Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar*

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Abstract

This study applies one phase of the structural semiotic analysis refined by J. Calloud from the work of A. Greimas to the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. The work focuses on the analytical steps making up the morphological analysis of the text, addressing the patterns, or structures, underlying the level of narrative plot. Morphological analysis is concerned with finding the tension between the positive and negative narrative programs embodied in the text, thereby revealing cultural values embedded in the narrative. Aspects of the biblical view of coercion are thus revealed by this analysis.

1. *Introduction*

This article is a small part of a larger work in which I examine the workings of coercion in Hebrew Bible narrative. In this article I apply a form of structural semiotic analysis to the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38, one of the more than one hundred narratives contained in the corpus of biblical episodes that exhibit elements of coercion. For purposes of this study, to coerce is to dominate or control by exploiting fear or anxiety, to compel someone by force or intimidation. In this definition, a victim is compelled by an explicit or implicit threat of force.[1] This method seems

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1. This definition of coercion is discussed and expanded later in this article, beginning on p. 302.

particularly suited to a study of the way coercion operates within biblical narrative because, in this approach, a reader looks at the language in which a text is expressed and extracts the unique code of cultural values embedded in the language of that text from the 'filigree' of words making up the narrative.[2] I have found structural semiotic analysis to be a very powerful tool for explicating the core values that are encoded in biblical narrative, and for illuminating insights that might not be intuitively apparent.[3] In this study I will offer some background on the methodology of structural semiotic analysis, and then continue with an application of its first phase, morphological analysis, to Genesis 38.

Structural semiotic analysis was originally propounded by Algirdas Julien Greimas and has been modified and applied to elements of general literature by Jean Calloud and the Centre pour l'Analyse du Discours Religieux (CADIR) group, among others.[4] The approach I take in this article is concerned with a specific kind of structural analytic methodology

2.   Calloud (1979: 76) comments on the way texts 'make meaning': 'If "meaning" "circulates" through a text, we need to show the direction it takes and the laws by which it circulates. These laws are not general laws (they do not exist prior to the text), nor are they clearly revealed in discourse. They are inscribed in filigree, as it were, between the words clearly enough for a sound reading to be possible but discreetly enough not to distract the attention of the reader... Since each text must establish its own laws, language preserves traces of them either in the form of memory of past texts or of potentialities of future ones.' Calloud calls these laws the 'discursive code' of the text; this code is unique to each narrative, is embedded in the language in which a text is written, and tells readers how to take meaning from the text it governs. This discursive code is a key to the meaning of the text, but should not be confused with the meaning itself. He writes, 'Every text points to its code at the same time as it expresses its message. All language has this twofold ability: to point to the code and to express the message' (Calloud 1979: 77).

3.   See also Calloud 1976 and CADIR 1979. On Gen. 38 in particular, see Fokkelman 1996. In this essay, although Fokkelman does incorporate many elements of structural analysis of Gen. 38 in his essay, his is not a rigorous structural semiotic analysis. For example, his analysis is heavily weighted to discussion of the occurrences of *Leitwörter* and the concentric circle structure associated with techniques of close reading; his discussion on binary oppositions focuses on linguistic, rather than on thematic features of the text; and he does not address such tools of semiotic analysis as the semiotic square. Fokkelman's insights are, however, interesting and quite useful, and I cite them when appropriate.

4.   See, e.g., Greimas 1987, 1983 and Greimas and Courtés 1982. An excellent elucidation of the semiotic method can be found in Calloud 1979. For an extensive example of semiotic analysis applied to a biblical text, see van Wolde 1989.

that is just beginning to be applied to biblical narratives by scholars such as Daniel Patte and Ellen van Wolde.[5]

In this study I will be modelling the application of a rigorous literary methodology that can be used on other narratives that exhibit the elements of coercion as I have defined it, and as I discuss them further, below. In the process I will be looking to add insights to a reading of Genesis 38 that might not be so intuitively obvious.

2. *Theoretical Underpinnings and Methodological Overview*

Structural semiotic analysis is a rigorous methodology with two major phases and several analytical steps within each phase. A full application of structural semiotic analysis is beyond the scope of this brief demonstration, and is not essential to the task of this work, the exposition of the value and function of coercion in biblical narrative. Therefore, in this study I will describe the application to Genesis 38 of the analytical steps making up just one of these phases, that of the morphological analysis, which even on its own can produce meaningful insights.

The application of a literary methodology in a systematic way allows for two desirable outcomes. First, results that have been termed intuitive or otherwise disparaged for lack of rigor can be derived step by step, thereby eliminating much of the bewilderment felt by readers who ask of intuitive readings, 'how did you get that?'[6] Second, all narrative texts may be treated with this same methodology, facilitating comparison.

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5.   Although I focus on Calloud's approach to structural semiotic analysis, I also acknowledge and build upon the work of scholars who apply other structural and narratological methods to the biblical text, among them Alter 1981, 1983, 1985, 1996; Bal 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Fewell 1987, 1990, 1992, 1993; Gunn 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980; and Jobling 1980, 1987, 1995. See also Patte 1998, 1990; van Wolde 1989.

6.   I am indebted to Edward L. Greenstein for reminding me that (as Eco suggests) intuitive readings are not arbitrary, but follow learned conventions of reading combined with intertextual and other associations; such readings are often quite rich in and of themselves. Here, I suggest additional approaches to uncover meanings inhering in structures that lie below the surface or 'plot' level of a text. See also Eco 1976: esp. 71, where he notes that the meanings encoded in a text occur within a cultural context that must be understood and acknowledged by a reader who may not be fully 'competent' to interpret the text within that cultural context.

Here I apply Calloud's approach to structural semiotic analysis, which differs somewhat from that first proposed by A.J. Greimas who pioneered the semiotic approach.[7] Calloud has applied his methodology to many texts and has developed an approach that can be used by students of structural semiotics. His approach represents a refinement and development of the work of Greimas. It also has the advantage of being divided into its component steps by Calloud himself (1976, 1979).

a. *The Geography of Structural Semiotics*

It may help to begin with the geography of structural semiotics. In this approach, analysts move from the surface of the text to deeper levels of meaning, applying to the narrative a system of correspondences that organizes the movement of meaning from one level to another. The surface level of the text, which is the level of the plot, is where form and content meet. The surface is the starting point for identifying the code of values that rules the universe of discourse of any text. This code varies from text to text and is expressed in two ways: the *figurative* is expressed directly, in language; the *thematic* is expressed indirectly, in discourse about language.[8] The technique of semiotic analysis involves replacing the language of the surface of the text with thematic representations.[9]

Language on the figurative level of narrative in a highly patterned text like the Hebrew Bible can often point to the intersection between the figurative or surface level of a narrative, and the thematic or structural level of the same narrative. Vocabulary and syntax that are similar or identical to the diction of other narratives in the same corpus resonate in the mind of the readers who bring their knowledge of other texts to the act of reading the text in front of them. These analogies on the figurative level invite the reader to recognize literary devices, and also relationships of genre and structure, on the thematic level. This intertextual process is essential to the structural semiotic approach I discuss here.[10] In my analysis, my

7. See, e.g., Greimas 1987, 1983.

8. Calloud terms this indirect expression 'metalanguage' (Calloud 1976: 75-77).

9. Compare structural anthropology and structural linguistics, both of which also move back and forth from surface structure to deep structure.

10. Intertextuality is based on the idea that readers bring their knowledge of other texts to the act of reading the text in front of them. Colapietro (1993: 123) defines intertextuality as: 'A term introduced by Julia Kristeva and widely adopted by literary theorists to designate the complex ways in which a given text is related to other texts'; Colapietro (1993: 123) elaborates: 'These *intertextual* relationships include anagram, allusion, adaptation, translation, parody, pastiche, imitation, and other kinds of trans-

goal is to identify the range and nuance of the code of values expressed in both of these dimensions, the figurative and the thematic, with respect to the narrative as a whole and especially in its valuation of coercive acts and responses. Intertextuality is the frequent marker of significant points within these dimensions.

Calloud's method owes much to the two strands of structuralism that predominated during the twentieth century, the syntagmatic structuralism of Vladimir Propp, and the paradigmatic structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Propp, a Russian formalist, philologian, and folklorist, applied his methodology to a corpus consisting of about 100 texts in an effort to define a classification or genre for groups of tales.[11] Proppian analysis concentrates on the surface level of the plot, and identifies and abstracts the structural elements of the text based on the actions undertaken in the narrative. This approach is also termed 'syntagmatic analysis' because it relies on the sequence of episodes, or the syntax, of the plot. It is relatively independent of language, since it focuses on the sequence of episodes that occur during the course of the story, and this sequence can be summarized independently of the actual words used in the narrative under consideration.

Unlike Propp's application of syntagmatic analysis to many stories in order to define what Propp identifies as common genres, Calloud applies Propp's syntagmatic analysis to a single text in order to identify the matrix of cultural values operating within that text. The sequence of transformations necessary to change an initial state represented in a text into a final state make up what Calloud terms 'narrative programs' (Calloud 1979: 57). These narrative programs become apparent when an analysis of the

formation. In the literary theories of structuralism and post-structuralism, texts are seen to refer to other texts (or to themselves as texts) rather than to an external reality. The term *intertext* has been used variously for a text drawing on other texts, for a text thus drawn upon, and for the relationship between both.' See Kristeva 1986: 37: 'Every text is constructed as a mosaic of other texts, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts. The notion of intertextuality comes to replace that of intersubjectivity.' Much has been written on the theory of intertextuality in general, and on its application to biblical studies in particular. Here I note the most accessible of these. For further discussion, see the following: Bowman and Swanson 1997; Brenner and Fontaine (eds.) 1997; Brettler 1995; Cazelles 1962; Crownfield (ed.) 1992; Eisenbaum 1997; Enelow (ed.) 1933; Exum and Clines (eds.) 1993; Fewell (ed.) 1992; Fishbane 1985; Ginsberg 1969; Granowski 1992; Greenstein 1998, 2000; Hartman and Budick (eds.) 1986; Johnson 1969; Kessler 1994; O'Neill 1996; Rendsburg 1986; Savran 1988, 1994; Swartley 1994; Zakovitch 1991.

11. See Propp 1968. For a recent application of Propp's methodology to a broad biblical corpus, see my book (Sharon 2002).

structure of a text reveals that a sequence of action abstractions (Propp calls these 'functions') repeats itself within that text, with or without variations. The similarities in the sequences of functions that recur in a narrative demonstrate a system of relationships present in the text (Calloud 1979: 57). The differences reflect dialectics of values that operate on the deep structure of the text, that may be expressed in many different ways. Claude Lévi-Strauss famously described these dialectics of values as binary oppositions.[12] Calloud uses several descriptors for these oppositions, such as the narrative program (NP) or anti-narrative program (–NP) warring for dominance in a text. Thus, Calloud's approach to structural semiotic analysis combines Propp's syntagmatic analysis of the action segments in the plot of a narrative with Lévi-Strauss's paradigmatic analysis of the cultural values embedded in the deep structure of a text.

b. *The Application of Structural Semiotic Analysis*
The practice of structural semiotic analysis consists of two stages, *morphological analysis* and *discourse analysis*. Here, in this study, I will focus my discussion of Genesis 38 just upon the first stage, a morphological analysis, which, as its name implies, addresses the patterns, or structures, underlying the topmost layer of the narrative, the level of plot. Even on its own, isolated from its companion tool of discourse analysis, morphological analysis will elucidate many of the cultural values embedded in the text. The morphological analysis is concerned with finding the tension between the positive and negative narrative programs embodied in the text.

In a full structural semiotic analysis, as noted earlier, the morphological analysis would be followed by a discourse analysis, focussing on the structuring of the language of the text. Then the results of both analyses would be brought together and charted on the *semiotic square*, a working tool for bringing the different phases of the analyses together to frame the meanings embodied on different levels of narrative. Although it is not part of my explication of only a small portion of Calloud's method in this study, the semiotic square can be useful as a graphic representation of the multiple outcomes resulting from the morphological analysis and the discourse analysis, and their relationship to one another. Structural semiotic analysis as a whole results in identifying complex relationships along multiple axes, and a graphic representation of these inter-relationships can help us better to understand their interaction.

12. See, for example, Lévi-Strauss's classic 1955 essay. This language is taken from structural linguistics (Troubetzkoi, Jakobson, etc.).

c. *The Process of Morphological Analysis*

The process of morphological analysis entails two stages. In the first stage, structural patterns are identified by reading the surface level of the narrative and looking at what is going on in the chronological sequence of the text—what the elements are that repeat within the narrative in approximately the same sequence each time, resulting in a description of the structures underlying the surface or plot level. Once these repeating structural sequences are identified and their component elements named, they delineate the internal structures underlying the surface or plot level of the narrative that may mirror, distort, or contrast with the surface meaning of the text. These repeating sequences can then be compared to one another and any variations in the pattern can be noted for further exploration.

In the second stage, each segment of the narrative, that is, each iteration of the sequence, is analyzed to identify the goals of the text that it promotes or subverts. These goals may be explicit or implicit, and are termed by Calloud the narrative program (NP) of the text, as well as the antitheses, the anti-narrative program (–NP), with which the goals of the narrative are in tension. The NP is expressed by the sequence of states and actions that make up the plot of the narrative. When this sequence of actions and states is summarized by verbs and nouns that convey the flow of the story, certain actions appear to follow after one another, Calloud explains, 'in complete conformity and in a coherent order. They work together to achieve a common goal. This set of coherent, similar operations is called the narrative program (NP). It includes all the operations necessary to transform an initial state, after many partial operations, into a final state' (Calloud 1979: 61).

However, during the course of the narrative, and in the process of morphological analysis, another series of actions emerges that attempts to thwart the progress made in the narrative program 'by cancelling out the transformation which occurred in it' (Calloud 1979: 61). This 'adverse intervention' is inevitable, since the movement of a story is determined by an initial 'lack' that is the result of some kind of adversity and that is ultimately, after the twists and turns of the plot, 'liquidated', or resolved, by the story's end.[13] The sequence of elements that oppose the goals of the text as expressed in the NP is termed the –NP.

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13. See Calloud 1979: 61. On these paired functions marking the beginning and end of a tale, summarized by Propp in the function category lack/lack liquidated, and including within it villainy or misfortune/villainy or misfortune liquidated, see Propp 1968: 53, 92, and *passim*.

Every narrative must contain both an NP and an –NP that stand in tension with one another. Without this tension between an NP and its antithesis, there can be no conflict, no movement, no story, since stories cannot proceed without conflict (however broadly defined that conflict may be). Calloud suggests that the existence of both explains the often polemical nature of narrative, even when the polemic is subtle or not apparent at all at a first, intuitive reading (Calloud 1979: 61). Competing NPs may not always be explicit, but, whenever one is present, its antithesis is also present, even if only by implication. It is essential for a reader to explicate the –NP even when it is not obvious, because meaning inheres in differences, contrasts, oppositions, and comparisons, and the meaning of a narrative may not be fully explicated without articulating both the NP and the –NP. These positive and negative NPs together define the values assumed in the text, even if both are not explicit upon first reading (Calloud 1979: 62). As I demonstrate in my sample analysis of Genesis 38, even the least apparent of the values defined by the NPs can often be identified by the intertextual resonances of the language associated with them.

In what follows in this study, I offer a morphological analysis of Genesis 38, and an elucidation of the narrative and anti-narrative programs, following a brief overview of the other two tools of structural semiotic analysis.

3. *Morphological Analysis of Genesis 38*

Applying Propp's morphological analysis to Genesis 38 reveals that a series of functions or action sequences appears to repeat itself with minor variations. Lining up these repeating sequences with one another shows that Genesis 38 appears to be divided into four segments containing these sequences in the same general order, indicating that these segments share structural commonalities. The segments are:

38.1-11	(from Judah's descent to Canaan to Tamar's banishment to her father's house to await Shelah's attainment of his majority);
38.12-23	(from the death of Judah's wife to his giving up on finding the prostitute who holds his staff, cord, and seal in pledge);
38.24-26	(from the message to Judah that Tamar is pregnant to his admission that she is more righteous than he); and
38.27-30	(the birth and naming of Tamar's twin sons).

My analysis reveals two NPs at work within these segments, a main NP that represents the direction of resolution from start to finish in the text, and an –NP that attempts to do the opposite by canceling out transformations

occurring in the main NP (Calloud 1979: 61). The four segments of the narrative each exhibit the same abstract scheme, which I note in the discussion that follows. There I describe the NPs as they emerge from my analysis, and then go on to note significant aspects of the selection and designation of each of the syntagmatic functions.

a. *Syntagmatic Analysis*

The syntagmatic analysis entails noting the structural elements, termed 'functions' by Propp, and listing them for each segment in Genesis 38. The common structural patterns shared by these segments consists of the following elements:

1. time connective;
2. opportunity for continuity/potential for progeny;
3. complication: threat to continuity/progeny;
4. coercive act/response;
5. sanction;
6. separation.

It is especially useful, when aligning the four segments with one another, to compare the functions making up the structure of each. Accordingly, I have organized my discussion of each function into four sections corresponding to these segments.

(1) *Time connective*

38.1	ויהי בעת ההוא	('Then, at that time...')
38.12	וירבו הימים	('When many days had passed...')
38.24	ויהי כמשלש חדשים	('Then, about three months later...')
38.27	ויהי בעת לדתה	('Then, at the time for her birthing...')

These time connectives seem to mark the beginnings of parallel structures, and serve as clues to divide the text into segments.[14]

The time connective occurs in these places only, and nowhere else where it might be expected to occur, such as in 38.5 to indicate the long period between the births of Shelah and his elder brother Onan that is suggested by Judah's banishment of Tamar in 38.11, or in 38.6 to indicate the passage of time between the birth of Er and his marriageability. Three of the instances consist of the syntactic formula of ויהי, 'then',[15] followed

14. Similarly Fokkelman 1996: 167-68.
15. See KB 243b, which characterizes this formulation as 'a fossilized expression' with the force of 'and then'.

by a preposition, and the first and last segments are marked by temporal formulas beginning ויהי בעת, 'then at the time…' The one time marker that does not begin with ויהי, the second one at 38.12, inaugurates a structural reversal that I discuss in detail below, upon which the entire narrative turns. Thus, its difference draws attention to the pivotal segment it initiates.

(2) *Opportunity for continuity/potential for progeny*

38.2	Judah marries and cohabits with the daughter of Shua
38.12	The daughter of Shua dies and Judah is comforted
38.24	Tamar is pregnant
38.27	Tamar is in labor with twins

This function of continuity begins to suggest the narrative programs of this text.[16] In the first segment, 38.2 offers the hope that continuity in the form of progeny will be forthcoming. And, in fact, it is: the following verses, 38.3-5, relate the conception and birthing of three male heirs. The syntax in which one follows the next with barely a breath suggests the ease and alacrity with which each birth follows the one before. This appears to be good news for Judah, who seems to be on his way to establishing a family of clans to rival his father's. Intertextuality, however, suggests that the narrative program at work here is not so straightforward. To those readers familiar with the pattern of Genesis, in which the birth of a significant character follows years of barrenness and trouble, Judah's ease in fathering his brood foreshadows, at a minimum, a different outcome from that of Judah's ancestors.[17]

The second segment, beginning in 38.12 and noting the death of Judah's wife, appears at first glance to be an odd choice to categorize as an

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16. The narrative program expresses explicitly the values embedded in the surface narrative of the text, and only implied. When both are present, they express the polemical nature underlying most texts, and Calloud (1979: 61-62) suggests that in some cases there may be more than two. Van Wolde (1989: 84) finds only two kinds of narrative programs, one of acquisition and another of loss. See my further discussion of narrative programs immediately following this section on syntagmatic analysis of the text.

Fokkelman (1996: 168) views this first segment as a prelude to the main plot. As is clear from my discussion, I view this segment as an essential element of the plot, containing as it does the coercive act that disrupts equilibrium and sets the rest of the episode in motion.

17. More, the tension between the positive and narrative programs in the text is suggested here, as I discuss below in section 'b. *Narrative Programs*'.

opportunity for continuity.[18] However, the intertextual example of the patriarch Abraham again resonates for the well-versed reader.[19]

After the death of Sarah, Abraham marries again and continues to father progeny, actions presumably in keeping with the divine will since these sons are themselves fruitful and establish clans. Certainly the opposite is the case for Judah's sons: the text is unambiguous in its attribution of Er and Onan's early and childless deaths to divine displeasure (38.7, 10). The intertextual message is that Judah now has the same potential for continuity that Abraham has—the death of his wife is an opportunity for him, as it is for Abraham, to father more children.

The third segment, 38.24, presents Tamar pregnant with the potential for progeny. The suspense is in how this pregnancy will be received by Judah, since it occurs outside the socially sanctioned framework of marriage in general, and Tamar's promised union with Shelah in particular. This opportunity for continuity is heavily shadowed by the dramatic irony that only the audience and Tamar know that Judah is the father, and that this

18.   An intertextual approach makes salient the choice to categorize this segment as an opportunity for continuity. Judah is comforted after the death of his wife: וינחם יהודה, 'Judah [was] comforted', 38.12. After Sarah's death and burial related in the narrative of Gen. 23, Abraham finds a wife for his son Isaac (Gen. 24), who is comforted for the death of his mother: וינחם יצחק, 'Isaac [was] comforted', 24.67. The verb form וינחם occurs only four times in the Hebrew Bible with a human subject of the verb (as opposed to God as the subject). In every case except Judah's in Gen. 38.12, the context deals with marriage, family, or concern for the well-being of progeny: in Gen. 24.67, Isaac is comforted for the death of his mother; in Gen. 50.21, Joseph reassures his brothers that even after the death of Jacob, their father, Joseph will take care of them and their children, and Joseph comforts them and speaks intimately to them; and in 2 Sam. 12.24, David comforts Bathsheba after the loss of their child, and they conceive Solomon. Judah's action runs counter to every other occurrence of this form of the verb with a human subject in his failure to take action to continue and protect the family lineage. Instead, Tamar is the agent who secures these goals.

19.   The patriarchal intertexts resonate further. The very next verse following Isaac's finding comfort in his marriage to Rebecca is the first of a new chapter, Gen. 25, in which Abraham, too, takes a wife, Keturah, although the text does not explicitly state that Abraham finds comfort with her. Keturah bears him six more sons, each of whom is the patriarch of a clan. The last-named of Abraham's sons with Keturah is Shuah (שוח, 25.2), who bears a name that sounds similar to that of Judah's father-in-law, Shua' (שוע). Shuah (שוח) ends in a guttural vocalized with a 'furtive' *patah*. The Hebrew letters *'ayin and het* have the same point of articulation in the back of the throat; they differ only in voicing: *'ayin* is voiced and *het* is unvoiced. Along with other correspondences, these resonances draw the reader's attention to a comparison of the two patriarchs.

pregnancy, too, is the ironic presentation of an opportunity for the continuation of Judah's line.

The fourth segment, 38.28-29, depicts a time of great opportunity as well as danger. God has been clear in condemning Er and Onan, whom God deems worthy of death. The question is where God stands on this pregnancy conceived by Judah under questionable circumstances and preserved at the last moment only by Judah's public contrition and confession that Tamar is more righteous than he.

Is this enough to secure divine approbation? Will Judah's line continue? In this segment the advent of twins suggests that Tamar's pregnancy is a time of immense divine blessing as well as risk. Two babies at once is surely a sign of divine approval within the biblical context, but the danger of such a pregnancy is great for both the mother and the babies, and the danger inherent in rivalry between such a sibling pair is well-known to those familiar with earlier biblical twins, Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob. The birth of Tamar's twins presents an opportunity for continuity that may or may not reach fruition.[20]

(3) *Complication: threat to continuity/progeny*

38.6-7, 8-10	Er displeases God, who kills him; Onan wastes his seed instead of meeting his levirate obligation and God kills him as well
38.16	Judah goes in to a roadside prostitute
38.24	Tamar, pregnant, is threatened with burning
38.28-29	High-risk parturition of twins

The first segment is doubled in this narrative, first in 38.6-7 when Er displeases God who causes Er to die although the reason is not specified, and again in 38.8-10 where Onan's transgression is specified and God causes him to die as well.[21] The doubling here emphasizes Judah's loss, and his failure to see the fulfillment of the potential for progeny inherent

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20. On a view of twinning as a literary (hence cultural) device to suggest splitting of characteristics and ambiguity of signification, see Wander (1973: 75-99, esp. 86). See also Kunin 1995: esp. 105-106, where Kunin also notes correctly that the biblical cultural context appears to view the fact of bearing twins to be a sign of divine blessing expressed through fecundity. On the pattern of ultimogeniture in the Bible, see Greenspahn 1994 and Syrén 1993.

21. On the suggestiveness of Er's name for concepts such as 'childless' (ערירי), and of Onan's to 'of naught' (און), as well as for a review of midrashic associations of Er's name to the Hebrew רע ('evil', and so forth), see Friedman 1990: 26-32, esp. 27 and n. 8.

in the earlier part of the narrative.[22] Two of his sons are dead, and the third is at risk and so not to be given the woman with whom he is obligated under levirite law to cohabit. Tamar appears to be the source of the threat to Judah's goal of continuity (Friedman 1990: 23-61).

In the second segment, 38.16, after Judah is 'comforted' following the death of his wife (וינחם יהודה, 38.12), Judah patronizes a prostitute during the potentially tumultuous days of sheep shearing instead of marrying to provide an opportunity for continuity.[23] Judah, too, has the potential for progeny, an opportunity that he would waste, as surely as Onan does, in the fleeting contact with a roadside prostitute were it not for the wiliness of Tamar.

Judah must act in a manner befitting his status as a patriarch in order to achieve the patriarchal goal of continuity. Judah's inaction appears to be a threat to this goal. Judah takes Tamar for a harlot—the Hebrew word is זונה, which comes from a root whose secondary meaning is 'to stray', or 'to turn away from'.[24] Tamar must stray from the direct path because Judah has strayed from his obligation to behave righteously by her.

Returning to one's father's house is, in this case, crooked, the result of Judah's deceptive intent. Staying in one's husband's household, as Tamar did after Er's death when Onan was given his levirite duty, is the straight path.[25] Judah coerces her to stray; Tamar takes a crooked path to make

22. On the role of doubling and tripling in folk narratives, see Olrik 1965. According to Olrik, doublings and triplings on the plot level represent single events on a structural level. Propp (1968: 74-75) agrees.

23. Again, intertextuality suggests that a more appropriate 'comforting' may be had in remarriage, since the identical expression is used of Isaac, who finds comfort after his mother's death in his marriage to Rebecca (וינחם יצחק, 24.67), in the verse preceding the announcement that Abraham, too, has taken another wife. As I note above, in my discussion of the function of opportunity for continuity/potential for Progeny, both Abraham and Isaac find comfort for the death of Sarah in their respective marriages; theirs is the approved manner, blessed in Abraham's case with an abundance of progeny, and in Isaac's case later with twin sons, all of whom are themselves fruitful.

24. See KB, under the first meaning for the root, *qal* 2b: '*sich buhlerish, abwenden vom*', 'to turn away from'. Ironically, another woman who returns to her father's house is described with the same Hebrew root, perhaps *because* she has returned to her father —the concubine of Gibeah in Judg. 19. For a discussion on the literary implications of the philology of this root, see Bird 1989: 75-94.

25. One clue to biblical practice might be found in the case of the daughter of a priest in Lev. 22.13 who is divorced without issue. She, specifically, must return to her father's house. I read this specification of this return by the priestly daughter as the exceptional case, since here she is singled out and directed this way in contrast to other

the way straight again, initiating the continuation of Judah's line directly through him since she cannot do so through one of Judah's sons. As I note below in discussing the fourth segment in Section (4), *Coercive act/ response*, not until her straying has been seen for what it is—righteous action—does the structure of these segments 'straighten out'.

The threat to continuity in the third segment is obvious: if Tamar is burned for unchastity, her progeny will die with her, and with them, ironically, Judah's line. Her status as chaste widow appears to be violated. A direct negative relationship is beginning to emerge: lack of righteousness in keeping with one's status results in failure to procreate.

Has Tamar overstepped God's bounds? Will she suffer God's punishment as Er and Onan have done? Again in this segment Tamar seems to embody a threat to continuity.

In the fourth segment, 38.28-29, the threat is two-fold, mirroring the two sets of values inherent in the narrative. The first danger, to the continuation of Judah's line via progeny, is whether the twins in Tamar's womb will have a safe arrival into the world or whether they will perish in the process. The second, reflecting the value of the righteous discharge of obligations in keeping with one's status, is whether the one who is first to breach the womb will be appropriately recognized. The question of primogeniture, of whether the brothers will each have his place respected, is literal in this segment as it is figurative earlier in Onan's violation of his brother's heritage in failing to do his levirate duty by Er. This segment thus contains and combines both values at issue in the narrative at large: What is the relationship of continuity to proper discharge of the obligations inhering in one's status?

(4) *Coercive act/response*

38.11	Judah withholds Tamar from Shelah and sends Tamar away; Tamar complies
38.17-19	Tamar requires a pledge from Judah; Judah complies
38.24-25	Judah orders Tamar burned; Tamar resists
38.27-30	None; the appropriate baby is marked as firstborn

daughters of Israel. Her return to her father's house is due, perhaps, to the fact that her father's lineage is priestly and, in the absence of her husband, she returns to her father so that the humiliation of the lot of the childless widow in the home of her father-in-law would not accrue to the holy families of the priestly class. As the daughter of a priest living in her father's house, her food and circumstances would presumably be superior to those of other widows, who make up a social class that is a biblical watchword for those in poverty and need.

This function of coercion deals with a coercive action and/or the response to it in each segment. Generally, to coerce is to dominate or control by exploiting fear or anxiety, to compel someone by force or intimidation. In this definition, a victim is compelled by an explicit or implicit threat of force. A slightly expanded definition has been proposed by Parke Burgess, a rhetorician who has written extensively on the nature of the coercive act.[26] Burgess suggests that a coercer's chief aim is to induce in the victim an experience of having no choice (Burgess 1973: 63). Burgess notes that all social situations depend upon communication and cooperation. In demanding the victim's cooperation, the coercer rejects use of direct force against the victim; the assailant sincerely hopes that the victim will be 'persuaded by a *threat* of force in the absence of *actual* force' (Burgess 1973: 63 [emphasis his]). Burgess claims, 'Clearly, the nature, meaning, or function of any specific command would absolutely depend upon how the command and its underlying power are conceived by speaker and audience' (Burgess 1973: 70).

In the first segment, Judah the patriarch tells Tamar his daughter-in-law to return as a widow to her father's house until Shelah grows up. In this episode, Judah has all the power in this relationship—as is clear from his control over Tamar's life and death later in 38.24—and Tamar has none. Tamar is silent, and complies with Judah's command, offering no resistance (38.11): וֵתֵּלֶךְ תָּמָר וַתֵּשֶׁב בֵּית אָבִיהָ ('Then Tamar [went and] dwelt in the house of her father').

Judah's action bears looking at for several reasons. Tamar was not sent home after Er's death; Judah sends Onan to do his levirate duty immediately. Is Shelah really so much younger than his brothers? No indication of an unusual interval between the boys' birth is indicated in the text: their births in 38.3-5 follow one right after the other without any time interval being noted between them. However, the narrative notes in 38.11 that Judah thinks to himself that he will save Shelah from the fate of his brothers by withholding Tamar from him, and that Judah has no intention of making good on his pledge to give Tamar to his youngest son. Shelah's age may be a ruse that the naive Tamar believes as she accedes to the patriarch's command.

Judah's proposal to Tamar is not a suggestion, nor is it the opening of a discussion of her options. Tamar has no choice—she departs from Judah's household to return to her father. Tamar's compliance may also be due to her belief here that Judah is sincere in his pledge to give her to Shelah.

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26. See, e.g., Burgess 1968, 1970, 1973.

Tamar trusts Judah to discharge his obligations righteously, in keeping with his status as patriarch, and this faith contributes to her willingness to comply with Judah's directive. It is only when Tamar realizes that Judah will not keep his pledge that she takes matters into her own hands by means of an indirect strategy (38.14).

In the second segment, beginning in 38.17, Tamar asks Judah to name his price for her services, which he does. But Judah's word is not enough for Tamar—after all, she herself has experienced his failure to deliver on earlier promises. Judah apparently does not expect the roadside prostitute to ask for a pledge—perhaps this was not the custom, or perhaps he was well enough known in the neighborhood not to expect to need one.

In any event, when the veiled prostitute requires a pledge from Judah, he does not know what pledge would satisfy her. When she asks for the signs of his office, Judah complies without protest. The objects she requests represent Judah's identity, which she hopes to use later on, and thus are more valuable to Tamar in themselves than as a pledge to be redeemed for the promised gift. Judah is so eager to avail himself of the prostitute's services that he surrenders his staff, cord, and seal to her without protest. Perhaps Judah cannot imagine that his staff and cord would be worth more to a roadside prostitute than his promised gift.

Judah is certain that his word is good, and he expects very quickly to redeem these symbols of his status. He has no consciousness of the obligation he has ignored, the wrong he must set right, and sees himself as he is not—a righteous patriarch of unchallenged status—just as he sees Tamar as she is not, for she is neither a killer of husbands nor a prostitute by the road.

Can Tamar's action be called coercive? The definition of coercion requires two conditions to be met: the threat of force, and the appearance to the victim of not having choice. Neither of these conditions is met here. No threat of force is explicit or implicit in the situation, and Judah has options: he is free to go on his way, postponing the fulfillment of his desire until the means of payment is readily at hand. Judah expects to pay, even though he does not have the payment readily available; a pledge to secure later payment for services received now seems reasonable even to him. According to this definition, Tamar's action cannot itself be called coercive.

Rather, Tamar's action represents a belated resistance to Judah's expulsion of Tamar from his household. In the first segment, Tamar accedes to coercion as long as she believes that Judah will deliver her to Shelah. The

narrative makes it clear to the reader that the continuity of Judah's line through Tamar is God's will—Onan is punished for withholding seed from her. Tamar resists Judah's coercion when she no longer believes that he will do what he promised: she dons her disguise only when she realizes that although Shelah is grown, she has not been given to him (38.14). Tamar deceives Judah, appearing as something she is not, just as Judah deceived Tamar in 38.11, appearing as a righteous patriarch when his intention was false from the start. If Tamar cannot be the progenitress of Judah's line directly through established levirate practices, she will accomplish her goal indirectly through deception.[27] Ultimately, Tamar is rewarded for serving God's will by these indirect measures. Judah acknowledges his own guilt, directly linking Tamar's status as more righteous than he is to his own withholding of her from Shelah. This acknowledgment allows Judah ultimately to participate in Tamar's reward. In Judah's case, as later in the case of David, his distant descendant, when he hears Nathan's parable in 2 Sam. 12.13, confession following self-recognition mitigates the potential punishment.

In the third segment, 38.24-5, the coercive ante has been raised, and the stakes are now life and death. The threat of violence is very much present as Tamar is brought out to be burned. Judah is secure in his false view of himself as righteous patriarch. Judah had sent Tamar to her father's house as a chaste widow and here is blatant evidence that she has violated her status! He is almost dismissive in his terse judgment: הוציאוה ותשרף ('bring her out and she shall be burned!', 38.24). As in the first segment, Judah is all-powerful and Tamar is completely at his mercy. Unlike her response to Judah's initial command, however, which had an outcome that was unsatisfactory for Tamar and unproductive of progeny to Judah, this time Tamar resists Judah's order. She does this in a characteristically indirect way, allowing Judah to make the moral choice: admit his error, losing face but gaining continuity, or pretending to righteousness that is not his, and killing at one stroke both Tamar and his own seed. Choosing this indirect strategy allows Tamar to set the terms of the paradox Judah must resolve. Tamar is testing Judah, a test that is crucial to the continuity of the family, to his right to lead his own clan, the clan of his father (especially in their coming confrontation with Joseph in Egypt), and, ultimately, Israel, in the person of David and his dynasty.

27. Marcus (1986) and Prouser (1991) have studied the inverse relationship between successful deception and the status of the deceiver.

The fourth segment contains no function that is a response to coercion; the threat has been met, proper relationships have been maintained, symbolized by the action of the midwife who ties a thread around the hand of the first child to breach the womb. The imbalance to kinship relationships, and the threat to primogeniture implicit in Onan's waste of seed in his refusal to perform his levirate obligation to his brother's wife in the first segment (38.9), are by now resolved by means of Tamar's stratagem and Judah's admission of fault. The equilibrium is restored.

(5) Sanction

38.11	Tamar accedes to Judah's command
38.20-23	Judah gives up his effort to make payment
38.26	Judah admits wrong
38.27-30	Both twins are born

This function of sanction expresses the explicit or implicit judgment of the text upon the actions described in that segment. The first segment, 38.11, closes on Tamar's acknowledgment of Judah's total power over her. Tamar judges Judah as righteous, based on his status as patriarch, even though Judah's true secret intention is to deny Tamar her rights (38.11). This represents a contradiction that must be resolved in the course of the narrative: Judah is to be brought into internal compliance with the expectation that he will act in a manner consonant with his external status as righteous patriarch.

The second segment, 38.20-23, demonstrates the persistence of Judah's lack of righteousness. Neither Judah nor his son Onan fulfill their obligations. The price of Onan's failure is death. What is to be the price of Judah's failure?

Just as Judah makes only two efforts to continue his line—finding a wife for Er, and ordering Onan to perform his levirate duty—and fails to make the final effort required—to give Tamar to Shelah—so, too, only two efforts are made to find the prostitute: the Adullamite first searches her out himself, and, when that fails, inquires among the townspeople. When the Adullamite returns empty handed, Judah fears popular judgment and calls off the search 'lest we become objects of ridicule' (פֶּן נִהְיֶה לָבוּז, 38.23).

Would Judah prefer the appearance of rectitude rather than risk his status in the eyes of the people in order to pay a debt owed to a roadside prostitute? At the close of the second segment, it is clear that Judah has chosen the appearance of righteousness over its actuality; he prefers popular judgment to right action.

The third segment, 38.26, intensifies the problem for Judah, forcing him to render public judgment on himself—he must either appear righteous and commit murder, or admit he was wrong. Finally, Judah claims the symbols of office as well as the reality, as he admits that Tamar is more righteous than he because he withheld her from Shelah. His admission explicitly connects Tamar's harlotry with the issue of continuity and his own duplicity. As he admits his error and situates its origin, Judah's public image of righteousness is congruent with his private reality. The paradoxes of continuity and status, appearance and reality, are resolved: one must behave righteously to deserve progeny, even at the apparent cost of image and even life. As others have noted,[28] this transformation prepares Judah to be the spokesman on behalf of his brothers before Joseph in the upcoming chapters.

Here the stakes are set out and the resolution confirmed both structurally and semiotically.

That this resolution is a lasting one and also divinely acceptable is apparent in the fourth segment. Just as there was no coercion nor response to coercion in the previous function, since right relationships have been preserved throughout the final segment and appearance is congruent to reality on questions of status (specifically, primogeniture as the first to breach the womb, even with just his fist, is designated as the elder), so, too, here there is no judgment explicit in the text. Both babies are born alive, testament to divine approbation and the granting of continuity to Judah and motherhood to Tamar.

This denouement is emphasized in 38.26, where the text notes that Judah is not again intimate with Tamar, indicating that her status of motherhood is already perfectly realized. For women in the biblical world, sexual intimacy is not an end in itself; the ultimate goal is to produce offspring, to achieve the status of motherhood.[29] Once she bears the twins, Tamar is no longer a permanent widow in her father's house, nor even in the house of her father-in-law. She is the mother of two boys, and the status of motherhood is viewed by the Bible as a sign of God's handiwork, and, by extension, of divine approbation. When Rachel, beloved by her husband, pleads with Jacob in Gen. 30.1 to give her children or she will be as one dead, Jacob responds in anger that he is not God to give or withhold the fruit of

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28. See Ackerman 1982; Levenson 1993: 156-64; and Landes 1980: 31-42.

29. See, for example, Meyers's study of the roles of women in ancient Israel (Meyers 1988: esp. 165-68).

the womb (30.2).[30] Earlier, motherhood is explicitly linked to divine agency when the text notes that God opens Leah's womb because God sees that she is disdained by her husband in 29.31. The context suggests divine approbation, or, at least, divine compassion for a woman scorned, and the means of comfort is the birth of a son.[31] Tamar's happy state of motherhood can be seen, in the light of Rachel and Leah's examples, as an expression of divine blessing.

In other instances where women are not intimate with men, the context explicitly or implicitly excludes any motherhood role. These include Michal in 2 Sam. 6.23, who is explicitly described as having no child until her death; the ten concubines of David after Absalom's defeat in 2 Sam. 20.3; and Tamar, daughter of David, after she is raped by Amnon in 2 Sam. 13.15, 20. In each of these cases, the immediate context is political, having to do with the royal line of succession. In the first, the animosity between Michal and David has national consequences, since a child of that union would unite partisans of Saul and David, and the absence of such an heir, ascribed here to petty bickering in the private sphere of marital relations, extends the contention between northern and southern interests and leads ultimately to the divided kingdom. In the second, by publicly refusing to cohabit with the ten concubines after Absalom sleeps with them on the roof of the palace, David is committing the symbolic political act of rejecting Absalom's usurpation of his position, as well as avoiding any possible confusion of paternity. Compare Jacob's condemnation of Reuben in Gen. 49.4, Ishbosheth's accusation of Abner in 2 Sam. 3.7-11, and, most clearly, Adonijah's request for Abishag in 1 Kgs 2.13-25, where the symbolic significance of the taking of a king's concubine as usurpation is made explicit. In the third, Amnon's unfitness for the throne after his act of rape is mirrored in Tamar's unfitness to be married, or even to function publicly outside her brother's household; Amnon's private acts, first of rape and then of rejection, have political consequences for the nation as a whole.

In each of these examples, the women in question are childless as a result of the withholding of intimacy. In none of these examples do the women already have children. In Genesis 38, Tamar is also childless as a result of the withholding of intimacy, her enforced widowhood and banishment to her father's house in 38.11. But by the time the text notes Judah's

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30. Compare the interaction between Hannah and her husband in 1 Sam. 1.4-8, and especially the analogy drawn by Polzin (1989: 18-30).

31. See Trible 1978: esp. 34-35.

lack of further intimacy with Tamar in 38.26, Tamar is already pregnant, and she is destined to escape the humiliating fate of childless widowhood, essentially differentiating her from Michal, from Tamar bat David, and from David's concubines.

(6) *Departure*

38.11	Tamar goes to her father's house
38.19	Tamar returns to her widowhood
38.26	Judah does not again know her intimately
38.30	Second twin, marked as elder, is born and named

This function of separation is present in each segment, yet it does not appear to be essential to the dialectics of values that are structurally and semiotically inherent in this narrative. It appears, rather, to operate rather as a coda, affirming the sanction function that precedes it. In the first segment, 38.11, Tamar goes to her father's house as Judah commands, affirming her obedience and her faith in his word. In the second segment, 38.19, Tamar returns to her widowhood, symbolically exchanging one status for another as she doffs her harlot's veil, צעיפה, and resumes her widow's weeds, בגדי אלמנותה.

In the third segment, 38.26, the separation is wholly symbolic. The text tells us that Judah does not again know Tamar intimately, signalling his separation from his old self and his adherence to his newly integrated status as righteous patriarch inside and out. As for Tamar, her status as the promised wife of Shelah is important only as it serves the divine goal of reproducing the line of Judah, and drops out of the story when it becomes superfluous, as does the issue of promulgating Er's name. Judah passes the test.

In the fourth segment, 38.30, the second twin, marked as the firstborn, successfully separates from the womb, traversing the dangerous transition safely now that right relationships have again been restored in the world into which he emerges.

b. *Narrative Programs*

There are two competing NPs in this text that together create a dialectic. Such structures are designated by Calloud as NP and –NP. My analysis identifies the main NP as the value that leads to continuity of the family line. In Genesis 38, this value is identified as true righteousness that requires congruence between inner and outer reality.[32] The –NP is that

32. Calloud's 'veridiction', briefly outlined in 1979: 81-83.

deception, false appearance, lack of righteousness, all lead to lack of continuity of the family line. The four structural segments of Genesis 38 each relate overtly to the NP that is dominant in that segment, although, as I noted earlier, its opposite is implied by the very presence of any identifiable NP at all.[33] This interplay of overt and implicit positive and negative NPs is one of the reasons for the deeply textured signification of narrative. Keeping this in mind, here I designate the dominant NP in each segment.

The first segment (38.1-11) is dominated by the –NP. The subjects, Judah and Tamar, both desire continuity. This object is threatened by deception and lack of righteousness, first by Onan (38.9), and then by Judah who intends to withhold Tamar from Shelah even as he gives Tamar his word that he will recall her from her father's house when his third son is old enough (38.11). Judah begins the first segment alone, without his clan, without a wife, and with no children. In the language of semiotic analysis, Judah, the subject, is in a disjunctive relationship to the object, his progeny or the continuity of his line.

In the course of the first NP, Judah sees, marries, impregnates Shua's daughter, and is temporarily in a conjunctive relationship to the continuity of his line. But by 38.11, Judah is again without an established line, having lost his two elder sons and having sent Tamar, his third son's rightful wife, back to her father's house. At the same point, Tamar is without a husband, sons, or motherhood, and Shelah is without a wife. Now both subjects are in disjunctive relationships to their mutual object of continuity.

At the same time, the reader is set up for another potential disjunction, as the text tells us that Judah fears for Shelah's life if Judah gives Tamar to him. Judah has outwardly given Tamar his word that she shall be given to Shelah when the boy is old enough, but inwardly has expressed a different agenda. Judah is at risk for being in a disjunctive relationship to his status as a righteous patriarch if he fails to discharge his obligation to Tamar and to his son. Onan displeases God when he fails to fulfill an analogous obligation, and his punishment is death at God's hand.

The second segment (38.12-23) continues to explore the tension between the appearance and reality of righteousness. Overall, it belongs to the main NP, advocating as it does that true righteousness, whatever its superficial appearance, results in continuity. However, at the same time, the events that together evoke this main NP have embedded within them the very –NP that is its antithesis.

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33. See above, in my discussion under the sub-heading '2. *Theoretical Underpinnings and Methodological Overview*'.

The segment begins with the death of Judah's wife, and the episode concerns Judah's interaction with a veiled woman he takes to be a road-side harlot. Tamar veils herself and sits by the roadside when she realizes that her father-in-law has failed to discharge his obligation to give her to Shelah (38.14). In these circumstances, Tamar is without her status as wife and mother to Judah's line, and Judah is without his status as righteous patriarch. Both subjects remain in a disjunctive relationship to their objects.

By the end of this segment, Judah is still in a disjunctive relationship to his status as righteous patriarch—he has still not given Tamar to his son; in addition, he has ceased the effort to find the roadside harlot to pay her what he owes and redeem his pledge. Judah tells his friend the Adullamite to stop searching for her, saying that it is better to have lost the insignia of his office (his identification) than to be a public object of ridicule (38.23). Judah trades off the reality of righteousness for the appearance of recti-tude. Tamar, too, is in a disjunctive relationship to her status—she is no longer the chaste widow sitting in her father's house. She sits instead by the roadside. However, by the end of this segment, Tamar has been intimate with Judah and is pregnant (38.13). The potential for progeny is present: she, and perhaps also the unwitting Judah, are now potentially in conjunctive relationship to their mutual object of continuity.

The reader is thus set up for the third segment (38.24-26), which also belongs to the main NP, and so, like its predecessor, also stands in tension to the implicit –NP made explicit so far only in the first segment.

The third segment begins with Tamar in a conjunctive relationship to the objects of progeny/continuity for Judah's line/motherhood as her pregnancy is scandalously apparent. However, Tamar is in a disjunctive relationship to her status as chaste widow, and this can cost Tamar her life as Judah orders her to be burned. Judah acts in apparent conjunction with his status as righteous patriarch, but Tamar, the reader, and soon the whole community know that Judah is sadly in a disjunctive relationship to his obligation to be righteous.

Tamar's riddle to Judah offers him the opportunity to reconcile the dissonances if he chooses.[34] The text is ambiguous about whether Tamar's

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34. The noted medieval sage Rashi notes this explicitly (*loc. cit.*), in his comment on her circumspect formulation of the phrase לאיש אשר אלה לו אנכי הרה ('by the man to whom these belong I am pregnant'). Rashi writes that Tamar did not want to put Judah to shame publicly, but instead allowed him to choose to acknowledge her voluntarily; if he would not, she was prepared to burn rather than to embarrass him publicly. Rashi

revelation of the pledge is a public or private act. Either way, she is playing a high risk game; if Judah continues to deny his lack of righteousness, if he insists on the facade of his public status instead of reconciling reality with appearance, as he has the power to do, Tamar could die. The paradox must be resolved: actual righteousness, not the appearance of rectitude, defines true status; appearance alone, without actual righteousness, threatens continuity.

Onan appears to perform his levirate duty, but actually he does not and so he dies at God's hand. Judah appears to keep his word to Tamar, once in promising to give her to Shelah and again when he says he will redeem his pledge with a kid from the flock, but both times Judah chooses the appearance of rectitude rather than actual righteousness.[35] This third time, when the stakes are again life and death, Judah must choose righteousness, reject appearance, and establish an appropriate relationship among righteousness, status, and continuity.

This segment closes firmly within the main NP as Judah rises to the challenge, acknowledging that the pregnant Tamar is more righteous than he. The –NP, however, is never far from the surface. The tension between the two NPs is almost unbearable during the unfolding of this segment, as the reader is never sure whether Judah will acknowledge his failings. Will righteousness and continuity triumph? Or will deception and barrenness dominate?

Judah's acknowledgment validates the cultural norm that Tamar's status as mother is more important than her status as chaste widow.[36] In terms of levirate practice, her pregnancy has in fact restored her proper status in Judah's household. Judah is finally in a conjunctive relationship to his status as righteous patriarch, Tamar is in a conjunctive relationship to her status as mother of Judah's line, and both are in conjunctive relationships to their desire for continuity.

The fourth segment (38.27-30) also belongs to the main narrative program, as the subjects' desire for progeny is fulfilled when Tamar gives

notes that the talmudic rabbis (*Sota* 10b) use this prooftext in establishing the moral principle cautioning in the strongest terms against publicly putting anyone to shame.

35. See my earlier discussion above under the heading '(5) *Sanction*' (p. 306) for my views on Judah's repeated failure to make a final effort in both cases after only two attempts each time.

36. Niditch (1979: 145) notes that sociologically, 'in terms of long-range security in the (biblical) social structure, it is more important for a woman to become her children's mother than her husband's wife'.

birth to healthy twins. The –NP that came so close to breaking through the surface in the prior segment is here quiescent, although not completely absent. In this segment, each brother assumes his appropriate status as first-born or second-born in spite of a challenging birth that has the potential of confusing the issue.

The chapter concludes with each son in a conjunctive relationship to his appropriate status, and Judah and Tamar both in conjunctive relationship to continuity. Equilibrium has been restored: righteousness reigns, reality and appearance are congruent, appropriate status is maintained, and the result is continuity for Judah's line.

4. *Conclusion*

In this study, I have demonstrated the step-by-step application of the two phases that make up morphological analysis: first, the syntagmatic analysis, in which I identify the repeating sequence of action abstractions that underlies the surface level of the plot; and, second, the explication of the positive and negative NPs that embody the cultural values borne by this narrative. In my analysis of Genesis 38, the core cultural values emerge that are the benchmarks by which leadership in Israel is judged worthy: righteousness in both appearance and reality must be present in order for there to be continuity of lineage. This conclusion is made possible by means of the first stage of structural semiotic analysis, an approach that confirms and sharpens intuitive insights that may arise upon an initial reading of the narrative, and that can also raise new insights not previously seen.

The power of this methodological approach is not limited to the analysis of this one text. Information elicited by my explication of Genesis 38 has broader application: it raises the question of the extent to which the core values identified by this methodology in this specific text may reverberate in other biblical texts. What happens to continuity/offspring where there is no righteousness? Can dissonance between righteous appearance and deceitful reality be tolerated by God? The message of Genesis 38 is that there can be no continuity without righteousness, that appearance and reality must be congruent for effective leadership, and that these values hold for the line of Judah in his own time; application of this method to related texts and intertexts may show whether they apply as well to Judah's lineage in times to come.

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