
An Ass in a Lion's Skin: The Subversion of Judah's Hegemonic Masculinity in Genesis 38

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The book of Genesis gives two opposing portraits of Judah's masculinity. On the one hand, he is shown as the leader of Jacob's sons, and on the other he is ridiculed by his daughter-in-law. Is Judah an ass in a lion's skin? This article explores Judah's antithetical masculinities as examples of the inherently unstable nature of gender construction. Although Judah is only the fourth son of Jacob, he is expressly depicted in Genesis as assuming a leadership role in relation to his brothers, including speaking up against killing Joseph, negotiating with his father regarding Joseph's demand that Benjamin be brought down to Egypt, and pleading with Joseph for Benjamin's life. In Genesis 49: 8–12, Judah receives the most favourable treatment of all Jacob's sons. The blessing of Jacob from his deathbed portrays Judah's hegemonic masculinity at its finest. However, in Genesis 38, Judah's masculine performance far from ideal biblical masculinity. Not only does Judah lack persuasiveness when he accuses Tamar, but she is able to persuade him that his own actions were wrong. Judah is deceived, specifically deceived by a woman. The shame he wants to attribute to Tamar rebounds on himself. In the end, he acknowledges himself to be less righteous than Tamar (Gen 38: 26). The episode as a whole reveals that Judah does not have control of his family. Genesis 38 clearly subverts Judah's hegemonic masculinity. What are the rhetorical effects of this subversion of Judah's hegemonic gender construction? Jacob speaks of Judah as a lion, but in Genesis 38 he seems to have been portrayed in the role of the ass.

Fables, narrative analysis and masculinity studies

Aesop's fable *The Ass in the Lion's Skin* tells of an ass that puts on a lion's skin to amuse himself by terrifying foolish animals. At last coming upon

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a fox, he also tries to frighten him, but as the fox hears the voice of the ass, he exclaims, "I might possibly have been frightened myself, if I had not heard your bray." The moral of the story is often quoted as being, "Clothes may disguise a fool, but his words will give him away." Jean de La Fontaine (1668) rewrote this fable with an ending that indicates that three quarters of a knight's bravery comes from his armour. Aesop's and La Fontaine's fables have some indirect thematic connections with Genesis 38, a story where trickery and clothing play an important part in establishing the identities of Judah and Tamar.

The book of Genesis gives two opposing portraits of Judah's masculinity. On the one hand, he is shown as the leader of Jacob's sons, and on the other he is ridiculed by his daughter-in-law. With time, the Lion of Judah became a Jewish national and cultural symbol, but in Genesis 38, is Judah an ass in a lion's skin? How can we account for Judah's opposing masculinities in Genesis?

Since the emergence of feminist scholarship, Tamar has been an important focus for scholarly investigation (Niditch 1979; Fuchs 1985; Van Wijk-Bos 1988; Bos 1988; Bird 1989; Nobuko 1993; Menn 1997; McKinlay 1999; Jackson 2002; Adelman 2011; Blachman 2013; Chan 2015). The blanks, ironies and transgressions integrated into this story are indeed fertile ground for gender studies. In contemporary research, Judah has been subordinated by Tamar. Indeed, gender studies of biblical texts have mostly centred on feminine characters. However, gender identity also concerns men and has been investigated by masculinity studies. Like all other forms of identity, masculinity is a social and cultural construct. M. Kimmel and T. Bridges (2014) broadly define this field of research: "Masculinities studies is a vibrant, interdisciplinary field of study broadly concerned with the social construction of what it means to 'be a man'." With the methodological apparatus generated by masculinity studies, I propose to shed some light on Judah's complex masculinity.

There are many ways in which masculinity studies can be utilized in biblical interpretation—for an overview, see Haddox (2016) and Smit (2017). I propose to examine Judah's masculinities in Genesis from a narrative approach focusing on the final form of the text and the effects it has on its readers. This type of narrative criticism inspired by reader-response is used by the *Réseau de recherche en analyse narrative des textes bibliques* (Burnet, Luciani and Van Oyen 2015). I will examine the elements of characterization of Judah that have an impact on the way the story represents the gender of this patriarch.

In a seminal article about David's masculinity, David Clines (1995) pointed out several categories of masculinity in biblical culture: the fighting male, the persuasive male, the beautiful male, the bonding male, the woman-less male, and the musical male. Recent scholarship tends to resist this impulse of defining biblical masculinity in a "quasi-structuralist" catalogue of representations of rules, codes and conventions that enable and determine the production, the construction and the performance of masculinities. As Robert Alter (2011, x–xi) writes, "the best way to get a handle on the Bible's literary vehicle is to avoid imposing on it a grid external to it but instead to patiently attend to its minute workings and through such attention inferentially build a picture of its distinctive conventions and techniques." The unstable nature of masculinities is made manifest by the influential concept of "hegemonic masculinity," theorized by Raewyn W. Connell (1987).¹ Hegemonic masculinity points to the expression of masculinity that becomes dominant and is the standard against which all other masculinities are judged: "Hegemonic masculinities define successful ways of 'being man'; in so doing, they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior. These related masculinities we call 'subordinate variants'" (Cornwall and Lindisfare 1994, 3). Susan Haddox (2016, 179) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the specific gender construction that is dominant in cultural and political power structures... Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity is not stable, but is continuously shaped by competing subversive masculinities and the political tensions these represent." Hegemonic masculinity is not a fix type of personality, but a hegemonic position in a given gender power structure. This hegemonic position is always contested and identified in relation to other masculinities characterized as subordinate, alternative, marginalized or complicit.

But, why is this attention to ancient literary representations of masculinities important? A greater consciousness of biblical masculinities, especially in narratives that transgress gender patterns like Genesis 38, can only help us to interrogate and deconstruct masculine gender scripts that promote inequality. Since the origins of feminist studies, scholars have campaigned to transform our society towards greater justice. Masculinity studies can also work towards a similar goal, as noted Stephen

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1. With time, critical discussion has helped refine this concept. See Demetriou (2001) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). The fundamental feature of the concept remains the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities. However, the notion of masculinity as an assemblage of traits opened the path to that treatment of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type. This has been rightly criticized.

Moore (2014, 545):

This missing political agenda might be supplied using analyses of ancient masculinities—especially the counterhegemonic masculinities now commonly identified in biblical texts—to critique contemporary expressions of hegemonic masculinity—especially those that appeal to biblical texts for legitimation.

Judah as a lion

In Genesis 37–50, many elements show Judah expressing a hegemonic masculinity in relation to the other men of his family. Although Judah is only the fourth son of Jacob, he is expressly depicted as assuming a leadership role in relation to his brothers. In Genesis 37: 26–27, Judah speaks up against killing Joseph. His plan still represents a horrible crime against his brother Joseph, but since Joseph is sold, readers can assume that Judah, unlike Reuben, persuaded his brothers to sell Joseph instead of killing him. For Thomas Brodie (2001, 362), Judah is the *de facto* leader of his brothers: “Judah spoke, and when he did, his brothers listened (‘His brothers heard him’ 37: 27); they sold Joseph.” The ability to persuade others is very important to the assertion of one’s masculinity in the Hebrew Bible. In his study of David as a “persuasive male,” Clines (1995, 220) states that “to be master of persuasion is to have another form of power, which is not an alternative to, and far less a denatured version of, physical strength, but part of the repertory of the powerful male.” For Steven Moore (2014, 541), “the ideal Israelite man” is able to use words as an instrument to “control lesser males.”

Later in the narrative, Judah negotiates with his father regarding Joseph’s demand that Benjamin be brought down to Egypt (43: 8–10). Unlike Reuben who fails in a similar attempt (42: 37–38), Judah persuades his father to proceed. Back in Egypt, Judah speaks on behalf of his brother when pleading with Joseph for Benjamin’s life (44: 14–34). Although arguing from a place of non-power, Judah convinces Joseph to spare Benjamin’s life. In this speech, Judah shows concern for his father and his younger brother. He also expresses remorse, in a contrasting attitude to Genesis 37. Robert Alter (2011, 215–220) shows that when Genesis 37–50 is read as a complete narrative, Judah, like Joseph, has grown morally through the trials he and his family have faced. In all these episodes, Judah shows leadership qualities. He is the man who persuades the other men of his family.

In Genesis 49: 2–12, Judah receives the most favourable treatment of all Jacob’s sons. It is part of a poem that is often disconnected with the pre-

ceding chapters. Diachronic analyses are concerned with Jacob's sons as figures that stand for the tribes they represent. Joel Heck (1990, 316–317) showed the temporal inconsistencies, the variation in genre and message led to a comprehension of this chapter as a compilation of tribal sayings distinct from the Joseph cycle. Nonetheless, in a narrative reading, Jacob's "testament" can be understood as connected with the preceding narratives. For Hans-Georg Wünc (2012), Genesis 37–38 form an *inclusio* with chapters 48–49. Genesis 37 and 38 are expositions about two of Jacob's sons and in chapters 48–49, Joseph and Judah clearly stand out. "The function of the connection is to make apparent that the time when the brothers bow down to Joseph is coming to an end. The leading position belongs to Judah and his descendant" (Wünc 2012, 784).

The blessing of Jacob from his deathbed portrays Judah's hegemonic masculinity at its finest since in relation to the other males of the family, Judah is given a leading position.

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. (Gen 49: 8–12)

This text evokes images of dominance. Judah is portrayed as a leader through multiple images that affect the construction of his masculinity. Jacob's speech opens by offering an interpretation of Judah's name: "your brothers shall praise (הדי) you." In Genesis 29: 35, Judah's mother offers praise to the Lord for Judah's birth and gives him a name with that same verb. In Genesis 49, it is not God who is praised, but Judah himself. This praise is to be given by Judah's brothers, other men who were in competition for this fatherly blessing. This shows that Judah's masculinity is recognized and celebrated as being superior.

Judah's hand being on the neck of his enemies is a declaration of his force and military supremacy. Moore's (2014, 541) summary of the ideal masculine Israelite states the importance of this characteristic: "He is able to dominate other males physically. He is skilled in weapons and warfare. He unleashes lethal aggression against male enemies."

The lion is a symbol of force, power and royalty, but the lion is also an image associated with Yhwh's actions.² The lion is an animal that has no predators. It is the most powerful animal evoked in Genesis 49. Readers can understand that, in a similar way, Judah is the most powerful male of the family.

The scepter and staff also evoke a man's power. In Genesis 49, Judah's "staff" (קֶסֶף) is said to stay between his legs. This is a direct contrast to Genesis 38, where Judah gives his staff (מִטָּה) to Tamar. The sexual undertones of this "staff" between a man's legs is a very masculine image, an image that clearly diverges from Judah's lack of sexual control in Genesis 38.

The prostration of his brothers shows Judah to be the main heir to Jacob. Prostration is an act of respect towards one's superior. This image reverses Joseph's dream in which Joseph was supposed to be the one revered by his brothers and parents (Gen 37: 1–11), as well as the prostration of his brothers in front of Joseph when in Egypt for supplies (Gen 42: 6, 43: 26–27). Judah is now the man in front of whom the other brothers must bow down: a strong image of Judah's hegemony.

Other images from Jacob's blessing are less clear, but point in the same direction. The physical beauty of Judah, in reference to his eyes and teeth, is praised. "The colours red and white are sometimes used in poetry to describe the surpassing beauty of a human being (Cant 4: 2–3; 5: 10, 12; 6: 6; Lam 4: 7). At the end of the blessing on Judah, they describe the beauty of the coming king" (Pröbstle 2007, 46). This also sustains Judah's superiority since in Bible narratives, beautiful men are born to rule.³

To summarize, this monologue represents fatherly praise of Judah's hegemonic masculinity. In fact, this portrayal of Judah is one of the clearest images of hegemonic masculinity found in Genesis and in the Hebrew Bible.

Judah as an ass

Scholars such as David Gunn and Danna Fewell (1993, 34–45) present Judah's characterization in Genesis 38, as self-centred, irresponsible, unfaithful, controlling and displaying a double standard. Judah's actions

2. 1 Sam 17: 37, 1 Kgs 13: 26; 20: 36; 2 Kgs 17: 25; Isa 31: 4; Jer 49: 19; 50: 44; Hos 5: 14; 11: 10; Amos 1: 2; 3: 8.
3. Examples of beautiful male rulers: Moses (Exod 2: 1–2), Joseph (Gen 39: 6), Saul (1 Sam 9: 2), David (1 Sam 16: 18) and also a king of Tyre (Ezek 28: 12). For a discussion of the relationship between beauty, power and masculinity, see chapter 7 of DiPalma (2018).

in this chapter do not correspond to what masculinities studies have shown to be important to “be a man” in biblical narratives.

Some details in the first verses of Genesis 38 can be read as negatively portraying Judah. The first verse indicates that Judah leaves his brothers to join company with Hirah, a foreigner who became his friend, and with Shua another foreigner who became his wife. As Esther Marie Menn (1997, 38) puts it, “Judah’s descent signifies more than an incidental direction of travel.” To leave kin in favour of a stranger is not a positive action for a man in a clan culture. Genesis 38: 2 does not explicitly state that Judah’s relation to his wife is inappropriate, but the wording leads readers to suspect that something could be wrong. Gordon J. Wenham (1994, 366) observes that the combination of “see” and “take” in Genesis has “overtones of illicit taking.” Also, Chezib, the name of the village associated with him in v5, is formed from the root כָּזַב (falsehood, lie, deception) which leads interpreters like Hans-Georg Wünc̄h (2012, 794) to see a negative aspect of Judah’s character.⁴ These readings are speculative since they do not explicitly state anything about Judah’s characterization. However, scholars have read the first verses in light of the end of this episode in which Judah states his own lack of justice (38: 26).

In verses 6–11, Judah performs actions that affect his family. Judah takes a wife for Er (v6), talks to Onân so that he goes to his dead brother’s wife (v7) and talks to Tamar instructing her on the actions she should take. He plays out the role of the father who imposes his will on the family, but ironically, these actions show his lack of control on his family. Judah’s firstborn does evil and is struck down (v7). Initially, Judah’s second son seems to obey his command to produce offspring on behalf of his dead brother. However, while Onan has sexual relations with Tamar, he does not want to conceive a child on behalf of his brother. Even though Onan appears only in a few verses, his masculinity should be studied in more detail. His actions are rooted in a masculine resistance to the biblical levirate law. He does not want to father a son for his brother. His death can be understood as a divine judgment against this form of masculinity. An effect of this narrative is to underscore that biblical masculinity must submit to biblical laws. Onan tries to enact an opposing masculinity, but his death shows that he ultimately fails. As a father of Onan, Judah also fails. He has not educated Er to refrain from being wicked (עַר), and Onan does not obey his instructions. While Judah attributes the death of his

4. “Presumably the author wants to point to an aspect of Judah’s character, which will become even clearer in the following story: Judah is a man of falsehood and lies, without a sense of responsibility and faith towards the people belonging to him” (Wünc̄h 2012, 794).

sons to Tamar (38: 11), readers can also see that Judah, as a flawed father, is perhaps in some way responsible for the death of his sons.⁵ Judah also abdicates his fatherly role by telling Tamar to return to her own father's house (38: 11). Dramatic irony is used by the narrator to let readers know that Judah's interpretation of events is not accurate (Clifford 2004). Judah wrongfully believes that Tamar is the reason for the death of his sons. Unlike Judah, readers know that it is Er's wickedness and Onan's actions that lead to God striking them (Shields 2003, 38).

In v15, Judah assumes that he is talking to a prostitute. Again, there is dramatic irony. The narrator has already given information to the readers, so they are aware of Judah's mistake. The scene is curious, since a veil (צַיִת) is not a biblical garment for a prostitute (Shields 2003, 42). Moreover, Judah converses and has sex with this woman without recognizing her. The least we can infer is that Judah is not perspicacious. In fact, Judah's lack of awareness is used in the narrative to absolve him the possible sexual taboo of incest: "for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law" (Gen 38: 16).

In order to have sex with this woman, Judah agrees to give her his seal, cord and staff. These are symbols of his masculine identity and masculine authority. As noted by Shields (2003, 44), the staff can also be seen as a possible euphemism for his masculine genitals:

Besides referring to a literal staff, the word (מַטֵּה) can have two different connotations. On the one hand, as it sometimes is in English, it may be a euphemism for the penis. On the other hand, the word as written can also mean "tribe"—and it is used in this manner in more than half of the occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. The first connotation alludes to Judah's lust; the second can be interpreted as an ironic allusion to what has been endangered thus far—Judah's tribe. (Shields 2003, 44)

Thus, Judah leaves behind the signs of his patriarchal power (Bal 1988, 149). As Richard Clifford (2004, 526) writes, "The narrative implies that he acted like a fool to pledge the symbols of his legal and social standing—his cord, seal, and staff—to a Canaanite, a woman, and a prostitute!"

When trying and failing to retrieve his belongings, Judah evokes the possibility of being ridiculed in front of the townspeople (38: 23). They could laugh at him because of his inability to find a woman, pay her and

5. Hans-Georg Wünc (2012, 795) underscores Judah's lack of familial control: "Astonishingly, he either ignores the wickedness of his sons, or he does not realize it." For Richard Clifford (2004, 525) it is a judgment against Judah's marriage: "The deaths of Judah's sons Er and Onan by unprecedented divine action, before they could beget any children, surely imply that Judah's marriage to a Canaanite was cursed by God."

retrieve the symbols of his manliness. Unlike the townspeople, the readers are well aware of Judah's inabilities, and several scholars have analysed the comical aspects of this part of the story (Shields 2003; Rendsburg 1986; Chan 2015; Spencer 2003). Judah is the butt of the joke. He comes out as the least masculine figure possible: A fool. For a second time, Judah does not accomplish his stated intentions. He has not followed through with the promise of giving Shela to Tamar, and he does not manage to give her the promised kid from his flock.

In verse 24, an unidentified voice criticizes Judah's fatherly control of his family. This voice speaks about his daughter-in-law (כלה), a term that recalls the relation between Judah and Tamar and underscores his responsibility towards her (Menn 1997, 30–31). This voice questions Judah's honour, because he was not able to control his daughter-in-law's sexual activity. For the ideal Israelite man, honour is his most precious possession (Moore 2014, 541). As Susan Haddox puts it:

Outside sexual activity is a threat to the honour of the males responsible for the women, because it constitutes a challenge to the masculinity of the father or husband by the male who is cavorting with the women. Illicit sex, therefore, is largely viewed as a competition between males, with challenges requiring a strong response. (2015, 536)

Also in verse 24, Judah is shown as a man who has power over others. He only has to pronounce his wishes of summoning and burning Tamar to have her brought to him. However, not only does Judah lack persuasiveness when he accuses Tamar, but she is able to persuade him that his own actions were wrong. Judah is deceived, specifically deceived by a woman.

In verse 26, Judah acknowledges that Tamar is more righteous than he is. Anthony Lambe understands this as Judah's epiphany and moment of transformation: "Judah's ignorance and alienation are overcome in a moment of enlightenment and self-discovery that foreshadows his future role as spokesman in the Joseph story" (Lambe 1999, 57). It is true that Judah recognizes his lack of justice, but there is nothing explicit about a change in his character or about future actions. The verse simply states that "justice" (צדק), one of the most important masculine traits in the Hebrew Bible, is lacking in Judah and that, conversely, Tamar has acted according to this virtue.⁶ The shame Judah wants to attribute to

6. Gen 6: 9 states that this quality is found in Noah, a just man (איש צדיק) and lacking in his generation. This is also the core value in Abraham negotiations with the Lord to save some just men from Sodom (Gen 18: 16–33).

Tamar rebounds on himself. He wants to kill her, because her sexuality has brought dishonour to him as the male leader of the family. Instead, he is the one who has brought shame to the family.

[W]hen Judah finally acknowledged that it was Tamar who had taken his possessions (seal, cord and staff), he realized he had been put to shame and as a result, Judah confessed his fault and Tamar's righteousness. This is the moment Tamar recovers her honour, but at the same time it corresponds to a new public awareness of a negative perspective on Judah. (Kim 2012, 560)

The way in which Judah's actions are publicly revealed is a blow to his honour and to his masculinity, since in the public realm a man is expected to demonstrate control of himself and of his family. The last comment of the narrator indicates that Judah's sexual relation with Tamar can be seen as problematic: "He had no further intercourse with her" (38: 26). The episode as a whole reveals that Judah does not have control of his family, nor does he possess the self-control of a male patriarch. Genesis 38 clearly subverts Judah's hegemonic masculinity.

The only positive masculine trait of Judah in this episode is his sexual potency. "A visible sign of a man's masculinity is the ability to reproduce. The children themselves, especially sons, serve, among other things, as proof of their father's virility" (Haddox 2016, 536). With only one sexual encounter, Judah produces two sons! And these sons are already fighting for first place before their birth (38: 27–29). In the beginning of chapter 38, Judah initiates movement towards reproductive actions, as a good patriarch should. Following the death of his second son, however, Judah's function in the narrative shifts. He emerges as an obstacle to procreation. Nevertheless, in the end, Judah contributes to the pursuit of his lineage even though he does so unwittingly (Menn 1997, 35).

To summarize, in Genesis 38 Judah tries to act as a hegemonic masculine patriarch, but he fails miserably.

Although Judah acts throughout the narrative in a commanding manner befitting the head of a household, his arrangements and imperatives never have the intended results... Through these repeated illustrations of Judah's unsuccessful efforts to control his family and to determine the course of events, the narrator ridicules this ineffectual paterfamilias who would, but cannot, rule. Instead, Judah is ruled by Tamar, one of the subordinates of his household. (Menn 1997, 39–40)

In this chapter, Judah's masculinity could be qualified as subordinate. Indeed, he is outwitted by a woman, punished by God (who takes

away two of his sons), and ridiculed in the eyes of readers and townsfolk. Unpersuasive, he is publicly shamed and acknowledges his lack of justice. The narrative effect of this portrayal is to emasculate Judah and deconstruct his patriarchal power.

Usually, in the Hebrew Bible, women are subordinate to men. Their sexuality is normally under the control of men. In Genesis 38, Judah tries to dictate Tamar's sexuality, but her actions transgress this rule (Haddox 2014, 512). It is Tamar who controls Judah and his sexuality. This chapter proves very rich for biblical gender studies, because it destabilizes the biblical gender roles. It undermines masculinity expressed as the domination of women and brings down femininity as submissive and sexually chaste.

An ass in a lion's skin?

The failed man described in Genesis 38 is far from the lion of Genesis 49. Jacob speaks of Judah as a lion, but in Genesis 38 Judah is portrayed as an ass in a lion's skin. Paradoxically, Genesis both upholds and undercuts Judah's masculinity. In Esther Menn's words, "Given the status of Judah and the tribe associated with his name elsewhere in the Bible, however, the generally negative evaluation he receives in Genesis 38 is particularly discordant" (Menn 1997, 36). Menn's study of early Jewish interpreters of this narrative shows how these sources employ creative interpretive strategies to reform Judah's character into an ideal ancestral hero. What are the rhetorical effects of this subversion of Judah's hegemonic gender construction?

Different methodological options could bring light to Judah's complex masculinities. For example, in a geopolitical perspective, Judah's hegemonic and subordinate masculinities could be analogous to the rise and fall of the kingdom of Judah. If some key passages of the Hebrew Bible allude to God's promise of an everlasting monarchy through the Davidic line, they also describe how foreign empires overpower and destroy the kingdom of Judah. For Susan Haddox,

The subordinate masculinities of the patriarchs in many ways reflect the position of Israel among the nations [...] at the mercy of the various superpowers: Egypt, Assyrian, Babylonia, Persia [...] Israel had to take positions symbolized by subordinate masculinities. (Haddox 2010, 16)

A canonical approach could also explain Judah's antithetical masculinities in relation to David's masculine performance, as Dohyung Kim points out:

Therefore, the role of Genesis 38 is to introduce Judah and Tamar in the context of Genesis 37–50, which depicts Judah's family as a whole, in order to validate the heirs of David's Judahite ancestry in the larger Primary Narrative (Genesis—2 Kings). Genesis 38 is the story of the first ancestors of the Davidic line as well as Abraham's family. (Kim 2012, 560)

Two contrasting images of David's masculinity are put forth in the books of 1–2 Samuel. His usual hegemonic masculinity is disrupted by a narrative where his attempt at hegemonic masculine performance fails miserably (2 Samuel 11). This is very close to the hegemonic masculine performance of Judah in most of Genesis 37–50 as opposed to his failed attempt in chapter 38. Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 11 function in similar ways, in regards to the failures of the men who are depicted as hegemonic in the rest of these narratives. Each of these two episodes can help readers understand the other. In a canonical perspective, Judah's antithetical masculinities in Genesis anticipate David's antithetical masculinities in 1–2 Samuel.⁷

In this article, a combination of narrative criticism within the book of Genesis and gender analysis leads to a discussion about Judah's antithetical masculinities as a result of his transformation in Genesis 37–50 from negative to positive, as well as the possibility that Judah's fails as a man creates a space for God to be the only hegemonic figure.

An experience of transformation

If historical-critical exegesis views Genesis 38 as a disruption in the Joseph cycle,⁸ narrative criticism such as applied by Robert Alter has connected a series of explicit parallels and contrasts that link Genesis 38 with the surrounding narratives of Joseph's cycle (Alter 2011, 2–5; Bekins 2016). Using this interpretive strategy, scholars see a positive evolution in Judah's character. For Thomas Brodie (2001, 362), "it is a story of sin and conversion. By showing sin and repentance in Judah (in Genesis 38), the narrative prepares for the time when all the brothers, led by Judah, will repent."

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7. Sébastien Doane (2019) studies the relation between David and Judah's masculinities as two of the four "husbands" of the matthean genealogy and contrasts these men with Joseph and Jesus.
 8. For example, "This peculiar chapter stands alone, without connection to its context. It is isolated in every way and is most enigmatic. It does not seem to belong with any of the identified sources of ancestral tradition. It is not evident that it provides any significant theological resource. It is difficult to know in what context it might be of value for theological exposition" (Brueggemann 1982, 42).

Moreover, for Anthony Lambe (1999), Judah's character is developed through a pattern of "Departure-Transition-Return." He describes Judah's development in four stages: "(1) Judah's reconnection to his Hebraic heritage and identity through the recognition and reacceptance of his insignia; (2) the realization of his lack of responsibility to the Law and his injustice to Tamar and their subsequent reconciliation; (3) his movement from ignorance of his evil to a knowledge of it; (4) a realization of his deception of and his injustice to his father and Joseph" (Lambe 1999, 57–58).⁹ However, if Judah does in fact realize (2) his lack of responsibility and injustice vis-à-vis Tamar, Genesis 38: 26 does not explicitly express (1) Judah's reconnection to his Hebraic heritage and (4) his deception and injustice to his father and Joseph. This is a separate moment made explicit in Judah's speech to Joseph. While Judah is negatively portrayed in Genesis 37–38, his character is transformed in 38: 26 when he realizes his lack of justice: "Judah's ignorance and alienation are overcome in a moment of enlightenment and self-discovery that foreshadows his future role as spokesman in the Joseph story" (Lambe 1999, 57).

In my opinion, it is reductive to view Judah's character as an evolution from negative to positive with 38: 26 as a pivotal point. The most negative conduct of Judah is indeed in Genesis 37 and 38. After Genesis 38: 26, he is also characterized in a positive way. However, the challenge to this interpretation is that Genesis 38: 26 does not explicitly state a reconnection with his family and regret for past actions. This is a separate moment made explicit later in Judah's speech to Joseph. In Genesis 38: 26, Judah publicly admits his wrong behaviour, but this does not imply that he has been transformed and will act in a benevolent way with others from this point (Alter 2011, 9–10). It is only in 43: 8–9, five chapters later, that Judah starts to take on a positive role by asking to be accountable for the life of his younger brother Benjamin (Alter 2010, 211–220). This attitude is in direct contrast with Judah's attitude towards Joseph in Genesis 37. It is also a contrast with Ruben's failed initiative in Genesis 42: 36–38. Reading Genesis 38: 26 as the moment of transformation limits the transformative aspect of the intense narrative moment when Judah pleads with Joseph for Benjamin's life which is a key moment for Judah's character. In a sequential reading of Genesis, at chapter 38, the reader has no idea that Judah will acknowledge his wrongful actions against his father or brother. Brodie, Lambe and Clifford fill the gaps of chapter 38 by a retrospective look based on the positive role given to Judah in chapters

9. Clifford (2004) and Adelman (2011) also see Judah's conversion from a conspirator and self-willed parent to an unselfish spokesman for the family, with verse 26 as a turning point in Judah's attitude.

42–50. In Genesis 38: 26, Judah acknowledges his own failure in accusing Tamar, but I contend that interpreting this verse as the pivotal point of Judah's personality over-interprets what is stated and undermines other important moments for Judah in the chapters that follow.¹⁰

From a feminist perspective exploring the androcentric bias of Genesis 38, Johanna Bos (1988, 48) shows that it is Tamar's actions that change Judah's perceptions. In her reading, the episode does not rehabilitate Judah and lacks a clear condemnation of his irresponsible and destructive behaviour towards Tamar. Correspondingly, Esther Fuchs (2000, 71) interprets Genesis 38: 26 as an "an unambiguous statement of rehabilitation" of Tamar, not of Judah.

Is Judah's transformation complete in Genesis 38: 26? In the analysis of Judah's masculinities offered in this article, Judah does not simply go from a negative character to a positive one. He enacts a hegemonic masculinity that puts him into a leadership position in chapter 37. In chapter 38, this hegemonic masculinity fails completely. In the following chapters, his masculine performance brings him back into the leadership position celebrated by Jacob in Genesis 49. However, his masculinity now accounts for subordinate characters in direct contrast to his failed hegemonic stances that lead to Joseph and Tamar hardships.

Letting God "be the Man"

Susan Haddox (2010) studied the men in Abraham's line in Genesis, focusing in particular on those sons that are divinely chosen to form the Israelite lineage. She states that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob express a masculinity that does not conform to the Ancient Near Eastern hegemonic ideal and argues that subordinate masculinity in the Genesis narratives sets up a standard for an appropriate relationship with God:

While the biblical text in many ways reflects and supports the categories of hegemonic masculinity, in the realm of the relation with God, these norms are frequently subverted, because no human can assume the position of ultimate power. That position is left to God. (Haddox 2010, 15)

In short, biblical men must perform a subordinate role to respect Yhwh as the ultimate embodiment of masculine power and control (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994; Haddox 2014, 517 and Graybill 2016). Genesis offers an implicit critique of hegemonic masculinity as a way to approach God. For

10. Dohyung Kim (2012, 554) also criticises Lambe's interpretation of Gen 38: 26 as a turning point in Judah's character: "Lambe has simply ignored the role of Tamar in the structure. That is to say, the changing situation of the two leading actors overlaps in the middle part: Judah is still descending, while Tamar is about to ascend."

example, in the case of Jacob versus Esau, the biblical narrative chooses to put forth Jacob and his subversive masculinity instead of his brother and his hegemonic masculinity.¹¹ This idea could explain why Judah needs at least one episode in which he is not portrayed with a typical hegemonic masculinity. However, the Joseph cycle does not speak much about approaching God. In fact, unlike important men in Genesis such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Judah is never placed in direct interaction with Yhwh. Judah's failure as a man in Genesis 38 does not give God a place of power or authority. Tamar is the one who takes the lead when Judah folds.

Following Menn, we could also consider that Judah's fallible masculinity is normative for biblical characters: "The presentation of Judah as a fallible human being in this narrative corresponds to the general tendency against idealizing ancestral figures in the Hebrew Bible" (Menn 1997, 40). This assertion is true, but it does not seem to do justice to the two opposing masculine performances underscored in the previous part of this article, or to the distinctions of sex and gender in biblical characters. Judah is not just a fallible human. He is presented as a man (not just a human) who tries to embody hegemonic masculinity by dominating women (Tamar) and subordinate men (Joseph) and fails in this attempt (Genesis 37–38) but who shows more inclusive form of leadership in Genesis 42–43 and is lauded by his Jacob as the hegemonic man among all of his sons (Genesis 49).

Conclusion

So, is Judah an ass in a lion's skin? This article explores Judah's anti-thetical masculinities as examples of the inherently unstable nature of gender construction. Although Judah is only the fourth son of Jacob, he is expressly depicted in Genesis as assuming a leadership role in rela-

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11. Susan E. Haddox (2010) compares both brothers: "In sum, Esau is portrayed as conforming to most of the expectations of masculinity: he is strong in body, hunting, warfare. He identifies with his father rather than his mother. He is an agent in procuring his marriages. He shows mercy from a position of strength. He is wealthy and has many offspring. He honours his father, though he has mixed reviews in this category, because of his Hittite wives. He falls short of expectations in not showing much intelligence or persuasiveness, at least as a young man" (Haddox 2010, 11). "Jacob's legacy is to father the twelve tribes of Israel, but his character is not consistently masculine. Jacob displays some of the characteristics: strength, virility, persuasiveness, intelligence, but falls short in the area of honour. He also frequently cedes his authority and initiative to other people: his mother, his wives, Laban and Esau. He is attached to women. Esau more consistently meets the masculine norms, yet he is not the one chosen by God" (Haddox 2010, 14).

tion to his brothers, including speaking up against killing Joseph, negotiating with his father regarding Joseph's demand that Benjamin be brought down to Egypt, and pleading with Joseph for Benjamin's life. In Genesis 49: 8–12, Judah receives the most favourable treatment of all Jacob's sons. The blessing of Jacob from his deathbed portrays Judah's hegemonic masculinity at its finest. However, in Genesis 38, Judah's masculine performance is far from ideal biblical masculinity. Not only does Judah lack persuasiveness when he accuses Tamar, but she is able to persuade him that his own actions were wrong. Judah is deceived, specifically deceived by a woman. The shame he wants to attribute to Tamar rebounds on himself. In the end, he acknowledges himself to be less righteous than Tamar (Gen 38: 26). Genesis 38 clearly subverts Judah's hegemonic masculinity. Jacob speaks of Judah as a lion, but in Genesis 38 he seems to have been portrayed in the role of the ass. Then again, contrary to Aesop's fable, this is not necessarily Judah's true character. Genesis upholds Judah's hegemonic masculinity in most of chapters 37–50, and emasculates him in chapter 38. This complex gender construction is not easy to categorize. With a narrative approach, this presentation of Judah's complex masculinities gives more depth to the description of his transformation through chapters 37–50.

In Genesis 37–50, Joseph and Tamar, and also possibly Er, Onan, Hirah, and Jacob, suffer the consequences of Judah's failed hegemonic masculinity. The patriarchal structure of the "story world" does not change with Genesis 38. Nevertheless, we have a clear example that in Genesis, when men try to perform a dominant masculinity that does not account for women and subordinate men, it fails. Morimura (1993, 57), Bos (1988, 48), Fuchs (2000, 73), and Bekins (2016, 395) all find that even if Tamar subverts gender expectations within the story, in the end, she stays subservient to the patriarchy as the mother of important sons. However, Rachel Adelman (2011) concluded her interpretation of Genesis 38 by a rewritten verse from Leonard Cohen: "There is a breach, a breach in everything. That's how the light gets in." Genesis 38 is indeed a breach in patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. From Judah, through Perez, "the breach," and to David in 2 Samuel 11, hegemonic masculinity in the Hebrew Bible is never stable. Books like Judges show many attempts at hegemonic masculine performance, but biblical men who try to perform hegemonic masculine stance are more often than not reminded that God is the dominant one. Therefore, Judah's complex and antithetical masculinities in Genesis is not as surprising as it looks since other biblical men like David fail when trying to perform a dominant masculinity.

Reading biblical narratives through this lens helps in deconstructing male gender scripts that promote inequality between men, and between men and women. Biblical narratives show how patriarchal masculinity patterns can lead to oppression of men and women, but they also open cracks in a system by helping readers to critique, interrogate and deconstruct male gender scripts that promote inequality.

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