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Choreography of an Intertextual Allusion to Rape in Judges 5:24–27

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Rationale for a Change in Behavior

Raising the Question

The poem that makes up Judg 5 has long been considered among the oldest in biblical literature.[1] Perhaps due to both the age and the power of this poem, much of its language and many of its themes resonate throughout the Bible, influencing to a greater or lesser extent the traditions and texts that came later. Judges 5 exhibits the compression of expression characteristic of the poetic genre, resulting in much that is suggestive and ambiguous. When the poem is read on its own, these very ambiguities raise questions about the actions and motivations of the people it describes. In this essay, I am concerned primarily with specific literary elements in the poetic version of Judg 5 and the way that these reveal or conceal information about the interaction between Jael and Sisera.

Traditional Readings

Traditionally, the two accounts of Israel's victory over Canaan at the hands of women in chs. 4 and 5 of the book of Judges are read in terms of one another, with information in one account being added to the information in the other.[2] The relationship between Judg 4 and Judg 5 has been the subject of

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Author's note: This article is dedicated to my doctoral adviser, colleague, and friend Stephen A. Geller, whose unfailing support of his students enabled us to find our own voices.

1. See, for example, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken, 2002) 45 and 51; and Mordecai Levine, "The Polemic against Rape in the Song of Deborah," *Beth Mikra* 25 (1979) 84, where he dates the poem to 1100–1150 B.C.E.

2. So, for example, Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975) 98; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2000) 85–97; and Yairah Amit, *Judges: Introduction and Commentary* (Mikra Leyisra'el; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999) 218–21, among others.

much scholarly attention.[3] The poetic version of the triumph of Israel over the Canaanites in Judg 5 differs in many respects from the narrative account of the same episode in Judg 4. Scholars have suggested many reasons for these differences, including variant sources and traditions and differences between the genres of each account.[4]

Both accounts tell of Israel's victory over the Canaanite armies led by Sisera on behalf of Jabin, king of Hazor. They agree on the major events: Deborah and Barak muster an army comprising mostly Northern recruits.[5] When they engage in battle against the Canaanite army, Sisera's troops are decimated (5:20–21, 4:15–16). Sisera flees, coming to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite,[6] who offers Sisera hospitality (5:24–25, 4:17–19) and then kills him (5:26–27, 4:21).

Problems Unanswered by Traditional Readings

Theologically, the assumption has traditionally been made that Jael is motivated by God-fearing loyalty to Israel, but this is not made explicit in either

3. See, for example, Schneider, *Judges*, 82–83 and 85–97. The poetic account in Judg 5 is often considered to be among the oldest texts in the entire Hebrew Bible and thus would precede the prose account of ch. 4 chronologically, even though the poem in ch. 5 is positioned to follow the prose narrative in ch. 4. See, for example, J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 80; Schneider, *Judges*, 82–85; George Foote Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895) 131–32. Moore notes the esthetic sensibility that makes the poem appear to be contemporaneous with the events it describes and concludes that "the poem was made by one under the immediate inspiration of the events" (p. 131 n. ‡).

4. See, for example, Boling, *Judges*, 98–100; Moore, *Judges*, 107–10; and Soggin, *Judges*, 60, 92–101. Robert H. O'Connell (*The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* [Leiden: Brill, 1996] 101–39, esp. pp. 120–23) focuses on the rhetorical implications of these differences. A perceptive reading of chs. 4 and 5 as complementing rather than contradicting one another can be found in Athalya Brenner's article, "A Triangle and a Rhombus," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 107–8. See also Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (trans. Matthew Gumpert; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 135, on the "meaning" of biblical texts.

5. From Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali (5:14, 18); from Naphtali and Zebulun (4:6).

6. The issue of Jael's relationship to Heber is of concern to scholars, both because of loyalty issues (if he has a peace pact with Jabin, king of Hazor, as suggested in 4:17, then is his wife bound by it?) and also because he is absent from the narrative. Tammi Schneider summarizes rabbinic and other commentators who are troubled by this circumstance and agrees with earlier commentators that Jael may be "among the women of" as in "belonging to the tribe of" rather than "wife of"; see Schneider, *Judges*, 76–77. Notably, Sisera is never seen entering Jael's tent in the poetic version.

text.[7] A question arises concerning what motivates Jael's slaying of Sisera, an action that, according to the narrative in 4:17–18, represents both disloyalty to her husband's ally and a reversal of Jael's own initial greeting of Sisera.[8]

7. See, for example, the traditional rabbinic commentators on these texts. For a convenient translation in English, see A. J. Rosenberg, ed., *The Book of Judges: A New English Translation of the Text, Rashi and a Commentary Digest* (trans. Avrohom Fishelis and Shmuel Fishelis; New York: Judaica, 1983) 27–48; and *Genesis Rabbah*, a collection of rabbinic midrash, on Gen 18:9: conveniently in English, Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New American Translation, Volume II* (BJS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), *parashiyyot* 34–67 on Gen 8:15 to 28:9. Compare Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (JSOTSup 68; Sheffield: Almond, 1988) 42–43, 46–47. Several commentators read Jael as being Israelite herself or the Kenites as being allies of Judah, ignoring the explicit mention in Judg 4:17 that there is peace between (Israel's enemy) Jabin, king of Hazor, and the house of Heber, the Kenite, שלום בין יבין מלך חצור ובין בית חבר הקיני. Athalya Brenner minimizes any Kenite loyalty to Israel's enemies: "the Bible describes how the Kenites, originally a non-Israelite clan or tribe, were slowly assimilated into Judah. This process of assimilation was first geographical, then ethnic (Judg 1:16; 4:11, 17; 1 Sam 15:6; 1 Chr 2:55). Indeed the foreign origin of the Kenites is noted, but no importance is attached to it because they cooperated with the tribe of Judah and were later incorporated into it." Brenner also suggests that, "when a foreign woman chooses to adopt Israelite (Judahite) society and religion, and her behaviour indicates that she is seriously committed to her new community, then her acceptance is guaranteed" (Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* [Biblical Semimar 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994] 119). Sisera is described as Jael's enemy by Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes, who writes of Judg 5:24–27: "These passages do not express the joy of the *people* about the downfall of the *enemy* only, but also the joy of *women* at the destruction of a *man* who is perceived as extremely threatening to them" (in Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* [Biblical Interpretation 1; Leiden: Brill, 1993] 46–47). Tikva Frymer-Kensky assumes that Sisera is Jael's enemy when she compares Jael and Judith: "The similarities between Yael and Judith are obvious: both are domestic women who kill the enemy general" (Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, 55). She goes on to ask whether Jael is "loyal to Israel despite her husband's employment by the Canaanites? The Kenites, after all, were normally closely allied with Israel" (pp. 56–57). Frymer-Kensky's reading assumes the Israelite perspective that God's will is behind Jael's actions and that Jael's actions are to be read politically, not privately. Comparing Jael and Rahab, Frymer-Kensky claims that each of these women "has a "moment of truth" when her destiny is thrust upon her and she has to demonstrate her loyalties: Rahab to the spies or the king of Jericho, Yael to Sisera or Israel. At that moment, confronted by history and destiny, each woman abandons whatever claims the Canaanites might have to her loyalties, deceives the Canaanite men, and acts for God and Israel" (p. 57). This political reading is the traditional one, celebrating Jael for striking a blow on behalf of the Israelites and against their enemies. This reading invites the questions I raise here.

8. Among the rabbinic commentators who are troubled by this detail and who attempt to harmonize it are the medieval commmentators Malbim and Abravanel. See also the collection, conveniently in English, of rabbinic midrash in *Exodus Rabbah* on Exod 4:18; S. M. Lehrman, *Exodus Rabbah*, in *Midrash Rabbah* (ed. and trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon; London: Soncino, 1983) 78. Modern commentators are also concerned. Klein assumes

Both the narrative in ch. 4 and the poetic version in ch. 5 are overtly silent on this question of Jael's motivation.

In the poetic version, the transition between Deborah's mustering of the Northern tribes and Jael's entertaining of Sisera consists of a single verse, 5:24, in which Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, is blessed among women in tents. This expression, מִנָּשִׁים בָּאֹהֶל תְּבֹרָךְ 'among women in tents shall you be blessed', situates Jael in the realm of household tents without ever locating her inside a tent. The entire interaction between Jael and Sisera (5:25–27) is never described as taking place within Jael's tent and could very well have occurred outside it, within the precincts of the household compound but not necessarily behind the tent door. The reading of Sisera inside Jael's tent is clearly influenced both by the account in Judg 4 and also by the poetic device of *parataxis*, defined as "the juxtaposition of clauses or sentences without the use of connecting words."[9] With no transition or conjunction, the phrase immediately following the blessing of Jael among women in tents tells that she offers milk instead of the water he requested (5:25), although the "he" who requests water and receives milk instead is not specified until the middle of the next verse, 5:26, when Sisera is named as the object of Jael's strike. Is she offering him milk inside the tent or outside? Either way, the intimacy of the household compound, the domain of women, is the setting.

Whether it takes place within Jael's tent itself or in an area immediately outside it, a surface reading of Judg 5:24–27 tells us that there is an about-face in Jael's attitude toward Sisera that occurs between 5:25 and 5:26. A close

hospitality conventions in biblical culture and suggests that Jael violated these laws of hospitality in her murder of Sisera (Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 40–47, esp. 42). However, according to my analysis, these "laws" of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible are most often observed in the breach; see my *Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 94–98. Mieke Bal also assumes these "laws" of hospitality, even as she critiques John Gray for making other assumptions about Jael (Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988] 211–12). Gray makes the absurd suggestion that Jael must invite Sisera in order to "grant the conventional security and hospitality" but then must murder Sisera to preserve her own honor, which has been sullied by her very invitation (John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* [NCB; Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1986] 259). Frymer-Kensky acknowledges the discomfort experienced by many readers and notes that "the Bible contains no such condemnation of Yael's actions. . . . it clearly portrays Yael as acting in accordance with the divine will and in fulfillment of a divine oracle" (Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, 56). My reading in 5:25–27 of poetic allusions to attempted rape suggests that Jael had personal reasons for an action that resonated politically.

9. Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 161.

reading of these same verses tells us that this about-face occurs within the context of a sexually charged encounter.[10] But neither reading tells us the motivation for this turnaround. She begins by welcoming a weary ally of her clan and ends by murdering him. What can account for Jael's *volte face* from hospitality to murder?

Even though her action benefits Israel and is praised in both narrative and poetic versions, the underlying questions prickle and demand to be addressed: Does Jael betray the Kenite friendship with the king of Canaan? Does Jael violate the norms of hospitality? If she does so, then why does she do so? Is she deceptive and treacherous and not to be trusted (casting aspersions on all autonomous women alone in their tents), or is there another explanation?

I propose that the poetic version of Jael's vanquishing of Sisera does address, by allusion and intertextuality, the troubling question of Jael's sharp turnabout in her behavior toward Sisera. A lone woman entertaining a warrior (even an exhausted one) is a transgressive situation that evokes cultural anxiety in Israel, based on the literary evidence elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[11]

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10. Most readers, both traditional and modern, find the account in Judg 5 particularly sexually charged. Exceptions include Frymer-Kensky, who acknowledges some sexuality but prefers a reading of "a savage grotesquery of childbirth" (*Reading the Women*, 52). All readers who acknowledge any sexuality in these verses posit consensual relations between Jael and Sisera, many suggesting that she seduces him in order to weaken him. This includes both the traditional rabbinic sources cited above and modern scholars such as Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 129–34; Brenner, *Israelite Woman*, 119; and Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, 55. Brenner makes explicit the religious justification assumed by these readers to justify Jael's behavior: "whenever two social principles come into conflict (in this case, sexual standards of an individual *versus* survival of the community), the Bible teaches that survival comes first" (*Israelite Woman*, 120). Brenner continues: "Jael herself, at any rate, is typecast as a representative of a well-established intercultural tradition—that of a brave married or widowed woman who sacrifices, or seems to sacrifice, her virtue in order to save her people" (ibid.). Brenner's premise gives primacy to the political. Although this reading is certainly present in the text, it is not the only motivation and, in my reading, neither is it Jael's primary motivation.

11. Even though Jael is a Kenite and not an Israelite, the text portrays her as an Israelite hero, and, of course, the Bible is an Israelite literary artifact. As Gottwald notes, the societal actuality of ancient Israel is ultimately unknowable (Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985] 177, 266); the only evidence we have is literary. Socioeconomic reflections in the laws concerning virginity and rape (ibid., 287) and family relationships in Lev 18, 20; and Deut 27 (Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988] 182) suggest that gender relationships are the core of Israelite social structure (ibid., 49). The literary evidence suggests a social unease when intimate boundaries are transgressed. A marrried woman may not be approached sexually by anyone but her husband, or risk death (T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* [New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1992] 191). Frymer-Kensky suggests

This cultural anxiety, I suggest, is a subtext of these verses.[12] In addition, the circumstance of Jael's finding herself alone with Sisera also suggests that, within the culture of Israel, she might be vulnerable to sexual aggression without the conventional protections of husband or son.[13] The law of rape in Deut 22:24, which mandates that a rape victim within city precincts must shout for help in order to be considered guiltless, suggests that, once a woman finds herself in a compromising position with a man who is not her husband, it is her

that this unease is rooted in the desire to avoid blurring family lines (ibid., 273 n. 27). Gottwald and Meyers also note that a concern with reproduction and progeny is the central Israelite concern (Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 175; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 56). Meyers further notes that lineage and its central implication for land tenure are a primary masculine concern in Israel, and the social structure of marriage is part of the mechanism for inheritance and property transfer (ibid., 183, 186). It is, perhaps, inevitable that there would be tension in a male-dominated society concerned with progeny and lineage, where women wield authority and autonomy within the household (ibid., 175–76). Tension of this sort could lead to social discomfort with intimacy between a married woman and any man not her husband, even in literary contexts.

12. Carol Meyers discusses male dominance in kinship relationships and the likelihood, in social structures such as the structures present in ancient Israel, that men control land and property and also control women in their reproductive role (*Discovering Eve*, passim). This control suggests social discomfort with any potential intimacy between the women of the social unit and a male visitor, particularly a tribal outsider, as Sisera is, and especially within the confines of a woman's tent. Perhaps social modesty is signaled in the Bible when, even in the open field, Rebecca veils herself upon meeting her intended husband, Isaac, in Gen 24:65. Frymer-Kensky notes that in the Bible "women do not usually encourage men to enter their tents" (*Reading the Women*, 53). Athalya Brenner states that, in Jael's case, "political and military considerations which involve the community as a whole are placed above considerations of conventional morality" (*Israelite Woman*, 119).

13. The suggestion of menace between warrior and women of the enemy is noted by several scholars. Susan Niditch notes that Robert Alter describes Judg 5:24–27 as a "hideous parody of soldierly assault on the women of a defeated foe" (Susan Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* [ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989] 43–57, esp. 46). This reading assumes that Jael represents the women of Sisera's defeated foe, for which I find no textual support, but does pick up on the hint of sexual menace. Similarly, Mordecai Levine suggests that the poem in Judg 5 was composed by a woman as a protest against the expectation among warriors that the women of the enemy are the prizes of victory (*Polemic against Rape*, 83–84). Van Dijk Hemmes notes in passing that Sisera is the enemy rapist who becomes the victim of the humiliation he planned to inflict upon the women of his defeated foe, as suggested by Sisera's own women anxiously awaiting his return in 5:28–30 (*On Gendering Texts*, 46–47). Frymer-Kensky agrees that Jael "completely inverts the common experience of women in war. When a warrior approaches a tent in wartime, we normally fear, not for the warrior but for the woman inside. We brace ourselves for a violent rape in which the warrior brutally penetrates the woman" (*Reading the Women*, 56). In my reading, Jael is the wife of Sisera's ally and not likely to be raped, as an enemy woman would be, by despoiling warriors. I do read the sexual threat as primarily personal, not military or political, although both military and political ramifications flow from the action in these verses.

own responsibility to extricate herself. A woman in a situation of this sort is socially vulnerable, and if she does not defend herself she is held liable. I find that a response to these cultural concerns is encoded literarily in these verses, in the gaps between the verses, as well as in the language of the text itself, much as the movement of dancers defines positive as well as negative space. The choreography suggested by the poetic allusions and intertexts in Judg 5:24–27 expresses and addresses this cultural discomfort to suggest an alternative motivation for Jael's about-face in her treatment of Sisera.

The Context of This Study

With regard to the story of Jael and Sisera, the intertextuality that is inherent in any text is even more powerful in the poem in Judg 5 than in the parallel version in Judg 4: the density of language that is part of the genre of poetry means that each word is even more freighted in this poetic account than in the prose narrative. The precision and weight of language that define the poetic genre constitute a rich resource for unpacking the intertextual allusions and references that contain the cultural messages preserved in the text.

Sexuality

The sexual context, in particular, is more concentrated and more salient in the poem than it is in the prose version. Readers, both traditional and contemporary, have long noted both the maternal and the sexual suggestiveness of the language and situation in these verses.[14] For example, the words "legs/feet" and "to lie" are repeated twice in 5:27. In Biblical Hebrew, the word for 'legs' or 'feet', the Hebrew noun רגל, is often a euphemism for genitals, and the verbal root שׁכב 'to lie down' often has sexual connotations.[15] Mieke Bal notes at length the sexual imagery present in the language and situation presented in these verses. She does not see Sisera as sexually aggressive as much as she sees Jael as the sexual aggressor who gives Sisera "more than he asks for," even though Bal cites Lacan in identifying Sisera's request for water as a

14. See, for example, Brenner's *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, 98–109; and Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 121–24. Some earlier rabbinic sources also suspect some sexuality in reading 4:17–18 and 5:27. These views are summarized in Leila Leah Bronner, "Valorized or Vilified?" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 86–91. See also Niditch, "Eroticism and Death," especially pp. 45–47.

15. This idea is widely accepted. See, for example, Edward F. Campbell Jr., who notes that Ruth uncovers the feet of Boaz and lies down next to him in a sexually charged context (*Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 7; New York: Doubleday, 1975] 121). Not every reader has found this language sexually suggestive, however. Boling sees in the language of "legs/feet" in v. 27 only military associations and does not note sexual allusions at all (*Judges*, 115).

request for love.[16] Feminist scholars who posit sexual relations between Jael and Sisera are anticipated by the rabbinic commentators, who praise Jael but who also criticize her.[17] Their ambivalence about the sexuality implicit in the poem can be seen in the *Judges Rabbah* on these verses of Judg 5, where R. Yochanan imagines Jael willingly having relations with Sisera seven times in order to weaken him, so that she could kill him.[18]

Women Dwelling in Tents

Sociologists use categories such as private space versus public sphere, especially in examining issues of gender relations.[19] In these verses of Judg 5, these categories play a significant role that has been recognized by both traditional rabbinic commentators and by scholars of gender.

According to the prose account in 4:17, Jael is the wife of an ally of Sisera's overlord, an enemy of Israel. As such, Jael goes out to welcome the retreating warrior and offer him refuge (4:18). In the poem, however, both of these items are omitted. Following the defeat of Sisera's armies and the cursing of Meroz for not joining the fray, there is an interjection in 5:24 praising Jael as among the most blessed of women in tents. In the verse following, immediately after the text has situated her within the household precincts in this way, Sisera is already ensconced within the tent compound, asking for water and receiving milk and curds (5:25). Jael's initially hospitable ministrations to Sisera in 5:25 shift suddenly to an attack on him in 5:26.

This attack is otherwise not explained or justified. Traditional commentators, not constrained by the silence of the text, praise Jael's courage in attacking an enemy of Israel. These commentators associate Jael with the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, who are described, as Jael is in 5:24, as dwelling in tents,[20] and note that as a woman dwelling in a tent Jael

16. Of Sisera's request for water, Bal notes that this request "is always, according to Lacan (1966: 814), a request for love" (*Murder and Difference*, 122).

17. See the *b. B. Meṣi'a* 87a, but compare *b. Naz.* 23b, which notes that a sin committed through motivation to serve God is comparable to fulfilling a precept out of improper motivation.

18. Rosenberg, ed., *The Book of Judges: Translation of Text, Rashi and Commentary*, 45, 46, 358. Among modern scholars who agree with this reading of Jael's seductive sexuality are Athalya Brenner (*Israelite Woman*, 118–20) and Niditch, "Eroticism and Death," 45–57.

19. See, for example, Kathleen E. Corley, who cites the general sociological literature on "the public/private dichotomy" of gender studies (*Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993] 15–16 nn. 57–61, 180–86, and passim). See also Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 203–12.

20. See Rashi's commentary on Judg 5:24, and, conveniently in English, H. Freedman, ed. and trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Dvir, 1983) 1:415–16, comment on Gen 18:9.

is not obligated to participate in the battle. Thus, according to tradition, Jael is doubly to be praised: first, for taking initiative when she need not have, and, second, for coming to the aid of Israel although her obligation to her husband exempts her from doing so.[21]

The praise of Jael among women dwelling in tents in 5:24 is read by Bal as a textual focus on Jael's gender. Bal notes that Jael's presence in the tent emphasizes her female role and hence her potential vulnerability.[22] Bal goes on to suggest that Sisera enters women's territory when he enters Jael's domain and traverses the dangerous boundary onto women's turf.[23] She imagines that, for Jael, the "pleasure of subverting the roles within her own assigned space, where the privacy of the woman is guaranteed, prevails over every other consideration, every other pleasure."[24] In my discussion I will suggest, in contrast, the danger to women of allowing such a transgression.[25]

Women Who Go Outside

Bal's insight that the space within the tent is the female sphere is in line with traditional Jewish commentators, who approve of tent-dwelling women as "modest" and who criticize women who "go out," such as Leah's daughter Dinah, who goes out 'to see the women of the land' ותצא דינה בת לאה אשר ילדה ליעקוב לראות בבנות הארץ and thus lands herself in trouble. The rabbis are critical of women who go out, suggesting in comments on Gen 34:1 that Dinah is identified as the daughter of Leah because Leah also "went out," in Gen 30:16, to meet Jacob after Leah's bargain with her sister, Rachel, over the mandrakes. The rabbis speculate that Leah went out to meet Jacob seductively dressed as a harlot and that Leah's daughter goes out similarly.[26] Jael

21. As I noted above, traditional medieval and some modern commentators assume Jael is striking a political blow in support of the Israelite cause. See, for example, the contemporary biblical commentary *Meam Loez* [Hebrew] by Yakov Culi and Shmuel Yerushalmi (Brooklyn: Moznaim, 1972). A summary of traditional commentaries on the book of Judges may be found in Rosenberg, ed., *The Book of Judges*.

22. Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 127–28, 131.

23. Ibid., 128.

24. Ibid., 133–34.

25. The men of Sodom in Gen 19 and the Benjaminites of Israel in Judg 19 also discover that there are severe consequences for transgressing sexual boundaries. Lot's daughters in Gen 19 remain within, where they are protected. The Levite's concubine in Judg 19 is thrown outside the protection of the house, where she, like Dinah who also goes out, is repeatedly violated sexually. On the analogy between Gen 19 and Judg 19, see, for example, Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 29 (1984) 37–59; and Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19–20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 (1982) 365–78.

26. See, conveniently in English, H. Freedman, ed., *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis*, 2:735–36.

does herself "go out" twice in the prose account (ותצא יעל, Judg 4:18, 22), on both occasions to greet a male visitor and to escort him into the tent, just as Leah does with Jacob in Gen 30:16. Perhaps this parallel supports the rabbinic midrash noted above suggesting that Jael seduces Sisera seven times in order to weaken him.

The general comparison implicit between women who stay inside the tent or return to it immediately and women who go out and stay out suggests a specific comparison implicit between Dinah and Jael. If "going out," the transgression of traditional women's boundaries, has negative consequences for Dinah, then Jael, by returning within, is able to avoid these. Leah, too, returns to her tent with Jacob, and there their union is divinely blessed with the conception and birth of Issachar (Gen 30:17–18). Perhaps because Jael, like Leah, returns and remains inside the tent, where tradition suggests she belongs, Jael's fate, like Leah's, is distinguished from Dinah's.

In contrast to the language in Judg 4:18 and 22, the poetic account in Judg 5 omits all reference to Jael's leaving the tent, greeting male visitors, and returning. This distancing from the fraught baggage of the verb יצא 'to go out' in Judg 5 may be read as a distancing from the gesture of "going out" to invite a man into the tent with sexual intent (as Leah does in Gen 30:16) as well as a distancing from the consequences of Dinah's "going out" and staying out in Gen 34:1. The violence associated with violated boundaries in Gen 34 is not completely avoided in Judg 5. However, instead of being the victim of violence as Dinah is when she inappropriately crosses a boundary into the sphere of men, Jael is the agent of violence against a male who has inappropriately crossed a boundary into the sphere of women.[27]

The genre of poetry incorporates a vast array of literary devices, including compression of language and allusive imagery, as well as the various forms of parallelism that particularly mark biblical poetry.[28] Because of these features

27. The analagous situation in which Leah invites Jacob back to her tent, marked by the language of "going out" in Gen 30:16, does not represent an inappropriately crossed boundary, because Jacob and Leah are married, and his presence in her tent is sanctioned both socially and by God (30:17). Thus any allusion to the violence associated with transgression of boundaries is absent in Gen 30:16–18.

28. The defining characteristic of biblical poetry is parallelism in its many variations. The literature on this subject is vast. Some of the most significant contributions of the past 20 years include: Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Stephen A. Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry* (HSM 20; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979); idem, "The Language of Imagery in Psalm 114," in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (ed. T. Abusch and J. Huehnergard; HSS 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 179–94; idem,

related to its genre, the poetic telling of the interaction between Jael and Sisera can be more suggestive and less delineative than the prose version. Taking advantage of these generic attributes, a close reading of the action of Judg 5:25–27 reveals a subtle subtext in the poem, absent from the narrative, that suggests a possible explanation for Jael's about-face from hospitality to murder that is not unrelated to the experience of Dinah, daughter of Leah. This subtext suggests, through language and allusion, action that takes place behind the scenes, between the lines of the poem.

Choreography of a Change in Behavior

The Choreography of Hospitality

Although allusions to sexuality and to the transgression of traditional gender boundaries in Judg 5:24–27 are noted by both ancient and modern commentators, the evocation of an attempt at rape becomes apparent only through a combination of close reading and intertextual analysis of this poetic passage. In order to see what evidence there might be for this suggestion, let us begin by blocking out the choreography of Jael and Sisera inside the tent in vv. 25–27.

The Language of Give and Take

A struggle for power between Jael and Sisera is implied by the shift in the relative positions of Jael and Sisera in these verses. To begin, in 5:25 there is an interaction between Jael and Sisera in which 'he requested . . . she gave' (שׁאל . . . נתנה). The language of give and take occurs in intertexts in which a

"Hebrew Prosody and Poetics," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (ed. Alex Preminger et al.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 509–11; Edward L. Greenstein, "How Does Parallelism Mean?" in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature* (ed. Stephen A. Geller, Edward L. Greenstein, and Adele Berlin; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, for Dropsie College, 1982) 41–70; idem, "Direct Discourse and Parallelism," [Hebrew] in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis, Volume V: Presented to Uriel Simon* (ed. Moshe Garsiel et al.; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000) 33–40; James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Francis Landy, "Poetics and Parallelism: Some Comments on James Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*" *JSOT* 28 (1984) 61–87; Willem van der Meer and Johannes C. de Moor, eds., *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite Poetry* (JSOTSup 74; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); Dennis Pardee, *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism: A Trial Cut (ʾnt I and Proverbs 2)* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Alex Preminger and Edward L. Greenstein, *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism* (New York: Ungar, 1986); and Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (SubBi; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988).

sovereign, divine or human, is asked for a boon from a supplicant, and the sovereign graciously complies and even offers more than requested.[29] These intertexts thus position Jael at first as a sovereign (divine or human) in a position to grant a request and Sisera as a petitioner. She offers him more than he asks, as God does with Solomon in 2 Chr 7:11–12, and as the king offers to give to Esther in Esth 7:2.

The Language of Offering

Within this same verse, 5:25, the relative positions of Jael and Sisera soon shift again from sovereign to supplicant and, in a verse or two, back again. Jael brings Sisera milk with the Hebrew verb הקריבה 'she offered'.[30] This is the language of offering a sacrifice at an altar and/or in the temple, but the morphology (Hiphil 3rd-fem. perfect) is unique in the Hebrew Bible, probably because women do not personally offer sacrifices. The association positions Sisera as a god and Jael as a worshiper. This image will be reversed in 5:27, when Sisera "kneels" at Jael's "feet." Here, the prayerful allusion via the Hebrew root כרע 'to kneel', adds to the irony of Sisera as king or god worthy of lordly bowls and (sacrificial) offerings and yet so wholly human and vulnerable that he dies at the hand of a woman.[31]

There are two other nonsacrificial instances of the Hebrew verbal root קרב 'to draw near' in Hiphil 3rd-masc. perfect. The first one appears in Gen 12:11, as Abram and Sarai "draw near" to Egypt. Abram is Sarai's husband, and in that role he might be expected to protect her from harm, not to put her in the way of danger, especially in a manner that betrays their marital bond. As the couple "draws near" to Egypt, however, Abram's anxiety rises in anticipation of his own treatment at the hands of the Pharaoh, and he makes a choice that puts his wife in danger so that he may be protected, asking Sarai to tell the Pharaoh that she is his sister. The second nonsacrificial use of this root occurs in Exod 14:10, when Pharaoh regrets his promise to free the Hebrew slaves

29. Occurrences of the language of ask/give in the context of request and response include Judg 5:25, 8:24; 1 Sam 12:13; 2 Sam 5:19; 1 Kgs 3:5, 10:13; 2 Chr 1:7; Esth 7:2; Job 6:8; Ps 2:8.

30. There are many layers of the shifting sovereign/supplicant relationship between Jael and Sisera. Beyond the elements I discuss in the body of this essay, see, for example, Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 129.

31. That this is a humiliating fate is made explicit in Judg 9:54, when Abimelech begs the lad who is his arms-bearer to finish him off lest it be said that he was killed by a woman. Sheba ben Bichri, enemy of David and partisan of Saul's house, is killed in a scheme by the wise woman of Abel to save her city from the sword of Joab in 2 Sam 20:21–22. Although she clearly mediates the transaction, the text is ambiguous about whose hand actually finishes off Sheba ben Bichri.

and goes after them with his army. As Pharaoh "draws near" to the Hebrews, they look up to see him coming and cry out to God in fear. The Hebrews fear that Pharaoh will do them mortal harm, just as Abram fears what Pharaoh will do to him in Gen 12. The root meaning of the verb קרב has the sense 'to bring/come nearer',[32] and in both intertexts someone's "drawing nearer" causes an increase in fear; and, in both, the person who is drawing near is betraying a trust. Both of the intertexts occur in the context of the Egyptian border, and in both the feared person is the Egyptian Pharaoh—an aggressive foreign leader. These intertexts suggest, perhaps, Jael's increasing anxiety as she draws nearer to the aggressive foreign leader taking refuge in her tent.

The subtext of betrayal present in both of these intertexts may also characterize the interaction between Jael and Sisera. Some scholars see Jael as the deceptive or treacherous one, violating the laws of hospitality by her murder of Sisera.[33] This reading is consistent with the evidence in the other two intertexts that the one drawing near is a betrayer of trust. However, it is also possible that the poem is suggesting an opposite reading, seeing Sisera as the one who betrays Jael's gracious generosity. Ambiguities in these verses allow both readings, suggesting, perhaps, that Jael and Sisera are jockeying for the upper hand.

The Choreography of Murder

Blocking out the choreography of 5:26 is difficult; the verse is ambiguous in its expression of the way that Jael reaches for her weapons of a mallet and a tent peg. Does she reach with one hand for the tent peg and the other for the mallet, as someone would do ordinarily, or does she pick up both implements with a single hand, as she might if she were holding off an aggressor with the other?[34] The parallelism of the poem allows for either gesture.

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32. This is probably the original meaning of the verb in its sacrificial context, bringing an offering, and hence the offerer, closer to God. See *HALOT* s.v. קרב: "Arb. *qaruba*; the basic meaning of the Semitic root is to be near, approach; causative: to bring near, often used within the cult in connection with making an offering, see below, *hif*."

33. Klein repeatedly characterizes Jael as deceptive, suggesting that she schemes from the start to dispatch the Canaanite general. She also "assumes" that Jael is Israelite. Neither of these assumptions is supported by the text (*Triumph of Irony*, 42–45).

34. Even if the parallelism of the poem allows the word pair hand/right hand to refer to two hands, left and right, as some scholars have suggested (see, for example, M. Dahood on *ydyhm*, in *The Psalms: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 16–17A; 3 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965–66] 1:163), the underlying reference to rape still flickers in the ambiguity. Moore suggests further that the peg and the mallet might be read as a single weapon, a blunt instrument to smash Sisera's skull (*Judges*, 163).

She Cast Her Hand

In 5:26, the expression 'she cast her hand to the tent peg' (ידה ליתד תשלחנה) occurs. Overall, the tone of this passage suggests that Jael is striking a military blow. This entire expression, with the morphology of ליתד 'to/toward the peg', appears only here in the Hebrew Bible.[35] There are intertexts with the individual words in this phrase, however, and these highlight Jael's role in doing God's will as well as the unexpected reversal wherein a woman offering drink becomes instead the woman wielding an implement of death.[36]

Intertexts with the single word translated 'her hand' (ידה) appear seven times, including here, in the Hebrew Bible.[37] Several of these intertexts are striking. The context of Lev 12:8 recapitulates the cultic allusions of the previous verse: a woman seeking atonement who does not have the price of a lamb in her hand (ידה) can bring less expensive sacrifices. Jael, too, can be seen as bringing the sacrifice that she is able to bring, from the interior of her tent instead of at the public altar, and using the homely instruments of tent peg and mallet instead of the furnishings of the sanctuary.

In Gen 24:18, Rebecca lets down her hand (ידה) to draw up water for Abraham's servant at the well, an image that evokes the gesture of Jael in the previous verse. The language of this intertext suggests a shocking reversal of expectation. In Gen 24, Rebecca's concern for watering Abraham's servant extends to his caravan animals, and this compassion marks her as divinely chosen to be the wife for Isaac. Initially, in Judg 5, Jael's hospitality in offering Sisera milk instead of water, more than he asked for and more than the matriarch offered as well, may suggest that the outcome will also go beyond

35. When the root for 'peg' (Hebrew יתד) appears as a metaphor, as in Ezra 9:8; Isa 22:23 and 25; Ezek 15:3; and Zech 10:4, it refers to something firm, well established, or able to bear weight. The significance of Jael's seizing a tent peg to slay the Canaanite king resonates especially with the Isaiah references: "In that day, says the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a sure place will give way; and it will be cut down and fall, and the burden that was upon it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken" (Isa 22:25 [RSV]). This situation resonates with this intertext, because the Canaanites with 900 iron chariots surely must have seemed like secure pegs to Israel. On the expression 'to cast one's hand' (Hebrew שלח יד), intertexts suggest internal rebellion, struggle, and/or battle to the death. The expression appears seven times in the Hebrew Bible: Lev 16:21; 1 Sam 16:20; 2 Sam 11:14, 12:25, 15:36; 2 Chr 23:10; and Job 8. In the three appearances in 2 Samuel, the expression relates the David/Uriah episode to the David/Absalom story. See the discussion of Nathan's curse in my *Patterns of Destiny*, 95. The unusual morphology of the verb תשלחנה (Qal 3rd-person imperfect), usually identified as a plural form, is probably an archaic form of the feminine singular.

36. Boling also sees the military allusions. See his comment on the Hebrew noun רגל in v. 27 (*Judges*, 115).

37. Feminine construct noun יד + 3rd-person fem. suffix. Gen 24:18, Lev 12:8, Deut 25:11, Judg 5:26, 2 Sam 13:19, Ezra 6:12, and Jer 50:15.

Rebecca's reward. However, in a shocking reversal for the reader—and Sisera—Jael's compassion for Sisera turns upon him, and the imagery of the matriarch becomes the imagery of war. Jael goes from milk to murder.

The intertext at Deut 25:11 is also compelling in the context of this verse, associated as it is with a man's private parts and with a woman's violence. The verse sets up the case of a woman who defends her husband by casting her hand (ידה) to grasp the private parts of his assailant. Such a woman is to have her hand cut off, and Deut 25:12 concludes with the admonition not to "let your eye be merciful," which the JPSV translates as "show no pity." In Judg 5, as in Deut 25, a woman is reaching out her hand to harm a man. However, Deut 25:11–12 is a hypothetical case, and Judg 5 describes a specific incident. The ironic reversals in Judg 5 from the prohibition in Deut 25 are, first, that here Jael is reaching out to slay her husband's ally, not his assailant, and, second, that what is cut off is not the woman's hand but Sisera's life. The element of a woman's role in defense against violent attack is constant in both intertexts, and in both, the woman's action is shocking in its transgression of social expectations. What differentiates Judg 5 from Deut 25 is the judgment of the text on whether the violent defensive action is appropriate or not.

Intertexts of Sexual Aggression

In light of these intertexts that deal with women's accepted social role and the acceptability of a woman's violent defense against aggression, a final intertext is most telling. The noun ידה 'her hand' appears several times in 2 Sam 13, the story of Amnon and Tamar—often enough that it could be considered a key word in that chapter. In addition to the appearance of this language in both intertexts, the underlying structure of the plot is the same in both. In both Judg 5 and 2 Sam 13, a woman brings sustenance to a man of high status who appears disadvantaged and in doing so puts herself in a culturally inappropriate setting of intimacy with a man whom she trusts but whom the reader has reason to believe is suspect.

A detailed review of the action in 2 Sam 13:1–19 and some of its intertextual associations is instructive. Amnon (David's oldest son and heir apparent) is sick with lust for his nubile half-sister Tamar (who is Absalom's full sister) but despairs of being able "to do anything to her." Amnon's companion Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimah, is a cunning man, who asks his cousin why he is so low morning after morning. Amnon confesses his love for Tamar, and Jonadab proposes that Amnon take to his bed and pretend to be sick. When his father comes to see him, Amnon is to request that Tamar, his sister, come to prepare food in front of him so that he can watch the preparation and eat from her hand (מידה [2 Sam 13:5]). Amnon lies down as though sick, and

when the king comes to see him Amnon requests that Tamar, his sister, bake two cakes in front of him so that he might eat from her hand (מידה [2 Sam 13:6]). David sends to Tamar's house requesting that she go to the house of Amnon, her brother, to prepare food for him.

Tamar goes to the house of Amnon, her brother, who is lying down. She takes the risen dough, kneads it, and bakes the cakes in front of him.[38] She takes the pan and sets it out before him, but he refuses to eat. Amnon orders everyone to 'go out' (הוציאו),[39] and everyone 'goes out' (ויצאו, 2 Sam 13:9).[40] Amnon tells Tamar to bring the food into the chamber so that he can eat from her hand (מידך [2 Sam 13:10]), so Tamar takes the cakes that she made and brings them to Amnon her brother in the chamber. When she approaches him to eat, he seizes her and says to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She says to him, "Do not, brother, do not force me, for such is not done in Israel. Do not do this vileness! As for me, how will I be able to bear my shame, and as for you, you will be as one of the vile ones in Israel. Now speak, please, to the King, for he will not refuse me to you." But he does not desire to hear her voice; he overpowers her, forces her, and lies with her.

Now Amnon's revulsion with which he reviles Tamar is greater than the love with which he loved her. Amnon says to her, "Get up and go!" She begs him not to add to this great evil by doing another one in sending her away, but he does not desire to heed her. He calls his boy servant and tells him to "send this outside from upon me, and lock the door after her!" Tamar was wearing a tunic with sleeves, for nubile daughters of the king would have dressed in a garment of this sort, when his servant puts her outside (ויצא) and locks the door after her (2 Sam 18).[41] Tamar puts ashes on her head, rends her tunic, and puts her hand (ידה [2 Sam 13:19]) on her head, screaming aloud as she goes.

Tamar is 'sent out', in language that uses the same root, יצא, and causative conjugation that are used when the onlookers are "sent out" before Amnon rapes her. Although the root "to go out" is the same, the repeated use of the Hiphil conjugation emphasizes that Tamar does not go out on her own, as Di-

38. There is much that is suggestive in the language of these verses in 2 Sam 13. The root לבב can mean the verb 'to bake' and the noun 'cakes' but also 'to burn' (*HALOT* s.v. לבב). The root בצק can mean 'dough' but also 'to swell' (BDB 130b), often of feet, which themselves are often suggestive of genitals, as I noted above.

39. Hiphil conjugation, masc.-plural imperative, Hebrew root יצא.

40. Qal conjugation, 3rd-masc. plural, *waw*-consecutive imperfect from the Hebrew root יצא.

41. The root יצא in Hiphil, *waw*-consecutive 3rd masc.-singular imperfect, apocopated.

nah does, as Leah does, or even as Jael does in the prose narrative of Judg 4.[42] For Tamar, the "going out" is done for her, upon the command of her rapist, and is not an act of autonomy. In this sense, the force of the distinction between Tamar's "going out" and the going out of the other women distances Tamar's situation from theirs. Her "going out" is a step removed from her own volition, although the consequences to her are as dire as though she had gone out on her own, as Dinah does.

The most striking connection to the poetic description of Jael in Judg 5, however, is the repetition of the noun 'her hand' (ידה) throughout the account in 2 Sam 13, ending with the poignant description of her hand on her head as a gesture of despair following the rape and rejection by her half-brother Amnon. The presence of the language of "her hand" connects the account in Judg 5 to the episode of rape in 2 Sam 13, at the same time that the absence of the language of "going out" in the poetic account suggests a different outcome for Jael from the consequences suffered by both Dinah and Tamar. In addition, the account in 2 Sam 13 stresses that Amnon as Tamar's half-brother has no right to touch Tamar, and that is why, at first, he despaired of ever attaining the object of his lust. Sisera, too, has no right to touch Jael. She is not an enemy who is one of the spoils of war; she is an ally and is entitled to Sisera's respect and protection.[43]

The structural similarities and the intertexts of language together suggest that perhaps Sisera, like Amnon, took advantage of a womanly act of nurturing; that perhaps Sisera, like Amnon, initiated the rape of a woman who was forbidden to him; and, perhaps, that the sudden, violent act of Jael against Sisera in Judg 5:26 was less a premeditated blow on behalf of Israel than it was her spontaneous self-defense against an attempted rape by a man who had no right to touch her.[44]

He Lay at Her Feet

The suggestion of attempted rape is supported by the choreography of 5:27. Jael pierces Sisera's temple, and he buckles between her legs, where he lies at

42. See above, under the subhead *Women Who Go Outside*.

43. See my discussion in the introduction to this study, especially n. 7, with regard to interpreters who see Jael as an enemy of Sisera. There is no textual support for this interpretation in Judg 5 and explicit contradiction of this interpretation in Judg 4:17.

44. In this interpretation, I am consistent with Mordecai Levine's suggestion that Judg 5, from v. 22 to the end, represents the view of a woman poet and, in its description of a woman who fights back, is a polemic against the rape by enemy soldiers that women can expect to experience as an outcome of war (*Polemic against Rape*, 83–84).

her feet.[45] For him to fall that way, Sisera would have had to be standing in front of Jael, very close to her legs. Mieke Bal questions twice whether Sisera is "really standing" before Jael. She concludes, "disregarding the realist criterion, the poetess portrays him as standing because it was necessary that he then fall . . . . it is the passage from the position of power of the respected commander to a position of annihilation, from life to death, and, according to the thematician, from sexual tension to postcoital release."[46] Bal's understanding of the rich layers of the imagery encoded in this verse is very powerful. However, although Bal is right to point out the power of this image, there is no reason to question the literal meaning of these words: the poet is painting a specific word picture of a particular situation in which Jael finds herself. What is the larger picture being painted here by the poet? What are the circumstances in which Jael finds herself that necessitate the turn from welcome to wounding in the space between verses? The poet evokes a situation that finds Sisera standing, distracted enough for Jael to reach, perhaps with a single hand, for a tent pin and a mallet, and close enough for her to smite him in his temple, where he falls between her legs. The choreography suggested—but not explicitly drawn—by the poet is an attempted rape of Jael by Sisera. Taken together, the language and imagery here flicker with both sexuality and defense against sexual aggression.[47]

45. Bal characterizes Jael's penetration of Sisera's temple as "a reversed rape" of Sisera by Jael (*Murder and Difference*, 134) but does not note in the language and intertexts preceding it the suggestion of an attempted rape of Jael by Sisera. It is interesting to note that, in the prose account in Judg 4:18–21, Sisera is lying down, as Amnon is in 2 Sam 13. This is another clear difference in detail between the prose account in Judg 4 and the poetic account in Judg 5. Intertextuality reads these texts synchronically, even though, as noted above (n. 3), Judg 5 is earlier than 2 Sam 13.

46. Bal, ibid., 130. The thematician referred to by Bal is Yair Zakovitch, "Sisseras Tod," *ZAW* 93 (1982) 362–74. Bal goes on to extend the symbolism to the imagery implicit in the milk offered to Sisera by Jael. Bal sees in Sisera's fall a perverse motherhood echoed in Deut 28:57, in the context of dire punishment for disobedience. The RSV translates that intertext as follows: "her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet (Heb. *ragleha*) and her children whom she bears, because she will eat them secretly, for want of all things, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns." Bal calls the mother evoked in this verse "the emblematic image of misery." She sees the imagery in Judg 5:27 as suggesting that Sisera is dispatched as though he had been aborted and never existed (ibid., 130–31).

47. There is also an overlay of maternal imagery that is in tension with the suggestive sexuality. Bal sees Sisera as the exhausted child, thirsty for maternal love, and Jael as the giver of sexual love; Bal suggests that the sexual love offered by Jael is beyond Sisera's desire or request (ibid., 121–24). This imagery is present to some extent in both the poem and in the prose narrative. In the poem, Jael brings Sisera milk instead of water, a gesture freighted with maternal associations, especially in so compressed an account as this in Judg 5. The

Together with the ambiguous reading in 5:26 that suggests Jael may be reaching for both tools with a single hand (perhaps using the other to distract from the business of seizing the weapons or perhaps using the other hand to ward off an aggressor), a poetic suggestion of attempted rape begins to take shape. Perhaps, somewhere between v. 25 and v. 26 in ch. 5, a now-refreshed Sisera grabs for Jael as she is serving him—just as Amnon overpowered Tamar under similar circumstances. The intertexts of language and narrative structure between the stories of Jael and Tamar suggest this reason for the sharp change from Jael's initially hospitable welcome to her sudden murderous turn against Sisera.

Intertexts of Narrative Structure

By means of the intertextual relationship of language and structure between the story of Sisera and Jael and the story of Amnon and Tamar, the other episodes of sexual impropriety that also lead to murder in the David cycle are themselves brought to bear upon Judg 5 as well.[48] In addition to the rape of Tamar by Amnon that leads to the killing of Amnon by Tamar's brother Absalom in 2 Sam 13, these include David's affair with Bathsheba that leads to David's murder of her husband, Uriah, in 2 Sam 11; Absalom's rebellion against David, symbolized by his sleeping with his father's concubines on the roof of the palace, which leads to the killing of Absalom by Joab in 2 Sam 16 and 19; and Adonijah's traitorous request for his late father's concubine, Abishag, which leads Solomon to order Adonijah's death for attempted treason in 1 Kgs 2.

In David's story, the transgression of sexual boundaries always has political reverberations on account of David's position as king of Israel.[49] In Jael's story,

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maternal imagery is much stronger in the narrative account: Jael welcomes Sisera as though he were a child, wearied by hard play, and covers him with a blanket (4:18). Jael offers him milk to drink and covers him again (4:19), and Sisera sleeps while he expects her to keep watch (4:20).

48. See Shimon Bar-Efrat for a discussion and chart listing the occasions when sexual impropriety in David's story leads to murder (*Narrative Art in the Bible* [JSOTSup 70; Sheffield: Almond, 1989] 135).

49. The most thorough discussion of the relationship of David's private failings to the national welfare of Israel can be found in Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis's essay, "King David of Israel," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives II* (ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 204–19. Other scholars make passing reference to the tension between David's private actions and the political stage, including Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*; Charles Conroy, *Absalom, Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Samuel 3–20* (An Bib; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978) especially 99–105; Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: King David (II Sam. 9–20)* (Assen/Maastricht: Van

the personal also becomes political, not so much becauseof Jael's leadership position as because of the pivotal location of her tent on the route of Sisera's flight from defeat. Jael's defense of herself becomes a defense of Israel due to the political circumstance of war between Israel and Canaan.

The weight of evidence that sexual impropriety leads to murder allows the reader of Judg 5 to postulate backward that Jael's unexpected murder of Sisera might also participate in this pattern and that her act of violence might thus similarly be in response to an act of sexual impropriety. The pattern set in the David cycle is explicit: sexual aggression leads to violent death, most often the death of the sexual aggressor. In Judg 5 the pattern is sketched incompletely, but the reader's familiarity with the sequence of events making up the pattern allows the reader to fill in the missing elements: violent death in a sexually charged situation suggests that this event is preceded by inappropriate sexual aggression, most likely on the part of the victim of violence.

Given this pattern as well as the strong relationship of structure and diction between the stories in Judg 5 and 2 Sam 13, within the silence between Judg 5:25 and 26 flickers the suggestion that Sisera, like Amnon, has attempted to rape the woman whose hand offered nurture.

Bal suggests that the images that are brought forth in the poem "are metonymically inspired by the few experiences that this woman has by virtue of her own power: to mate, to give birth, and, now, to murder." She posits this poem as "the liberation of an always limited imagination, as much in its experiences as in its means of expression."[50] Surely the experience of attempted rape is part of the experience of this tent-dwelling woman whose husband is absent, and surely even a "limited imagination" seeking "liberation" is able to visualize the ultimate self-defense against this aggression. The murder that Bal describes as one of "the few experiences that this woman has by virtue of her own power" is more than the dispatch of "an enemy of her people," as Bal characterizes Sisera in terms of Jael.[51] Rather, it can be read in this poem as

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Gorcum, 1981), especially 1:68–70, 86–90, 103–13; Everett Fox, *Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul and David: A New Translation of Samuel I and II* (New York: Schocken, 1999) 190, 211; and Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History, Part Three: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 70–71, 136–38, among others.

50. Bal, *Murder and Difference*, 131.

51. Bal's characterization of Sisera as an enemy of Jael's people is not supported by the text. However the Hebrew expression אשת חבר הקיני (Judg 5:24) is translated, whether Jael is the wife of a man named Heber the Kenite or an affiliate of the Kenite clan on her own, she is never identified in the text as an Israelite. Further, as noted above, the parallel identification in Judg 4:17 specifies that there was peace between Sisera's overlord and the clan

the image of a woman victorious in her power to defend herself, her own person, against the violence of an aggressor. If, in the process, she renders a service to the enemies of her enemy, all the better.

Conclusion

I believe that, rather than a calculated and premeditated action motivated by political loyalty, Jael's murder of Sisera is a spontaneous response to an unexpected private threat. Jael is indeed a heroine in Israel, but the poem suggests that she is also a hero on her own behalf, defending her own person against inappropriate aggression. If, as Mordecai Levine suggests, the poem as a whole expresses a woman's protest against the expectation of rape by enemy warriors,[52] then the implicit attempt at rape that takes place between 5:25 and 26 reinforces this polemic. Jael's personal struggle and triumph against an aggressor, who lurks in the experience of every woman in a time of war, is a song of personal as well as national victory.

The poetics of poetry allow for multiple determination—for all these possibilities to be present similtaneously within the ambiguities created by the compressed language of the poem.[53] Here in Judg 5, Jael's personal struggle and success as a woman against an aggressor foreshadow, mirror, and influence the political struggle of Israel against its enemies.

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of the Kenites in the same breath as it notes that Israel defeated Sisera's armies. See my discussion above, in nn. 7 and 43.

52. Levine, *Polemic against Rape*, 83–84. See above, n. 13.

53. Bal notes that texts, by definition, are semiotic constructs, requiring the active participation of audiences for their existence. "The textual object is dynamic, unstable, elusive" (ibid., 135). Bal suggests a visual analogy to the way poems make meaning, citing the "celebrated example of the drawing representing simultaneously a rabbit and a duck. Both isotopies cannot be *seen* simultaneously, but it is possible to pass at will from one to the other" (p. 131, emphasis hers).