to be repeated, thus making the structure perceptible.⁵¹

Robert Longacre and his fellow text linguists envision a narrative text as an expandable “paragraph,” into which smaller paragraphs can be embedded, each paragraph representing a section of discourse organized around a unified topic.⁵² Boundary markers help readers navigate the text, signaling intermediate as well as final stopping points. In some cultures and genres, certain boundary markers have specific functions within a text genre, for example closing an episode but leave open its connection to a larger narrative, just as commas, semicolons, and periods signal different degrees of closure at the end of a clause.⁵³ In other genres or cultures, boundary markers (or other closural devices) may be less specific: for example, story-length ring compositions may contain smaller units or episodes which are themselves structured as rings.⁵⁴ Boundary markers may also cluster at the ends of episodes or larger units, their combined effects generating a greater sense of closure than any one used alone.

PART II: AN ANALYSIS OF CLOSURE IN JUDGES 13–16

Below I review the kind of closural and cohesive devices occurring in the Samson narrative at two different levels: larger units and smaller episodes. I analyzed the narrative for distinct and explicit chains of causality and character constellations, distinguishing three

⁴⁹ Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 43.

⁵⁰ Many discussions of chiasmic structure fail to mention two features Douglas describes: the optional latch or the convention of a midpoint matched to the exposition.

⁵¹ Wyckoff, “Have We Come Full Circle Yet?” The point has been made by others as well.

⁵² Longacre, “The Paragraph as a Grammatical Unit.”

⁵³ See Philippe Hamon’s discussion of a hierarchy of closure within a text, including both internal and final closure, in “Clausules,” 504.

⁵⁴ Many critics have described this feature. See, for example, Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 18, 39, and Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative.”

large units (13:2–25; 14:1–15:19; and 16:4–31a) and one small (16:1–3, the story of the prostitute in Gaza).⁵⁵ I divided the units into episodes based on changes in setting, primary characters, and topic. Each episode contains one or more scenes, summary expositions, or closings, and in most cases narratorial comments of various sorts. I evaluate separately the Judges framework in 13:1 and 16:31b as well as the anomalous 15:20, an early iteration of the end-frame in 16:31b tallying Samson’s twenty years as a judge.

I analyze what an attentive modern reader knowledgeable in Hebrew and biblical narrative conventions might experience in the way of closure in each unit and episode. This reader does not correspond precisely to an actual individual, not even myself, and is in fact an impossible construction—for somehow the reader achieved some sensitivity to biblical language and conventions with no prior knowledge of the Samson story. At the end I consider how closural devices and retrospective patterning at different points in the narrative affect this reader’s understanding of Judges 13–16 as a unified composition.

Unit One: Judg 13:2–25

The first unit—the angel’s annunciation of Manoah’s wife’s pregnancy—focuses on Samson’s parents, introducing Samson himself at the very end. Within the unit’s single episode appear a number of boundary markers, including independent *qatal* clauses, larger and smaller rings, and the word **וא**. Boundary markers combine with other stylistic closural techniques at two principle junctures: 13:21, and the unit’s final two verses, 13:24–25. As I indicate below, verse 13:21b wraps up a major theme in the unit, while verses 13:24–25 resolve the problem identified at the beginning, so that the intensification of boundary markers coincides with closure at the level of theme and plot. Cohesive devices include repetitions of key words, phrases, and events—some unique to this unit, and others extending into other parts of the narrative. Both the unit’s content and its literary techniques leave the reader expecting more, relating this unit to those that follow.

From its first verse, the narrative sets up the reader’s expectations regarding the way the unit is likely to end—regarding not only its plot, but its wording as well. The opening verse 13:2 serves as the unit’s exposition, introducing Samson’s parents and the unit’s central problem, Manoah’s wife’s infertility. The isolated, independent *qatal* clause **ולא ילדה** at the end of 13:2 indicates that the verse constitutes the first paragraph of text.⁵⁶ Since the opening phrase

⁵⁵ Most analysts consider chapter 16 as a block, although Kim in *The Structure of the Samson Cycle* considers 16:1–3 to form part of the same “canto” as chapters 14 and 15. Using my criteria for distinction, it belongs to neither unit two nor unit four.

⁵⁶ As noted earlier, Heller, *Narrative Structure*, describes the isolated, in-

(that is, **ויהי איש אחד**) is standard for introducing a protagonist's father or other ancestor,⁵⁷ the reader expects both an annunciation type scene and a longer story, in which the child to be born is the real hero. Sensitive to biblical conventions, the reader notes in passing key words and syntax in the exposition, expecting to encounter them again in the likely event of an inclusio or ring composition. The reader's expectations will be confirmed when key words from 13:2a recur both at the end of the unit and at the end of the entire Samson narrative.

The effect of the *qatal* boundary marker at the verse's end is to create a slight pause for comprehension, setting off both lexemes and message. In Judges 13–16, virtually all verbs in non-*wayyiqtol* forms communicate important information of one sort or another. Verse 13:2b informs the reader of the unit's central plot issue, the infertility of Manoah's wife, in the process making use of a peculiarity of Hebrew narrative syntax. Since the verb form used for mainline events, *wayyiqtol*, does not normally take a negative particle, negative clauses like this one frequently occur as **לא** plus *qatal*, a form ideally suited to identifying problems.

Two key roots are particularly significant in this unit: **ראה** and **ידע**, both addressing important themes. In Judges 13, the root **ראה** acts as both a cohesive device and an indicator of theme.⁵⁸ Exum notes its structural use as well in framing the entire unit.⁵⁹ The root's salience is increased by its appearance at clause- or paragraph-ends, in marked forms, and in structurally-marked configurations, as in the ring 13:19b and 20b, where it appears as a masculine plural active participle reflecting the behavior of Manoah and his wife. The salience generated by this unusual morphology and its repetition in vv 19b and 20b may lead the reader to remember both its form and its context when the masculine plural active participle of **ראה** recurs in the final unit's last episode. Thus this root serves to unite first and last units as well as unifying unit one, adding to the reader's sense of the planfulness underlying the whole.

Another thematically-important root in Judges 13–16 is **ידע**, which occurs twice in this unit in narratorial comments, both times in *qatal* (13:16b, 21b). The first use appears in a comment indicating Manoah's obliviousness to the angel's identity as God's messenger, the second in a comment indicating Manoah's later recognition of the angel's divine origin.⁶⁰ The marked syntax leads the reader to

dependent *qatal* clause as ending paragraphs of text.

⁵⁷ S. Niditch, *Judges. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 141nb. She cites Y. Amit, "There was a man . . . and his name was . . .": Editorial Variations and Their Tendenz" (Hebrew). *Beth Mikra* 30 (1984/85), 388–99.

⁵⁸ M. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976).

⁵⁹ Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment."

⁶⁰ Amit considers the whole of Judges 13 to be editorially recast from

give extra attention to each clause in which the verb occurs, resulting in a frisson of recognition when the root **יָדַע** recurs, twice in unit two and twice in unit four, always in non-*wayyiqtol* forms. As with **רָאָה**, the repetition of a key-word increases the cohesion within unit and entire narrative, while the link between thematic meaning and plot events adds to coherence. (As Exum, Crenshaw, and others point out, the theme of knowing and not knowing will feature large in subsequent units involving secrets.)⁶¹ The highlighting of the two uses of **יָדַע** in chapter 13 by means of their marked syntax tells the reader that Manoah's change of view is important. The character development which Manoah undergoes adds to the modern reader's sense of the unit's coherence to this point. Much later, in retrospective patterning after unit two, the reader may recognize the shift in Manoah's understanding as a thematic foreshadowing of the shift in the reader's own. This realization will increase the reader's sense of closure at the unit's end.

The unit's cohesion is increased as well through the three-fold repetition-with-changes of the angel's instructions. The repetition of the instructions as well as their heightened, repetitive language (including repetitions of **כָּל**, an intensifying "quantifier" in Labov's terminology),⁶² enhances later recall, important for the plot.

Verse 13:21 contains a number of closural features whose impact is diminished because of the verse's structure. Verse 13:21a, on its own, appears to be the story-ending technique Labov calls a coda, which moves out of the story-time by addressing events later in time—or in this case, the non-existence of such events: "The angel of the Lord never appeared to Manoah and his wife again." The verb's *qatal* formulation suggests that the clause could end a paragraph or larger unit of text. The verse continues, however: "Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the Lord," with **יָדַע** in *qatal*, as noted above. Like the English word "then," **אָז** can have either a temporal or a logical meaning (i.e., "afterwards" vs. "therefore").⁶³ The order of clauses in 13:21 implies that here **אָז** means "therefore", as if 13:21a explained how Manoah came to the new understanding of the messenger's divine origin revealed in 13:21b. Logic and context, however, suggest Manoah came to his realization when he observed the angel's disappearance in the altar's flame (13:20), rather than from a future non-event (the absence of the angel's reappearance during his lifetime). The reader takes a mo-

a birth story to one stressing Manoah's shift from disbelief to belief in the angel's appearance. *Book of Judges*, 289–304.

⁶¹ Crenshaw, "The Samson Saga," 487–488; Exum, "Aspects of Symmetry and Balance," 8–9.

⁶² Labov, *Language*.

⁶³ B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 658.

ment to resolve this slight confusion, which undercuts the closural effects of **אז** as a lexical boundary marker.⁶⁴

Two more verses (22–23) provide a bit of an anti-climax—the couple’s disagreement over the danger of their experience. Following this, a series of closural conventions and techniques signals the end of episode and unit: the expected resolution of an annunciation type-scene with the birth of a son in 13:24; the end-inclusio to 3:2 in 13:25, naming tribe and town in chiasmic order; and the rhythmic, repetitive parallelism within the final phrase: **במחנה דן בין צרעה ובין אשתאול**. Smith notes that parallelism or repetition in final lines adds to closure.⁶⁵ Together these techniques provide a far greater sense of closure than do the ends of the preceding paragraphs.

Yet despite the concatenation of terminal closural devices, several features leave the unit open. The angel’s pronouncement in v 5 that Samson “will begin to save Israel from the Philistines’ hands” leaves the reader expecting a future fulfillment of the prediction. Exum notes the inclusio formed by Manoah’s name in 13:2 and Samson’s in 13:24, indicating “a shift in emphasis from father to son,”⁶⁶ a shift confirmed by 13:24’s last clauses, stating that the lad grew up and the Lord blessed him. The first part of 13:25 gives rise to the anticipation of adventures to follow, with use of the root **חלל**, “(to) begin.” The combination of these strategies serves both to close the unit and to open it to the rest of the narrative.

In sum, the reader experiences the unit as an extended exposition, giving important information in story form about events preceding Samson’s birth, and promising great things of Samson, with a hint of foreboding in Manoah’s wife’s words, “until the day of his death.”

Unit Two: Judg 14:1–15:19

The second unit (14:1–15:19) contains four episodes. The first (14:1–14:20) presents Samson’s desire to wed the Philistine girl in Timnah; his bare-handed slaying of the attacking lion; the riddle he presents at the wedding feast, involving the lion and honey; the cheating by the men of Timnah, who wheedle the riddle’s answer from Samson’s bride; and Samson’s final slaughter of thirty Philistines from Ashkelon in revenge. In the second episode (15:1–8), Samson’s father-in-law denies him access to the Timnah girl, whe-

⁶⁴ Wyckoff, “Have We Come Full Circle Yet?”

⁶⁵ Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 157.

⁶⁶ Exum, “Promise and Fulfillment,” 57. Judges 13 also contains smaller inclusions identified by Exum in “Promise and Fulfillment”: 13:3–10, framed by the messenger “appearing”; and 13:19–23, framed by “taking.” In between is a “fourfold asking and answer discourse between Manoah and the messenger.” Exum sees the first inclusio as linked to the second inclusio by the root **ראה**, which “functions as a framing device for the whole” (45).

reupon Samson initiates a cycle of retaliation: burning the Philistines' crops (the fox incident), having his wife and father-in-law burned alive by the Philistines, and defeating the Philistines in a fight. At the end he holes up in a cave in Eitam. In the third episode (15:9–13), Samson allows himself to be bound by men from Judah who are serving the Philistines, and is brought from Eitam to Lehi. The final episode (15:14–19) includes Samson's massacre of three thousand Philistines, his thirst and desperate prayer, and his restoration when God creates the spring Ein Haqqoreh. As I indicate below, all episodes except the final one balance features leading to expectations of continuation with features suggesting finality. At the end of the unit's final episode, the number and power of closural features increases significantly.

In the first episode of unit two, 14:1–20, the problem appears in the opening verse: Samson's interest in a Philistine girl. Meir Sternberg points out the immediate "gap" this creates for the reader—a hero, one whose birth was announced by an angel, marrying outside the nation of Israel!⁶⁷ The reader predicts problems, and indeed they will occur: later in this episode the girl's countrymen connive and threaten, and the girl chooses life and family over loyalty to Samson. Yet Samson is clearly acting at the Lord's behest, as the reader learns at the end of the episode's first scene (14:1–4). After the parents voice the reader's own question—why doesn't Samson marry a nice Israelite girl?—the narrator intones in 14:4, "His father and mother did not know that this originated with the Lord, because he sought a pretext against the Philistines, who were ruling Israel at that time." The *qatal* form of the verb יָעַץ in SVO clause-order, and the verse's scene-ending position, underscore the verse's significance as an explanation of what has gone before. This verse gives rare insight into the Lord's thinking, placing the reader in a position of knowing more than Samson's parents, but not much: only that Samson's odd behavior "originated with the Lord" (literally, is "from the Lord") and has to do with bringing down the Philistines. The reader registers that this statement coheres with the angel's prediction in 13:5b, but the means by which Samson is to begin Israel's deliverance seems preposterous: marriage? The verse tantalizes, giving closure to the scene but impelling the reader on.

Soon the reader receives confirmation that Samson has a unique relationship with God. Seized by the Lord's spirit (וַתִּצְלַח עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה) in 14:6, Samson tears apart an onrushing lion barehanded. The later, miraculous appearance of a beehive in the lion's carcass gives him the raw materials for his riddle, unsolvable by any who had not seen the lion or heard the answer.

⁶⁷ M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 237–238.

Structurally, the episode evinces a stair-step pattern. As Exum points out, four times Samson, his father, or both his parents “go down” (יָרַד); twice to Timnah, vv 1 and 5, and twice “to the woman”, vv 7 and 10.⁶⁸ The frequent use of this key word adds cohesion, as does its patterned repetition, each use beginning a scene. The last descent, in v 10, moves the reader into the heightened action of the riddle, the dramatic means whereby the Philistines obtain the solution, and Samson’s retaliation. Exum notes that this long fourth scene is approximately the length of the three prior “stair-steps,” and that this structural pattern (three short scenes followed by one three times longer) will repeat in chapter 15.⁶⁹

Within this episode, the scene in which Samson presents the riddle has particular closural force. The riddle itself, with its heightened language (epigrammatic in style: alliterative, rhythmic, and concise), draws attention and slows the narrative pace. The deviation from the *wayyiqtol* pattern in the following clause, 14:14b, along with its terminal reference to time, marks its significance: “They were not able to solve the riddle in three days.” A dramatic pause surrounds this verse, preceded as it is by the riddle and followed by a new scene commencing with the initial boundary marker וַיְהִי.

The key word נָגַד, *to tell*, gives this episode additional cohesion, with tension between telling and not telling. The root features in Samson’s dealings with parents, wife, and Philistine men, appearing one or more times in 14:2, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 19, then disappearing from the narrative until unit four.⁷⁰ Kim notes the symmetrical ring arrangement of the root in this episode, centering on 14:16, the wife’s plea that Samson only hates her and doesn’t love her. “Here the narrator begins to develop the theme of Samson’s helplessness before the wiles of Philistine women,” he writes.⁷¹ True as this claim may be, the sensitive reader is not likely to consciously observe more than the frequent use of the root at this point, enough to note its reappearance in unit four. Nonetheless the reader may respond to the root’s allusive quality, attempting to unriddle the story itself, to understand what it is not telling.⁷²

The same divine influence described in the lion incident recurs in the episode’s penultimate verse, 14:19, as Samson, seized again

⁶⁸ Exum, “Aspects of Symmetry and Balance.” In v 5, Samson’s parents accompany him. In v 10, only Samson’s father goes down. Either Samson was already in Timnah, or his name was lost during the text’s redaction or transmission. In this unit, references to “going down” exceed those to “coming up,” although both act as key words here and in the following episode.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Crenshaw, “The Samson Saga,” 486–487. Crenshaw also assumes the root occurs in 16:2a (unit three), following the Septuagint.

⁷¹ Kim, *Structure of the Samson Cycle*, 388.

⁷² For more on this notion, see E. Greenstein, “The Riddle of Samson,” *Prooftexts* 1 (1981), 237–260.

by the spirit of the Lord (ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה), takes an ironic revenge on the cheating Philistines—killing thirty men from Ashkelon to fulfill his promise of clothing to the Philistines. (Note that “solving” the riddle was not part of the original deal—just “telling” it.) Structurally and thematically, the episode is thus ringed by Samson’s divinely-inspired power. The reader notes the doubly-repeated clause, ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה, and remembers the promise of future adventures impelled by the Lord’s spirit in the last verse of unit one, ותחל רוח יהוה לפעמו.

This episode provides solid closure on the level of plot, in several regards. First, Samson makes good on his pledge of a reward (even if he does so in a bad way), thus concluding a variant of the prediction-fulfillment schema. His underhanded means of fulfilling the pledge match the underhanded means by which the Philistines procured the riddle’s answer, both sides having broken an unspoken behavioral code. The unexpected method by which Samson simultaneously keeps his promise and expresses his wrath meets Aristotle’s twin criteria of necessity and surprise. Finally, the last verse, 14:20, announces that Samson’s wife has been given to another, fulfilling the reader’s hypothesis that the problematic choice of wife would lead to marital failure, thus adding to closure through this confirmation of expectations. Yet this last line also opens the story to continuation on the level of plot: how will Samson deal with this new insult? Moreover, killing thirty Philistines hardly seems dramatic enough to fulfill the angel’s prediction. The reader is still unsure how Samson is to accomplish his divine mission against the Philistines.

The second episode, 15:1–8, continues the story of Samson, his wife, and the Philistines. Samson’s parents are now out of the picture entirely; instead Samson speaks to his father-in-law, asking for access to the girl he married, using the root בוא with its sexual nuance. The father-in-law refuses, leading Samson to burn the Philistines’ crops in a distinctly memorable way—tying together foxes and setting their tails aflame. The episode’s first scene ends with 15:5, a long descriptive phrase with internal repetition, ועד קמה ועד כרם זית, drawing attention to the magnitude of Samson’s vengeance.

New Philistines enter the scene who do not initially know who set their crops on fire. When they learn, the cycle of revenge escalates. The Philistines torch Samson’s wife along with her family and their house, causing Samson first to vow vengeance, then to deal the Philistines a great defeat (מכה גדולה, in 15:8). Afterwards Samson goes down to the cave in the rock of Eitam, the verb ירד linking this episode to the previous one. The many references to burning in both episodes increase the cohesion between the two.

The episode’s penultimate verse (15:7) contains an allusion to ending (the root חדל). Not only does the root itself suggest a conclusion, but its use in context does as well: Samson plans to carry out vengeance, “then stop.” The episode’s final verse (15:8) con-

tains an evident idiom (שוק על-ירך, leg and thigh) indicating the completeness of Samson's victory—an intensifying form of evaluation, in Labov's terminology, as is the phrase מכה גדולה ("great defeat") which immediately follows. Verse 15:8 ends with an alliterative phrase describing Samson's refuge—another device with closural effects, as noted earlier. A number of closural devices thus converge in 15:7–8. If the story ended here, Samson's מכה גדולה against the Philistines would be seen as justifying the angel's promise. Still, no specific significance the reader knows of attaches to Eitam. The story could be closed, but if so, the reader might lack a sense of repleteness. The lengthy and dramatic introduction (chapter 13) would seem to require a heavier counterweight at the story's end, at least to modern sensibilities. The reader attuned to biblical stylistics would look for an inclusio binding the last verses of this episode with the beginning of unit one, and find none.

The third episode, 15:9–13, begins by describing the Philistines camping in Judah, with a reference to Lehi. Their goal of vengeance against Samson (15:10b) connects them to the Philistines in the preceding episode. The reader assumes that these are the Philistines who survived the previous battle, perhaps joined by others. New characters, three thousand Judahites, act as Philistine tools in binding Samson (with his permission!) in order to bring him to their overlords. Samson mirrors the language of 15:10b β when he announces his plan to avenge himself on the Philistines in 15:11b. The matched expressions of vengeance escalate the reader's sense of suspense. The two statements proclaiming vengeance cross lines of a more prominent structuring technique, references to going down and coming up, continued from the previous episode in modified form. As the reader might recognize, the root עלה provides an inclusio to the episode as a whole.

The Judahites' promise not to kill Samson in 15:13a, emphasized with an infinitive absolute, heightens tension by bringing up the possibility of death. The reader notes the "two new ropes" the Judahites use to bind Samson in v 13b. The Hebrew Bible's paucity of adjectives enhances the words' salience, so that the reader is more likely recall these ropes when a similar phrase occurs in unit four. The final terse clause in 15:13b, "and they brought him up from the rock," contrasts with the previous descriptive clause, adding closural and dramatic force. The episode ends as a cliff-hanger, definitely open to the next. Rushing on to learn the outcome in the following episode, the reader defers retrospective patterning. Once the tension drops at the end of unit two, the reader may think back to the specific ways that Samson and various Philistines have been matching blow for blow in this unit, with gradually escalating violence: the unfair riddle and its unfair solution, the burning of the fields (destroying the Philistines' livelihood) and the burning of the family, the victory Samson won in battle and the Philistines' massing against Samson.

The final section of unit two, 15:14–20, first intensifies then resolves the narrative tension developed in the previous episode. This concluding episode begins with Samson's entry into a new locale, expressed in a clause with two *qatal* forms, unusual opening syntax.⁷³ The combination of the onrushing Philistines and the descent of the spirit of the Lord in 15:14 recalls the first episode of the unit, in which Samson tore apart an onrushing lion, and presages a successful outcome based on the Lord's continued positive influence in his life. Still, the Judahites' delivery of their bound captive to the Philistines massed at Lehi raises the unit's narrative tension to its climax.

This final episode contains two scenes. The first, 15:14–17, is strongly cohesive with the previous episode. It features characters the reader has already encountered—the vengeance-seeking Philistines from the previous episode—and begins with Samson's tearing off the bonds the Judahites put on. The simile in 15:14, “the ropes melted off his arms like flax burned with fire,” links the scene to the fires in unit two, adding to the cohesion of the entire unit. In the second scene, the final reference to Lehi in the last clause of 15:19 links back to the first verse in the prior episode (15:9), in which Lehi appears as the final word, creating an *inclusio*. This adds to the strong cohesion between the two episodes of unit two created in the previous scene.

Besides connecting to previous parts of the unit, this last episode also shows strong internal cohesion. Between vv 14 and 19 the word **לחי** appears eight times and the word **יד** five. The first scene's cohesion is strengthened with an *inclusio* in 15b–17a, beginning and ending with the verb **שלה** and the suffixed noun **ידו**, as Samson picks up the ass's jawbone, then drops it. Between these two acts he wields the jawbone to slay a thousand men. The second, briefer scene, 15:18–19, shows high coherence as well as cohesion based on the ironic contrast between vv 18a and 18b. In 15:18a, Samson thanks the Lord for the “great victory that you placed in the hand of your servant” while in 15:18b he expresses fear that he will “fall into the hand of the uncircumcised.”⁷⁴

This last episode in unit two also evinces greater closure than any of the unit's previous episodes. Several techniques resemble those used earlier. After Samson's slaughter of the Philistines, he sings his victory song, the latter as condensed, alliterative, and paronomastic as the riddle in episode one. Besides the end-*inclusio* with **שלה** and **ידו**, verse 15:17a also contains the word **כלה**, referring to Samson's concluding his song, but also suggesting to the reader the idea of ending in general, as **חדל** did at the end of epi-

⁷³ In fact 15:14a could serve equally to end the previous episode, in which case the references to Lehi in 15:10 and in 15:14a would form a more obvious *inclusio* than the iterations of **עלה** in 15:9 and 15:14b.

⁷⁴ The root **קרא** also occurs twice, once in 15:18a and once in 19b.

sode two. But here the reader sees another, seemingly stronger closural technique as well. After the pile-up of syntactical and allusive closural devices in 15:17a, the reader comes to the first of three adjacent codas, in 17b: **וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא רֵמֶת לַחִי**. By suggesting a time-frame after the end of the story, the clause carries closural force above and beyond the earlier techniques. Following this coda is another, introduced by the brief scene in vv 18–19. This scene focuses on Samson's life-threatening thirst and brings the Lord onstage for the first time. In this story, the reader had previously encountered the Lord only through his messenger and narratorial explanatory asides (chapters 13 and 14). In the marked speech of his prayer to God, Samson alludes to the proximal cause of his death, if it occurs: falling into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines. As Exum notes, this scene explicitly contrasts life and death.⁷⁵ In 15:18b, Samson prays, "But now I am to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised" and in 15:19b, after God makes water burst forth, the text reads "he drank and his spirit returned and he came back to life" (**וַיָּחִי**). This key-word combination comprises both ends of a divinely-controlled continuum, and so carries merismal (hence closural) force. As an added cementing factor, verse 15:19 contains the root **שׁוּב**, referring to the return of Samson's spirit after he drinks. Regardless of its meaning in context, the word has powerful closural effects when used near the end of a text, as Gottlieb notes.⁷⁶

The wording of the second coda, 19b, "therefore the place is called Ein Haqqoreh, in Lehi, to this very day," strengthens the unit's closure. The term "therefore," **עַל־כֵּן**, indicates causality, and carries authoritative weight. The final phrase, "until this very day," breaks the time-frame of the story even more conclusively than does the language of the previous coda, ending the scene with a greater dramatic flourish. Both these codas serve to show the relevance of the events to the reader's own world, if only theoretically.

On the level of plot, the ending provides strong closure as well. Events in this last episode fulfill some of the promises earlier in the story. By killing a thousand through military prowess, rather than murdering thirty through sneakiness, Samson has now clearly "begun to deliver Israel from the Philistines," as promised by the angel in 13:5. Samson, identifying himself as God's servant, has achieved a "great victory" with God's help, the word "victory," **תְּשׁוּעָה**, formed with the same root as appears in the angel's prediction, **וְהוּא יַחַל לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים** (13:5). Thus the climax at Lehi offers cohesion with the prediction raised in unit one in a way that the **מַכָּה גְדוֹלָה** of 15:8 did not, creating a stronger sense that the prediction-fulfillment schema has come to a conclu-

⁷⁵ Exum, "Aspects of Symmetry and Balance"; "The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga."

⁷⁶ Elsewhere this verb occurs only at 14:8, in a non-terminal setting.

With this re-reading of the story, previously incomprehensible points are explained and the predictions are recognized as fulfilled. The reader may wonder that consorting with a foreign woman led to success in battle and intimacy with God, but knows other biblical narratives left open at the level of question. The very unexpectedness of Samson's means of fulfilling God's will enhances the plot's closure by providing substantial *peripeteia*, yielding strong discordant concordance. The reader takes some time to appreciate the thematic and structural correspondences between the various units (e.g., the various key words, and the balancing of structure in unit two's first and second halves). Thinking back over the whole, the reader savors the familiar and utterly-consoling theme: that God operates behind the scenes, in mysterious ways, for the good of his people Israel.

Unit Three: Judg 16:1–3

The third main unit, 16:1–3, has Samson visiting a prostitute and carrying off Gaza's gates in a single episode. After the culminating coda at the end of chapter 15, the reader has difficulty placing Samson's visit to the Gaza prostitute in context. Based on the convention of tallying years at the end of lives as well as of narratives, the reader had assumed both that Samson's narrative was over and that he was dead. Yet, here Samson is, not only alive but visiting a prostitute. The reader wonders if Samson was already a judge during this episode, or if the events transpired before his years of office or perhaps even afterward. Adding to the reader's confusion is unit three's lack of any introductory temporal marker relating it to the events in unit two. Only the briefest of expositions (וילך שמשון עזתה וירא־שם אשה זונה. . .), in obvious parallel to 14:1 (וירד שמשון תמנתה וירא אשה בתמנתה. . .), places Samson in Gaza, a locale not previously mentioned. The reader alone must decide how Samson got there, and why the Gazaites have it in for him. The reader is not content.

Unit three manifests a high degree of internal cohesion due to its many repetitions and its unusually descriptive style. Several repeated phrases occur in this brief unit: "all night long" occurs twice in 16:2; "midnight" (חצי הלילה) occurs twice in 16:3; and "the city gates" occurs twice as well, once in v 2 and once in v 3. Although each repeated phrase gives closural weight to its respective clause, only the last gives specific closure to the unit as a whole. The others serve different rhetorical functions. The Gazaites wait כל־הלילה בשער העיר according to 16:2. The length of the phrase acts as an iconic representation of the length of their wait, which is further underscored by the intensifying word כל. Verse 16:3 contains a long description of the parts of the gate Samson grasps, emphasizing their immensity and the miraculous nature of his act. The reader will remember that Samson was strong enough to support a physical structure as heavy as a city gate when he later pulls down a temple. The final phrase of 16:3 is long and closural—"to the top

of the hill that is by Hebron.” A main character’s departure to another location (often, but not always, home) is itself a closural convention for a narrative or an episode within it.⁷⁸

Although this unit is the only one so far in which the key word **ידע** is absent (in all others it occurs twice), the reader notes the Gazaites’ ignorance and Samson’s savvy in escaping their trap. The theme of knowing and not knowing is thus present even if the key word is not. Just as the opening line links this unit to the start of unit two (“Samson went/went down to Gaza/Timnah and saw a woman there...”), the relatively florid descriptions as well as the root **ארכ** (in 16:2) will link it to unit four. Thus despite the reader’s sense that this unit is somehow floating, out of context, in terms of its setting, characters, and plot, nonetheless links to the larger narrative exist in the form of coherent themes and cohesive language.

Unit Four: Judg 16:4–31a

This final unit falls into two episodes: 16:4–22, the story of Samson and Delilah, and 16:23–31a, the events at the Dagon temple and Samson’s dramatic death.

The unit’s opening transition marker (“afterwards”) indicates at least a loose temporal connection between the previous unit and the episode that follows. A new character appears, from another new setting: Delilah from Nahal Sorek, whom Samson loves (16:4). The appearance of affection in the hero, heretofore focused on lust, honor, and revenge, strikes the reader as a noteworthy change of pattern.⁷⁹ In the world that produced the book of Judges, however, love between Israelite and Philistine does not bode well.⁸⁰ Thus the reader predicts once again that complications will arise, and sure enough the Philistine lords approach Samson’s beloved with an offer of silver if she can entice (**פתת**) from Samson the secret of his strength. The reader notes the familiar word from unit two (14:15) and begins to look for other similarities between the current episode and the story of Samson and his wife. The reader will discover multiple parallels, including plot complications, structures, and vocabulary, but will note distinctions as well.

One similarity is the use of stair-step parallelism to characterize the first episodes of unit two and unit four. In unit two, stair-steps based on the single repeated element of “going down” characterize the first episode from its inception through the riddle-challenge and its consequences. In the first episode of unit four, the technique is better-developed, serving to unify the episode so strongly as to set it somewhat apart from earlier parts of the narra-

⁷⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 131.

⁷⁹ One clue that such affection is not wholly out of Samson’s character is his behavior in sharing honey with his parents in 14:9.

⁸⁰ It is true that the Bible does not explicitly claim Delilah is Philistine. Nonetheless she acts as their agent.

tive. Each of the four scenes in 16:4–22 contains Samson’s description of what ties might effectively bind him, Delilah’s use of these bonds, and (in the first three cases) Samson’s success in freeing himself. His escape is marked by extended descriptive language, including similes in 16:9 and 12. The repetition of vivid words and phrases in a stereotyped pattern links the four scenes together in very obvious fashion. Examples include the rhyming clause **וּחִלִּיתִי וְהִיִּיתִי כְּאַחַד הָאָדָם** (16:7, 11, with similar language in 16:17) and Delilah’s gleeful cry, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” (16:9, 12, 14, 20). The fourth scene in the sequence, preceded and marked by additional action-slowing devices, forms the turning point, altering the pattern of repetition without ending it.

The reader, well-accustomed to the pattern by the time the third scene ends, pays close attention to the new elements in the dialogue between Samson and Delilah in 16:15–17. Delilah’s accusation in 16:15, “How can you love me when your heart is not with me?” brings back recollections of the tearful cry of Samson’s wife in 14:16 (“You only hate me, you don’t love me!”). In the former case, such a plea led to Samson’s divulging the answer to the riddle. The reader pauses to wonder if here, too, Samson will give in. The story continues to parallel the previous account. In both cases, the women needle Samson (**הַצִּיקָתָהּ** in 14:17; **הַצִּיקָהּ לוֹ** in 16:16) over a span of time—here rendered as **כָּל הַיָּמִים**. But in the current episode, the narrator adds a striking phrase to the verse, namely **וּתְקַצֵּר נַפְשׁוֹ לְמוֹת**, literally “shortening his life until his death.” Read as a hyperbolic description of Samson’s feelings, it nonetheless contains a message the reader notes as potentially foreshadowing, resembling unit two’s last episode rather than the conflict over Samson’s secret in the first. As if doomed to repeat the past, Samson now tells Delilah “all his mind” (16:17), once again with the intensifying word **כָּל**, and using the same theme-word as the story in the first episode of unit two, **נִגַּד**. He tells her “No razor shall go over my head, for I am a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb” (16:17a), repeating memorable words and phrases from chapter 13. The contrast between “death,” ending the previous clause, and “womb,” ending this clause, highlights the life-and-death situation toward which the reader now fears Samson is heading.

Samson’s next words provide the reader with new, somewhat puzzling information. “If I am shaved, my strength will leave me and I will become like any other man” (16:17b). Since the phrase **וּחִלִּיתִי וְהִיִּיתִי כְּכָל הָאָדָם** closely resembles the playful phrasing of 16:7, 11, the reader wonders if Samson is once again tricking Delilah with false information. But no, he has just confessed to her his Nazirite status, and the **כָּל** of this version of the refrain recalls the narrator’s comment, earlier in this verse, that Samson told Delilah “all his mind.” Therefore the reader guesses that his admission is true, even though nothing in the prior units linked Samson’s hair with his strength.

Delilah now recognizes (using the root **ראה**, once again recalling unit one) that Samson has told her (**הגיד לה**, from unit two) all his mind and sends for the Philistine lords (16:18). An end-inclusio follows, as the clause used when they came to make their offer—“the Philistine lords came up to her” (16:5) recurs with the addition, “the silver in their hand.” As they did in the case of Samson’s wife, the Philistines fulfill what they promise or threaten—another example of the prediction-fulfillment schema. Now there is nothing left but for Delilah to carry out the method of bondage Samson has described, producing the final stair-step. Putting him to sleep on her lap, she shaves off his seven locks and “began to subdue him, and his strength left him” (16:19b). The initial clause **ותחל לענותו** is rendered more memorable by a repetition of the root **חלל** in 16:22, **ויחל שער ראשו לצמח כאשר גלח**. The alert reader might recall the double use of this root early in the narrative, in 13:5 (“he will begin to save Israel”) and 13:25 (“the Lord’s spirit began to impel him”).

In v 20, the familiar elements in the stair-step pattern briefly resume, as Delilah once again calls, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” Oblivious to his changed circumstances, Samson awakes. The narrator creates irony by noting Samson’s assumption that he will be able to break free as before. The drama heightens considerably when the narrator informs the reader that not only has Samson’s strength departed, but the Lord has departed from him as well. The reader rethinks the previous units, puzzled over the connection between hair, strength, and the favor of the Lord.

“Knowing” and “not knowing” are key motifs in this episode, as they were earlier in the narrative, occurring in 16:9—“[the source] of his strength was not known—and 16:20—“he did not know that the Lord had left him.” Both narratorial comments use non-mainline verbal forms, *nip'al* and *qatal* respectively, once again enhancing the theme words’ salience and making the reader more likely to connect the various “knowing” and “not knowing” comments and theme throughout the story. The isolated *qatal* form in 16:20 indicates the end of a scene, as the reader confronts the bleak significance for Samson of a life without God’s protection and power. Immediately the reader sees the impact of this loss, as in a series of rapid-fire *wayyiqtol* forms, the Philistines capture Samson, gouge out his eyes, bring him down (using the *hip'il* of the familiar root **ירד**, here suggesting a descent in status as well as location), to Gaza (scene of unit three), and binding him in chains (one more repetition of binding, succeeding where all prior attempts have failed). The multiple connections to previous units as well as the unit’s own coherence gives these events a sense of rightness, even as the narrative tension stays high. Samson, the hero, now becomes a captive grinder of grain. The following verse (16:22), however, ends the episode with the hopeful thought that the hair on his head has begun to grow back.

The final episode (16:23–31a) begins in a noteworthy fashion, with the SVO order and a *nip'al* verb drawing attention to the be-

havior of the characters known from the previous episode: the lords of the Philistines, those who bribed Delilah to deliver Samson, now gathering to thank their god Dagon for their own deliverance. Prayers of thanksgiving by the lords and the people suspend the action. The repeated triumphal clause “Our God gave [Samson] our enemy into our hand” in 16:23–24 recalls Samson’s fear in 15:19 that, weakened with thirst, he would indeed fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, thereby heightening the reader’s concern that Samson’s worst fear may come to pass. The language also raises the narrative tension by its inversion of the angel’s prediction in 13:5. The reader wonders how Samson will fulfill his mission to save Israel from the hands of the Philistines, as 13:5 promises, if the tables are turned and he is in Philistine hands.

In the next scene, the Philistines call for Samson to entertain them. From this point forward, descriptive phrases portraying the temple’s structure and the position of the Philistines and Samson dot nearly every verse. The reader notes that Samson is literally in the hand of a Philistine when, in v 26, Samson asks to be guided between the pillars on which the temple stands. For the first time in the narrative, an entire verse (16:27) is given over to description, with intensifying terms stressing the packed temple, the presence of all the Philistine lords, and the three thousand men and women gathered on the roof to feast their eyes on the humiliated hero.

Another prayer follows in 16:28, this time Samson’s, asking to be strengthened one more time so that he can avenge himself for one of his two eyes. In 16:29, the terminal phrase is uncharacteristically graphic in depicting Samson’s stance, poised with a hand on each pillar, and ending with the evocative phrase, **אחד בימינו ואחד בשמאלו** (in so doing, incidentally continuing to emphasize the motif of hands). Syntax with similar terminal repetition will appear in the final clause of the episode and the story, 16:31a, **בין צרעה ובין אשתאל**.

Before the final verse, however, comes one more, 16:30, itself laden with closural strategies. In the first clause of 16:30, Samson cries out, “Let me die with the Philistines!” (תמות נפשי עם־פְּלִשְׁתִּים), closely mimicking 16:16 in its lexemes (ותקצר נפשו למות), thus confirming the reader’s premonition that Samson’s confession to Delilah would indeed lead to his death. The second clause tells us Samson’s action (**ויט בכח**), while the third draws out the description of its effects in the verbal equivalent of slow motion: “the temple fell upon the lords and upon all the people in it” with the intensifier **כל** and two parallel participial phrases. The final clause bears the brunt of the closural force. It consists of a narratorial comment intertwining Samson’s death with his life’s purpose: “The number he killed at his death was greater than those he killed in his life.” Unlike most death reports, this clause never says bluntly that Samson dies. The ellipsis of the actual death-notice is unexpected and itself closural, even as the fact of Samson’s death is hammered home with the verse’s four repetitions

of the root **מות**. This verse encourages retrospection over Samson's life, both structurally (four repetitions of the root for death, then a final change to the root for "life") and by invoking a comparison of his death tallies, prompting the attentive reader to go back over previous episodes and count the number he killed. The reader recalls that Samson's victims were actually tallied only twice before: midway through unit two (the thirty dead Ashkelonites) and at its end (the thousand slain); but in order to come to this realization, the reader must think through the other episodes as well. During this retrospection, the reader focuses attention on the scene in 15:18–19, where the key-word antonyms life and death also appeared on the heels of Samson's mighty victory. As the reader ponders the numerical comparison—one thousand vs. three thousand slain, Samson's life and death in the balance each time—the realization strikes that in 15:18 Samson prayed for life, whereas in 16:30 he prayed for death—and in both cases, the Lord answered his prayer. The symmetry and contrast between the two scenes strike the reader with strong closural force.

Having reached this epiphany, the reader appreciates the skill with which the narrative was constructed, and begins searching for other patterns that might evoke such a satisfying sense of unity. Perplexed by Samson's prayer for vengeance for just one of his eyes (16:28), the reader looks back for prior references to the root **עין**. In the final unit, the root occurs twice—once when Samson's eyes are gouged out, and once when he prays for vengeance. The reader notes that **עין** occurs twice early in the narrative as well, with the double reference to the Timnah girl as "pleasing in Samson's eyes" (14:3, 7). The symmetry suggests a ring composition. Continuing to ponder, the reader spots the root once more, with a different meaning, at the text's midpoint: the etiology of the name **עין הקורא**, the "Spring of the Caller" in 15:19. Appreciatively, the reader recognizes that the word "caller" (**קורא**) applies to Samson both at 15:18 and at 16:28. Perhaps, wonders the reader, Ein Haqqoreh is Samson's other **עין**.⁸¹

Other links now appear to the reader which connect unit one and the final episode of unit four. The final episode's double repetition of **חלל**, as noted earlier, reflects the earlier double repetition in unit one. Both units feature sacrifices. In both, male and female spectators watch (in each case, with **ראים**) the individuals whose presence prompted the sacrifice (angel, Samson) just before the angel or hero prepares to depart the human world (13:19, 20; 16:27). The twofold repetition of "watching" with similar syntax in chapter 13 aids recall now. The reader experiences a feeling of rightness as these coherent elements hit home—a sense that all has been planned from the beginning. The sense of planfulness and coherence only increases as the reader notices additional cohesive

⁸¹ Crenshaw makes a similar point in "The Samson Saga," 479–80.

motifs. One is fire, present in multiple verses.⁸² Another is the root **פגפ**, uniting the beginning of Samson's exploits (13:25), his plans of fiery vengeance (15:3), the turning point of his affair with Delilah (16:15, 18, 20) and his prayer for a final burst of strength (16:28).⁸³

In the midst of the reader's retrospective patterning, the final verses of the narrative are not neglected. The reader notes that 16:31b ends the inclusio spanning from 13:2 as well as the more developed initial frame in 13:25, providing a conventional circle around the story. By having Samson's kinfolk bring his body back, the final verse incorporates two common topical boundary markers for the end of a narrative: the principal character's death as well as his homecoming.⁸⁴ The contrast between Samson's "going down" in 14:1, immediately after 13:25, and "being brought up" at the end of the narrative, adds to the strength of the inclusio by incorporating a pair of key antonyms. In addition, the reader realizes, Samson has been brought up from Gaza, the point where the Philistines brought him low in 16:21. The raising of Samson after his death suggests that Samson's paradoxical mission—to fulfill God's will by sinning against God—has been resolved to the good. Simultaneously, the moral dilemma posed by the first half of the narrative has been resolved as well. Samson did indeed win through sin, but did not ultimately receive the unambiguous success signaled by God's accession to his prayer for restoration in 15:19. To the degree that the reader had been concerned about Samson's inappropriate alliances, the reader finds consolation that Samson's greatest victory required his death.

When the final end-inclusio occurs in 16:31b, the reader is firmly convinced that the narrative is over, not only because the conventional Judges boundary marker is in place, but because this time Samson is clearly both dead and buried. Another round of retrospective patterning follows, focused on contemplation of incongruities. Once again, the connection between hair, strength, and relationship to God arises as a dilemma. As Alter notes, the way Samson's mother alters the angel's prediction in her report to her husband (adding the phrase "until the day of his death" in 13:7) has ominous overtones,⁸⁵ but in fact, she was wrong: Samson lost his Nazirite status when his head was shaved, and only regained it—if indeed he did—when he prayed for death. Nonetheless, the mother's reference to death in relation to his status vis-à-vis God was prescient, since it was God who impelled Samson toward Philistine women, and God who answered his prayer for death.

⁸² R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 94–95.

⁸³ Alter, "Samson Without Folklore."

⁸⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 132–134.

⁸⁵ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 101.

Discrepancies continue to niggle at the reader, but with less force. Perhaps, the reader thinks, the Philistine lords bribed Delilah because they were angry that Samson carried off Gaza's gates—which could explain Samson's imprisonment in Gaza. The reader finds it odd that Manoah's death is not mentioned, but considers that it might have occurred during Samson's judgeship. The reader finds it odd, as well, that a narrative so artfully constructed would have failed to mention Samson's hair through much of its course, or to connect his hair with his strength; and strange, too, that Samson's parents change behavior then disappear. But the main message is clear, present in units one, two, and three: that God uses Samson's aberrant behavior—even his outright sin—to further God's aims for his people.

CONCLUSION: A UNIFIED NARRATIVE OR NOT?

As my depiction of an imaginary reader's journey shows, the units in Judges 13–16, taken individually, show both internal cohesion and coherence of plot, structure and theme. As an example, Samson, having lost his eyes in 16:21 as a result of Delilah's perfidy, stays blind to the end. To a modern reader, however, certain forces interfere with perception of the entire work as a unified narrative. The biggest obstacle to a sense of unity is 15:20, whose closural force disrupts the reader's sense of continuity to such a degree that the following episodes seem to be almost an ad hoc collection, despite their many apparent thematic and structural parallels. The effect is heightened by the two preceding codas in 15:17–19 and the absence of boundary markers affirming the story's continuity at the end of chapter 15 and the beginning of 16.

Another obstacle to a modern reader's sense of unity is the inconsistency of the supporting characters over the narrative as a whole—a problem that looms relatively large, given the current predilection for growth even among minor characters. Among the various supporting characters (Samson's parents, Delilah, various named and unnamed Philistines, and the men of Judah), only Samson's parents appear explicitly in more than one unit. Yet little connects the parents in unit two to those in unit one, not even a name. All that they share is their designation as Samson's parents. Not until unit four does the reader encounter the parents of unit one again, reflected in Samson's reference to his mother's womb in 16:17 and the narrator's mention of Manoah in 16:31. The absence elsewhere of supporting characters appearing in more than one unit, whether as actors or within analepses or prolepses, adds to the burden on other narrative aspects to carry the weight of coherence.

As for Samson, the only character to appear in every unit, the very consistency of his behavior hinders coherence in another way. Even after the disastrous consequences of the wedding, he retains his draw toward inappropriate women and his readiness to divulge

personally-important secrets.⁸⁶ Readers expect characters' behavior to alter based on key events in the plot, and wonder about Samson's apparent failure to learn from his mistakes. Some may consider the possibility that the Samson who falls for Delilah never fell for the woman in Timnah—that the two accounts have no relationship whatsoever. Mitigating against this conclusion is Samson's seeming inability to learn from Delilah's perfidy within unit four itself.

Related to the issue of Samson's character is the general paucity of explicit analepses or prolepses connecting setting or plot points from unit to unit. This absence is most disconcerting with regard to Samson's hair. The connection between Samson's hair and his Nazirite status is made clear in unit one and explicitly recalled in unit four, aiding the coherence of the annunciation scene with the narrative's conclusion. Yet the link between Samson's strength and the length of his hair, first mentioned in unit four, conflicts with this account and raises an obstacle for the reader, who would have expected a helpful anticipatory explanation. Finally, the strong internal cohesion of unit four's first episode (Samson and Delilah) produced by its pronounced stair-step patterning poses a stylistic contrast with other episodes and units.

If the redactors were so inclined, they could have attended to most of these issues with very little work. Omitting 15:20 and the other codas in unit two, and substituting a transitional discourse marker—like the one in 16:4—would increase the ease with which Judges 13–16 could be read as a continuous story, with earlier events now seen as foreshadowing later ones. A line or two explaining the links between Samson's strength and his hair, dropped into units one, two or three; a reference to planned vengeance spoken by the Philistines lurking at Gaza's gate; or the use of Manoah's name in chapter 14 would have gone far to alleviate the modern reader's sense of disjuncture. To modern eyes these are easy fixes, so why did the redactors let such obstacles to plot closure remain? Certainly errors in transmission may account for some missing features. So, too, may redactors' reluctance to alter details considered sacred or otherwise significant. Yet the presence of so many structural and thematic parallels suggests the redactors' willingness to make comprehensive changes, while the multiplicity of thematic and structural correspondences suggests as well that much of this editing has been transmitted beautifully. The parallels of structure and plot connecting chapter 13 with 16, chapter 14 with 15, and chapters 14–15 with 16; the coherent narratorial comments about the Lord's dealings with Samson in units one, two, and four; and the patterned use of key words *ידע*, *נגד*, *ירד*, *ראה*, *יד*, and *פעם* all argue for exacting attention toward coherence and cohesion in

⁸⁶ Alter refers to Samson's proclivity to dangerous women as a "repetition compulsion" in *Samson Without Folklore*.

arenas unrelated to the reader's perception of a causally-linked unifying plot.⁸⁷

Clearly the redactors were capable of recognizing cogent and coherent plots, as the tightly-knit unit four indicates, as well as its links to unit one. The redactors were doubtless capable as well of making the minor adjustments that would add to perceptions of a causally-linked beginning, middle, and end. The lack of such coherence implies redactional choice. Instead of repairing the breaches in causality and cohesion, the redactors built an extraordinary degree of thematic and structural unity into the whole. They appear to have put greater weight on connections made through key words and motifs, parallel structures, and symmetrical plot events than on those created by a continuous plot and coherent portrayal of the story-world.

This choice seems alien to the modern reader, even one somewhat attuned to biblical conventions. Why might the redactors have made it? Two thoughts come to mind, both of which address the issue Kermode raises: the function of narrative closure as consolation.

First, in emphasizing structural over plot coherence, the redactors were likely responding to a somewhat different set of generic expectations than our own. In fact, the redactors plausibly had another model of coherence in mind than Aristotle's, one equally attentive to correspondences between beginning, middle, and end: the ring composition. The overall arrangement of the Samson narrative corresponds most closely with Douglas's description of a full-blown ring, albeit with a significant variation. To repeat her description, such a ring includes "an exposition, a split into two halves, a central place or mid-turn matched to the exposition, identifiable parallel series, and an ending."⁸⁸ The Samson narrative contains a clear exposition (unit one) strongly linked to the ending in Gaza (end of unit four); a turning point at Lehi (end of unit two) also strongly linked to the end of unit four; and strong parallels in plot, language, and theme between the two halves (unit two on one side, and unit three and four on the other) although involving different characters, places, and events. In addition, smaller-scale rings and parallels abound, including multiple corres-

⁸⁷ Exum has noted an almost uncanny number of correspondences in chapters 14, 15, and 16 in "Aspects of Symmetry and Balance." For example, both 14:1–4 and 15:1–3 contain a conversation between Samson and a parent or parents; an objection by the parent to his marriage; and "a question...about the possibility of another woman, which Samson rejects." Further parallels occur between 14:5–6 and 15:4–6a; 14:7–9 and 15:6b–8 (although less obviously); and 14:10–20 and 15:9–19. Additional correspondences in structure and plot events are described in Exum's and others' works. See, for example, Amit's depiction of the relations between 14 and 15 in *The Book of Judges*, 270.

⁸⁸ Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 43.

pondences (such as the word פגע) structured on different bases. Both smaller rings and a multiplicity of overlapping structures are not inconsistent with an overarching ring composition, as Exum and Douglas note.⁸⁹ The primary difference between the Samson narrative and Douglas's depiction of a ring composition is that the parallel events in the two halves (unit two on one side, vs. units three and four on the other) are arranged sequentially (ABA'B'), not chiastically (ABB'A'). To illustrate with just one example, in both unit two and unit four the woman in Samson's life needles him until he divulges his secret (A), after which Samson is delivered, bound, to the Philistines (B). A true chiasm would require that in one case the binding (B) precede the woman's efforts to obtain the secret from Samson (A) to create the pattern ABB'A. Yet in both unit two and four, Samson gives up his secret before being bound (in unit two, by the Judahites; in unit four, chained by the Philistine lords). This lack of chiastic or concentric structure in the narrative's details does not necessarily obviate the narrative's comprehensive structure as a large-scale ring, so long as beginning, middle, and end clearly correspond. As noted above, deviations from strict chiastic structure are common, and the Samson narrative appears to be a variation on the structure.

The lack of a comprehensive narrative with a clear-cut beginning, middle and end to its plot seems to run counter to the purpose of fiction as put forward by Kermode, who situates much of the consoling function of fiction in the plot events, *the peripeteia*, drawing the protagonist away from the predicted conclusion before arriving at it. Yet those attuned to ring compositions are likely to see the text as unified, even replete, despite an absence of an overarching causal chain. In fact, the early appearance of the end-frame in Judg 15:20 underscores the parallelism between the two halves, marking the beginning, middle, and end all the more clearly.⁹⁰ In other words, the very verse that most impedes the sense of a coherent plot emphasizes the coherent structure. Moreover, the repetition of the message of Samson's life—that God, who answers prayer, controls history—may have proved even more consoling than modern coherent fiction. The doubling of events, the recurrent key words, the other structural and thematic correspondences indicate a strong authorial hand just as readily as does a coherent plot, and just as easily lead to the analogy that such a creator gives

⁸⁹ Exum, *Aspects of Symmetry*, especially p. 28 n. 16. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*.

⁹⁰ Exum describes the issue thus: "It bears asking whether the appearance of this formula at the end of each cycle is an indication that the Deuteronomistic historian [who added the Judges frame] was aware of the parallelism of the accounts and accordingly provided symmetrical notices about Samson's term of office as judge." (*Symmetry and Balance*, 9). Perhaps it was a Deuteronomistic redactor who put the Samson narrative into its current form.

meaning behind the scenes to the obstacles and confusions of ordinary life.

Second, the absence of consistent supporting characters from unit to unit impels the reader to look for coherence wherever he or she can find it. One effect is to focus attention on coherence in the characters who do recur. Samson's consistent portrayal has been described above. The other "character" appearing or mentioned in three of the four units is the Lord. Kermode sees narrative as providing its consolatory function in a world apparently without inherent meaning or direction. But the worldview of Samson's redactors, at least as indicated by the narrative itself, betrays no such angst. In this world, the Lord rules both directly and from behind the scenes.⁹¹ In such a world, story closure reflects the world's meaningfulness without needing to prove it. Large-scale coherent plots with exquisite closure become less vital. Given that the narrative highlights divine intentionality of which Samson and family are ignorant, that specific theme resonates at least as clearly here as in the contemporary fiction Kermode champions.

Finally, the Samson narrative does demonstrate discordant concordance of the type Ricoeur describes. The main units in the Samson narrative, two and four, show clear *peripeteia*, in which God drives the unlikely hero Samson to win through sin. Unit two shows this pattern as positive for Samson, while unit four shows it as negative, with both outlooks, interestingly, foreshadowed by unit one; but in either case, the sense that God works behind the scenes, using humans to fulfill his goals without their perception, is consistently portrayed. It is for this sense of purpose lurking behind the world's seeming "mere successivity" that Kermode claims modern people read fiction. Perhaps, in the world that produced the Bible, coherence of a different fashion fulfilled the same need. Retrospective patterning among Israelite audiences would have shown that Samson died as he lived, beneficiary and victim of God's hidden plans. The gaps and discrepancies that plague modern readers may have added verisimilitude to the mix, in the same way Kermode claims *peripeteia* do: by reminding readers that no story can be completely closed, no questions completely answered, in the human task of discerning God's mysterious work in the world.

⁹¹ Exum, "Theological Dimension." Exum notes that the Lord consistently responds positively and immediately to Israelite prayer. In unit one, Manoah successfully prays for the messenger's return (13:8). In unit two, Samson successfully pleads for life-giving water (15:18). In unit four, Samson successfully prays for one more burst of strength, in order to die with the Philistines (16:28, 30). Exum notes the deity's consistent portrayal in other regards as well. She also surmises that the redactor used, but intentionally did not develop, older traditions connecting Samson's hair with his strength, in order to focus the reader's attention on God's control of Samson's fate (44–45).