Biblical Masculinity and Its Relevance to Contemporary Society

Biblical depictions of male patriarchal power have had enormous cultural influence across the years in which the bible and its authoritative interpretation have been the source. Samuel Tongue argues that the dynamic space between the text and the reader allows construction of social, political and theological textualities which structure everyday life (Tongue, 2012). Within the Jewish tradition this space is inhabited by midrashim[1] which in many cases elaborates and gives a 'back story' to the text.

Rhiannon Graybill points out that in the Hebrew Bible masculinity is not the necessary and inevitable consequence of the male sexed body nor is it a rigid binary identity (Graybill, 2015) but is a complicated and shifting negotiation of body, sex, sexuality and performance. A study of the behaviour of men in the bible narrative reveals an almost constant power struggle between men vying for supremacy and Carrigan characterises this social construct of imposition of behaviour by certain men on others as 'hegemonic masculinity' (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). In her study of biblical brothers, Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau, Susan Haddox notes that the man most favoured by God often appears less masculine than the rejected brother (Haddox, 2010).

In examining the religious literature, one approach taken has been to see how the issues therein would play out or have relevance to contemporary society. A brief example of this is the comment that Sforno[2] advances on the verse, *"Though my father and mother abandon me the Lord will take me up,[3]"* that the verse refers to a young man leaving home. This interpretation may give comfort to a religiously inclined youth contemplating leaving home for the first time.

Another approach to the literature is to examine recurrent words or incidences where a passage regarding one person relates to another - intertextuality. Elizabeth Boase's diachronic reading of Isaac and Abraham traces the similarities in the narratives of the two characters (Boase, 2001); e.g. the subterfuge that Sarah and Rebecca were the sisters of Abraham and Isaac respectively. She argues that there is a bi-directional movement of material between the traditions associated with the two characters. Intertextuality can also work to highlight the difference between characters as Diana Lipton shows in her contrast between God and Ahasuerus (Lipton, 2008 Page 72 et.sec.) in the book of Esther. Readers perceive what God is by what Ahasuerus is not and what God is not by what Ahasuerus is.

On a general note, Jonathan Sacks has advanced the principle in which the question to which the text is the answer is less "What happened?" than "How then shall I live?"(Sacks, 1992

[1] Midrash *pl*. Midrashim: A type of literature, oral or written, which stands in direct relationship to a fixed canonical text, considered to be authoritative and revealed word of God by the midrashist and audience, and in which this canonical text is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to. Gary G. Porton (1981)

[2] Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno Italy 1475-1550

[3] Psalm **27.**10

Page 225).[4] The Hebrew Bible and early rabbinic texts recount the experience of numerous men and from these a selection has been made because they represent prototypes that have been historically significant.

Abraham

The Lord said to Abram, "Go out from your native land and your father's house to the land I shall show you. I shall make you a great nation and I shall bless you."[5]

Abraham, the first of the patriarchs is the dominant figure of Genesis Chapters 12 to 25. He received a call at the age of 75 from God to leave his established society and become personally great and a source of blessing through his progeny. The midrashim enlarge on this by saying that he had become disillusioned by the idolatrous theology of his society and he discovered a radical new philosophy – monotheism, a single deity – that necessitated a complete break from home, family and country. Abraham thus represents someone, so dissatisfied with his current position, socially and geographically, that he has to make a complete break from all the connections to his former life.

The feeling some people have of being dissatisfied with their current circumstances and wanting to break free to discover a new, better religious philosophy is explicitly described in relation to Hasidism for whom Abraham was a role model in its early development. Hasidism has the philosophy of spirituality through joy, song and dance. This movement was founded by the Baal Shem Tov[6] and was viewed unfavourably by the Jewish religious establishment culminating in an edict against Hasidism by the Gaon of Vilna[7] in 1772. Hasidic philosophy was opposed to the intellectual elitism of Rav Chaim of Volozhin[8] and the early devotees of Hasidism broke with the established Jewish communities and left their families to cluster around their chosen Hasidic master – the Rebbe (Gellman, 1998). They regard their own resolve to follow their Hasidic master against the wishes of their families as parallel to Abraham's resolve to obey the command to leave his home and also to sacrifice his son (family) for God. In present times this model of leaving one's community to pursue a more religious life either spending extended time in a yeshiva and/or joining one of the Hasidic sects in Israel has appealed to some young men.

The relationship between God and Abraham was sealed with the covenant of circumcision of the foreskin[9] - deliberate wounding of the penis. Although circumcision as a rite of passage for adolescent boys was known in some ancient societies associating circumcision with a covenant at 8 days is a unique marker of identity for a male Jewish infant. The importance of circumcision in rabbinic thought is expressed in midrash, I*n the hereafter Abraham will sit at*

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[4] This question has been attributed to Socrates in *Plato's Republic* See Jonathan Lear *Freud* Page 14 (2005) Routledge

[5] Genesis **12.** 1-2

[6] Israel ben Eliezer 1698 – 1760

[7] Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman 1720 – 1797

[8] 1749 - 1821

[9] Genesis **17.** 9-14

the entrance of Gehinnom and will not allow any circumcised Israelite to descend to it. As for those who sinned unduly what does he do? He removes the foreskin of children who died before circumcision and places it upon them and sends them down to Gehinnom.[10] A male convert to Judaism is required to undergo circumcision as a sign of acceptance of the Abrahamic covenant and he takes a Hebrew name as a *ben Avraham.*

In his personal habits Abraham is an exemplar of modest hospitality. Chapter 18 opens with his entreaty to invite three strangers to his tent notwithstanding that he was recovering from his own circumcision and occupied with a conversation with God, *"My lords, if it please you do not go past your servant… let a little water be bought and let me fetch you a morsel of bread."*[11] He promised little but went to great effort to serve his guests. Another trait in Abraham is his sense of justice when he hears that the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah are to be destroyed and Abraham argues and tries to change God's mind, *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"*[12]

The defining incident which cements Abraham's relationship with God was the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac – the Akedah – and this episode has been used in at least three ways. As a test of Abraham's faith, the Akedah required him to comply unquestioningly and with alacrity because any hesitation would have meant that he had failed (Gellman, 1998). An alternative view is presented by Jonathan Jacobs (Jacobs, 2010) whose analysis postulates that Abraham procrastinated and delayed many times, probably in the hope that the divine command would be annulled. Jacobs sites the multiple verbs (6) in verse 3 describing the preparation for departure hints at Abraham's delaying as he had many servants who could have done everything in advance. The journey to Moriah is interrupted by the dialogue between Abraham and Isaac when Abraham's reluctance to reveal the true nature of God's command indicates Abraham's perplexity and anguish at Isaac's question, *"Where is the lamb?"* On arrival at the place of intended sacrifice (Moriah) there are six more verbs in verses 9 and 10 which parallel those of the preparation. Far from being the cold one-dimensional figure who obeys God's commands in an unthinking mechanical manner that has characterised his dominant masculinity, this reading demonstrates a complex human figure who is torn between his love for his family and his obligation to obey God despite the emotional cost to himself. This view is supported by the midrash; *[Abraham] stretches out his hand to take the knife and tears fall from his eyes into the eyes of Isaac from the compassion of a father. Nevertheless, his heart rejoiced at doing the will of his creator.*[13]

The Akedah and its effect on Isaac has been used in midrash also as symbolic of resurrection of the dead (Spiegel, 1993 Pages 30 and 111). Stephen Frosh notes that the collective memory of the Akedah became a motif of Jewish suffering as if the affected generation was being 'tested' (Frosh, 2018) and Shalom Spiegel notes that the Jews murdered by the Crusaders

[10] Genesis Rabbah **48.** 8
[11] Genesis **18.** 4-5
[12] Genesis **18.** 25
[13] Genesis Rabba **56.** 8

called on the memory of the Akedah to confirm their devotion (Page 17 et. sec.) as a symbol of martyrdom, the willingness to be sacrificed in sanctification of God's name. In Holocaust thought the notion that the murdered Jews were sacrifices in this mould has had some traction.

Throughout the text Abraham displays an exalted level of masculinity and social status that is legitimated and ordained by God. When necessary he intervenes militarily in the battle between rival armies in the Valley of Siddim[14] to rescue his nephew, Lot, and refuses to take any personal reward for his efforts. Abraham is the archetypical masculine patriarch whose dominance, hospitality and sense of justice portrays a dominant male who is selected and chosen, for religious purposes, to be the founder of a nation (Israel). He is a property owner who possesses land, a subordinate wife, subordinate male relatives, and slaves. As a husband and father his relations with women and children are paternalistic and intend to be benevolent but he does expect immediate obedience from his family. Through Abraham, a tradition of patriarchy is established and continued through his male progeny. As this Abrahamic masculinity develops, it will claim that power and authority are legitimated on theological grounds (Neal, 2011).

Isaac

Abraham gave his new-born son, whom Sarah had borne him the name of Isaac. And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him.[15]

In a superficial reading of the life of Isaac, he comes across as a very passive figure. From his birth in Chapter 21 to his death at the age of 180 recorded at the end of Chapter 35 he is mentioned as a main character only in Chapters 25 to 27 but even then, he does not appear to have prime agency. However, his contribution to the construction of a role model for Jewish masculinity is considerable. He was the necessary link between Abraham and Jacob and whilst they both had dramatic, eventful lives, it was Isaac's quiet dedication that was necessary for the consolidation of the patriarchal covenant promised to Abraham so that this covenant could be passed on to the future generations. His life can be considered to consist of three phases. The first is as a passive youth (although his age has been calculated to be 37[16] when he was nearly sacrificed at the Akaida); the second is as a mature man marrying Rebekah, having children and negotiating with Abimelech and the other inhabitants of the land; and the final phase, as an old blind man, being manoeuvred and deceived by his wife so that the covenant could be passed to his more suitable younger son Jacob.

The Akedah was discussed in the previous section as a test for Abraham but it was more a test of Isaac. Generally, one trusts one's parents for provision and protection and here the opposite was occurring. Isaac is continually referred to as '*the lad*' and '*Isaac, your son*' so his

[14] Genesis **14**
[15] Genesis **21** 3-4
[16] Louis Ginzberg 1909 *Legends of the Jews* Volume 1 Chapter 5. Calculated from the death of Sarah aged 127 allegedly brought on by the Akedah – She was 90 when Isaac was born (Genesis **17.** 17)

identity is not his own, he is his father's son. The horrific trauma that Isaac experienced as a lad at Moriah scarred him. That shock notwithstanding, he achieved a tremendous amount in his life; a testament to the might of his inner fortitude and to the strength of his will (Zucker, 2010). He is a resilient character having experienced his change of status from 'beloved child' almost to 'sacrificial lamb.'

This notion of 'sacrifice' i.e. the unwilling victim of persecution, was exchanged for the notion of 'willing sacrifice' by the Zionist pioneers in early 20th century Jewish Palestine who had fled the persecution of Eastern Europe and were ready to give their lives for the idea of building a motherland. Berl Katznelson (1887-1944) was a Labour-Zionist, second Aliya leader who coined the paradoxical expression '*Osher Akedah'* – the happiness of self-binding – to portray the excitement and trepidation of the volunteers to the Jewish Legion in the British army in World War 1 (Feldman, 2013).

Isaac's first encounter with Rebekah is written from her viewpoint. She had been chosen as his wife with no input from him and she sees him at a distance when he had come into a field. וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה, לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב *And Isaac went out to ?? in the field in the evening*. The verb לָשׂוּחַ only appears once and its meaning is uncertain. Although the Midrashic tradition is that it means 'to meditate' i.e. to pray, Zvi Ron brings two other meanings (Ron, 2015). The first is a tradition from Rashbam[17] that it is related to שִׂיחַ *a shrub* and Isaac was engaged in agriculture. If this is correct then it would suggest that unlike his father, Abraham, and son, Jacob, who were notable herdsmen, he was a 'tiller of the soil' and this would correlate with the mention of *"Him sowing the land and reaping a hundredfold"*[18]. Other leaders of Israel, Moses and David, were also described as shepherds. Flocks and herds move around but fields are fixed and stable. While Isaac's more sedentary lifestyle is often interpreted as a sign of passivity it can be viewed instead as applying himself to hard work in order to make a living and make his way in the world. In the context of masculinity, Isaac can be seen as the epitome of a stable reliable person – an ideal husband. The second, more radical tradition that Ron quotes, is from Ibn Ezra[19] who thinks that Isaac was taking a stroll among the bushes i.e. pursuing a leisure activity. If correct it puts Isaac as someone who enjoys leisure activity by taking an evening stroll and accordingly, no longer a dour severe individual but a happy and tranquil one.

The result of Isaac's hard work and divine blessing made him very strong and in the context of a famine in the land (Chapter **26.**1) the size of his household was a source of envy of the Philistines. Abimelech, the Philistine king, came to him with a deputation to seek peace because Isaac was so much stronger than they. Isaac had not sought confrontation over water supplies because he was assured in his own strength.

[17] Samuel Ben Meir. Troyes 1085-1158
[18] Genesis **26.** 12
[19] Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra. Spain 1089-1167

As an old man Isaac cuts a rather pathetic figure. He loves his son Esau because of the food that Esau provides but his sight is so poor that he cannot differentiate between the two sons and he is deceived into giving the patriarchal blessing to his younger son. The prophecy that the younger son should inherit the blessing was only given to Rebekah and there is no evidence that Isaac knew about this. Isaac's repeated questioning of Jacob when he had come with food for him so quickly, suggests that he knew who he was blessing but he had little control in this situation. He was the agent through whom the blessing was to be given but was not trusted to make the correct choice (Boase, 2001). David Zucker suggests quite the opposite; that it was Jacob who was deceived. He opines that Isaac and Rebekah planned the ruse to force Jacob to leave home and go to Paddan-Aram to find a wife (Zucker, 2010).

The theological importance of Isaac rests on the fact that the promises he inherited were not for his own actions but those of his father Abraham, and Isaac in turn passed these on to Jacob also as a child chosen by God. The pattern of the promises to God's chosen ones in continuity from one generation to the next is established. Isaac is the crucial link that stretches into the future and although overshadowed by the generations before and after, without him the chain would have broken. That was his legacy to future generations.

Jacob

And the boys grew up, Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the fields; but Jacob was a mild man who lived in tents.[20]

This narrative of contrasting siblings has been a mainstay of attitudes and aptitudes presented to Jewish children; Esau, the older twin, the physical man, and his younger intellectual brother Jacob. Whilst Esau was out in the world hunting and fighting, doing all the things that young boys fantasise about, Jacob was the stay-at-home bookish man that decidedly was not what a young boy was fantasising about. As both boys were directly descended from Abraham, they represent two contrasting visions of how the patriarchal covenant could be continued as both characters have their flaws; Esau's great weakness was his impulsive nature and Jacob, slyly and with an eye to the main chance, uses his greater intelligence to take advantage of his brother's impulsivity to acquire the birth right. Daniel Elazar describes this dichotomy as presenting God with a dilemma of which of these imperfect characters should continue the covenant that He made with Abraham (Elazar, 1994).

The narrative describes how Jacob has to leave home and he spends 20 years living on his wits, being deceived and in turn deceiving his unscrupulous uncle Laban. Using his intelligence, he does eventually acquire considerable wealth and a large family. He does not treat the women in his life particularly well as his first wife, Leah, cannot doing anything to obtain his love despite bearing him six sons and a daughter. In the context of ancient near eastern culture this fecundity would have merited Leah the highest status of women in the

[20] Genesis **25.** 27

household. He became angry with Rachel, the wife for whom he had served fourteen years, when she was upset at her lack of fertility.

Essentially the bible is telling that the clever, calculating person who at times is not completely honest, is preferable to a bluff, impulsive person who cannot make discriminating choices. Jacob displays the characteristics which are later to become the non-Jewish stereotype of the Jews while Esau continued to display the characteristics which become the Jewish stereotype of the non-Jews, disparagingly referred to as – *the goyim,* (lit. the nations). By prioritising Jacob's brain over Esau's brawn, the favoured role model presented to children is *"The mild man who lived in tents"* i.e. the studious domesticated type of man who shuns physical violence whilst glossing over the negative aspects of his character; his less than perfect treatment of the women who loved him.

Jacob is not a warrior by nature; returning to his homeland and being advised that Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men, Jacob's instinct was to placate his brother with gifts and he organised his camp so that some might escape in the event of an attack by. It is when Jacob is left alone that he is confronted by and has to wrestle with an unknown man[21] and when the adversary has been unable to defeat Jacob, Jacob refuses to let him go without receiving a blessing. When Jacob admits his name, *"I am Jacob"* thus correcting his statement to Isaac the he was Esau at the occasion of acquiring a blessing, the adversary re-names him Israel because *"You have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."* The classical rabbinic exegetes, Nachmanides[22], Sforno and Rashbam[23], identify the adversary as an angel who told him of the sins that future leaders will commit but a more nuanced reading is possible. The adversary could be God masquerading as Jacob's own subconscious self. Jacob had been envious of the love Isaac bore for Esau and it was only when Jacob was comfortable in his own skin that he gained his own Identity with a new name; no longer a 'one who supplants' but 'one who strove with God'. The wound that Jacob sustained could be a metaphor for the altered, less physically aggressive masculinity which would be in keeping with the disapproval of such behaviour that can be read from his reaction to the occasion when his daughter, Dinah, was seduced/raped by Shechem. The initiative for revenge was taken by his sons and when Jacob heard of the massacre perpetrated by Simeon and Levi his only response was, *"You have made me odious among the inhabitants of the land."*[24] He seemed more concerned about his reputation – what will the neighbours say? – than about the violence although he did condemn Simeon and Levi for their actions on his deathbed.[25]

[21] Genesis **32.** 25 - 33
[22] Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194 - 1270
[23] Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir 1085 - 1174
[24] Genesis **34.** 30
[25] Genesis **49.** 5-7

Joseph

Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." So, she named him Joseph, which is to say, "May the Lord add another son for me."[26]

This is a narrative of an over-indulged, 'pretty-boy' son of the favoured wife of his elderly father; who went from being sold as a slave by his resentful elder brothers, rose to be steward of a noble Egyptian family, only to be denounced as a rapist and thrown into prison, then rose again to be the right-hand-man to the most powerful ruler in the world. At a macro-social level, the narrative deals with survival of religious separatism in a foreign environment. Diana Lipton asks, *"How far can Joseph assimilate into Egypt without ceasing to be an Israelite, how high can Joseph climb in Egypt without compromising his Israelite values, can a Hebrew be simultaneously an Egyptian, is living in diaspora viable in the long term?"* (Lipton, 2008 Page 245). These are complex questions about society and identity that Jews living in the relatively liberal society of 21st century Britain are dealing with either consciously or unconsciously. At a micro-social level, it is a narrative of how a dysfunctional family ridden with internal jealousy, a grieving elderly single parent (Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not mentioned) and an arrogant, vain, spoilt, younger brother eventually become reconciled and healed so that they can live together in peace. On a personal level the encounter between Joseph and Potiphar's wife[27] can be read in the context of Joseph's struggle with his sexual inclination.

Joseph dominates the last 23 chapters of the book of Genesis and is introduced as an immature teenager giving unspecified bad reports of his older brothers' behaviour to his father thus incurring their hatred. The multicoloured coat that Jacob gave him is a mark of the special love he had for Joseph's mother, Rachel. The phrase for this coat, in Hebrew *ketonit passim*, occurs only once more in the bible – the coat of the princess Tamar[28] so it was a garment of princesses. Wendy Zierler quotes Thomas Mann's novel *Joseph and his Brothers* that the coat was actually the wedding veil belonged to Rachel[29] and when Joseph put it on he became Rachel in Jacob's eyes (Zierler, 2013). Joseph is a dreamer, of domination over his brothers and of domination over the sun, moon and stars. In the popular belief of that time, dreams were messages from God and therefore these dreams were divine prophesies. The text notes that he was exceptionally beautiful, *"And Joseph was of beautiful form and fair to look upon."*[30] The midrash on this verse comments *"It may be illustrated by a man in the street, pencilling his eyes, curling his hair and lifting his heel*[31]*, while he exclaimed, 'I am indeed a man.'"*[32] The sense of this passage would indicate some gender fluidity and whilst Zierler reads this as evidence of effeminacy and vanity, in contemporary society it could also be

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[26] Genesis **30.** 22-24
[27] Genesis **39.**
[28] Samuel II, **13.** 18
[29] *Joseph and His Brothers* Thomas Mann translated by H.T.Lowe-Porter Chapter 4 Pages 314-323
[30] Genesis **39.** 6
[31] Usually understood as 'mincing gait'
[32] Midrash Genesis Rabbah **87.** 3

designated as 'meterosexuality' where young men are using 'male grooming products' i.e. cosmetics, and taking care over their clothes and appearance without any homosexual intentions.

Joseph's beauty is the cause of his being propositioned by his master's wife who accused him of rape when he rejected her. He was imprisoned but his ability to interpret dreams allowed him to be released and elevated to the aristocracy being second only to Pharaoh. In this position of power, he has the opportunity of exacting revenge on the brothers who had hated him enough to conspire to kill him. That they had merely sold him into slavery hardly redeemed their actions. Now, in Egypt, with the brothers at his mercy, Joseph has a struggle between his inner self and public persona (J. Gordon McConville, 2013). Joseph is desperately concerned about his father and wants to see him again but is uncertain whether his brothers still harbour resentment towards him for his youthful behaviour. For their part, the brothers do not recognise him; the Egyptian aristocrat before them has no resemblance to the effeminate callow youth they hated. Joseph had recognised that the prophecy of his first dream – the sheaf binding episode – had been fulfilled with grain being an important link between the dream and the brothers desire to buy corn. Dreams being a prophesy from God implied that the hand of God had been instrumental in the whole process. It had been God that caused Joseph to be sent down to Egypt and to be in a position to rescue the family from the famine. It was God who caused the famine and engineered saving the descendants of Abraham in a foreign country where they could build a nation, *"Know you well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs."*[33] The stratagem that Joseph devised, holding one brother hostage to force Benjamin to come before him, knowing the strain that this would impose on his father, could be construed as cold and calculating but that belies his emotion when he wept in private. The impassioned speech by Judah in defence of Benjamin who had artificially been made to look as a thief convinced Joseph of his brothers' sincere regret over their treatment of him. The narrative closes with the family reunited and at peace with each other.

Taking the narrative as a paradigm of diaspora, Joseph portrays a model life amid the socio-political, ethnic, and economic struggles and tensions between the "insiders" and the "outsiders," and between the powerful and the marginalized (Kim, 2013). Joseph as chief minister to Pharaoh has a hybrid identity; he is an outsider to the sophisticated aristocrats in the court of the most powerful kingdom in the world but as the man with the power to give or withhold food he is the ultimate insider establishment bureaucrat. It was public knowledge that he had been plucked from a dungeon and placed in command of the resources of the whole country. In his position of power, he had effectively controlled the entire economy and concentrated all the wealth of Egypt in Pharaoh and even enslaved the entire population. However, Joseph's position is inherently unstable. Having no political base in Egypt he owed his exalted status to Pharaoh's favour and must have been acutely aware that he could be

[33] Genesis **15.** 13

brought down as easily as he had been elevated; it had happened before when he lost his position in Potiphar's house. Joseph was careful to brief his brothers as to how they were to conduct themselves before Pharaoh and the Egyptians so they would not appear to be a threat.[34]

Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife bears the hallmarks of a common mime of ancient Greek and Roman theatre (Levinson, 1997) where a virtuous man is propositioned by a sexually voracious woman of higher social status. This also feeds into a common fantasy that young men have of being introduced to sex by an older woman.[35] On a standard reading of this chapter Potiphar's wife is guilty of tempting Joseph to commit adultery and of being an adulteress herself. Rabbinical hermeneutics on this chapter emphasise Joseph's virtue, restraint and self-control, a theme compatible with the rabbinic model of what made a 'real' man and contrast that with the woman's lack of control; her lust and passion. This reading is in keeping with what many scholars have shown to be a dominant code of self- fashioning in the contemporary Greco-Roman world of the first generation of Talmudic scholars, where self-control, especially in its sexual form, was a sine qua non of masculine gender identity, while women are constantly portrayed as "constitutionally unable to constrain themselves." Philo of Alexandria[36] subscribed to the view that gender was a fluid continuum with male at the top and woman at the bottom. Giving in to lustful desire was an indication of sliding down this scale from male to female because unbridled sexual passion was a female characteristic (Conway, 2003). Some later commentators are not so certain about Joseph's conduct as this abridged passage from the Talmud shows[37]. *And it came to pass that he went into the house to do his work. Rabbi Johanon said, 'This teaches us that both had the intention of acting immorally.' Rav and Shmuel differ; one said it really meant to do his work but the other said it was to satisfy his desires. At that moment his father's image appeared to him through the window and said, 'Joseph, your brothers will have their names engraved on the breastplate and yours should be there too. Do you want your name to be expunged and be called an associate of harlots?' Immediately his passion subsided and he stuck his hands into the ground and his lust came out from between his finger nails.* The use of Jacob's image and the breastplate of the high priest as a means of distracting Joseph from having intercourse with Potiphar's wife presents Joseph with a stark choice between the heteroerotic of this foreign woman or the homosocial of his family and religion. Potiphar's wife is not only a symbol of sexual impropriety but also of cultural difference. Levinson argues that the attempted seduction was cultural and political rather than just bodily and sexual and if this line of thought is continued to present day circumstances then for young men to be tempted to choose a non-Jewish woman to marry would be a cultural challenge to the continuation of Judaism.

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[34] Genesis **46.** 34

[35] The 1967 film *The Graduate* where the young Benjamin Braddock encounters Mrs Robinson *"Are you trying to seduce me, Mrs Robinson?"*

[36] Hellenistic Jewish Philosopher 20BCE-50CE

[37] Tractate Sotah 36b

Moses

When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."[38]

The figure of Moses dominates the last four books of the Torah and is variously described as "Our Teacher" and "The Law Giver" denoting his primacy over all the prophets of the bible and his key role as mediator between the Children of Israel and God. Moses upbringing was as an Egyptian but he never forgot his Hebrew identity when he saw an Egyptian taskmaster hitting an Israelite slave[39] he intervened. This could be considered as a test of his character to be a leader. A second test was when he attempted to resolve a dispute between two Israelites.[40] The third incident was when Moses defended the shepherdess daughters of Jethro against a rival group of shepherds[41] and the fourth was Moses' care of the flocks of his father-in-law.[42] The midrashim on these incidence have been collated by Ari Zivotofsky (Zivotofsky, 1994) and he thinks that the common theme running through these incidents is that Moses was consistently portrayed as not only caring for others but was prepared to act upon his concerns. It was his sense of justice that caused him to confront the taskmaster and the shepherds to protect a weaker party, his sense of diplomacy to try and resolve a dispute between the two Israelites and his sensitivity to the needs of the flocks in his care. These were the qualities that marked him out for leadership but Zivotofsky goes further to infer that the composers of the midrashim thought that these were qualities that every man should aspire to have.

The behaviour of the Children of Israel fluctuated wildly between the extremes of profound faith such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the revelation on Mount Sinai and the equally profound rebellion and complaining such as the Golden Calf and the numerous occasions when water and food were scarce. Moses also had to deal with direct challenges to his authority; both communally, as the revolt of Korach and his company[43] and personally as when Miriam and Aaron expressed disapproval of Moses' wife.[44] In these incidents Moses did not respond directly but God dealt with both challenges. The quality of leadership required to maintain community coherence under such circumstances would normally be that of a domineering personality usually associated with hegemonic masculinity but the text states *"Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any man on earth."*[45] Moses was frequently irritated by instances of ingratitude and complaint from the people but the only occasion when Moses gave vent to his anger towards the people – when he struck a rock to bring water instead of talking to it[46]- he was punished by God by not being allowed to lead

[38] Exodus **2.** 10
[39] Exodus **2.** 11 - 12
[40] Exodus **2.** 13 - 14
[41] Exodus **2.** 17
[42] Exodus **3.** 1
[43] Number **16**
[44] Numbers **12**
[45]Numbers **12.** 3
[46]Numbers **20.** 9-13

the people into the Promised Land. Usually it was God who was angry with the people and Moses who managed to calm God down and avert a threatened catastrophe. These episodes would seem to indicate that for a leader it would be better to maintain a cool head and self-control in the face of challenge and adversity would be better than than to give vent to rage.

For Philo of Alexandria Moses seemed more a god than a man, a perspective that would seem to be at odds with Philo's steadfast belief in monotheism. To resolve this there is a view that for Philo, Moses was so perfect that he almost became divine although because of corporality he could not actually attain divinity. Another view is that Philo's elevation of Moses was just to reinforce the view that Moses was the ultimate philosopher-king and that he never became more than the divinely endowed supreme example of a religious life commended by Philo. Colleen Conway suggests that Philo regarded Moses as the ideal 'man' and that is consistent with the Greco-Roman[47] concept of gender and that Philo's sense of the divine/human scale is integrally linked to a male/female gradient (Conway, 2003). In this gradient biological sex was not synonymous with gender and instead of being binary male/female there was just one scale with the perfect male being at the top with other less complete or less perfect versions falling some way behind on the axis. In this view, woman was not the binary opposite sex of man but an imperfect, incomplete version of man. Men had more to lose than women using this gradient because performance determined where one was on the scale so masculinity was not fixed but unstable and required continued effort. Correlation with the divine/human gradient meant that the perfection of one's soul was linked to performance of piety so the more pious a soul was inevitably was associated with being more masculine. Virtues such as courage, honour, justice and shunning luxury would put one up the scale and vices, particularly lustfulness and unbridled sexual passion which was viewed as a female characteristic would do the reverse. Lack of the virtues would indicate softness and effeminacy and a man should shun any behaviour which could be seen as feminine because that would endanger his position on the masculinity scale.

Philo notes Moses' beautiful and noble appearance from birth indicating his elevated soul and true masculine essence. He further comments that Moses had noble speech, strict self-control of his passions particularly sexual passion and that he had eschewed luxury. Using this model, in Moses is seen the perfect masculinity associated with divinity. Philo seems to have ignored Moses' declared speech impediment, *"I am slow of speech and slow of tongue,"*[48] and that he killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave.[49] The speech impediment could be overlooked because of the ability of his brother, Aaron, who could speak for him and killing the Egyptian could be excused on the count of justice. Moses' continued piety is portrayed as his climbing up the masculinity scale towards the divine and this trait is one to be emulated. If divinity and masculinity are to be equated then God, being the ultimate divinity, would be ultra-male. However, the text in creation states that, *"In the*

[47] As advanced by Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE) and Galen (130 CE - 210 CE)
[48] Exodus **4.** 10
[49] Exodus **2.** 12

image of God He created him; male and female He created them,"[50] and this can only be reconciled by saying that the image of God is undifferentiated, neither male nor female, which Philo understood to be 'masculine asexuality.'

A more critical reading of the physicality of Moses reveals a body much less than perfect. Certainly, at birth his mother described him as *"good*[51]*"* and at death *"His eyes were undimmed and his vigour unabated*[52]*"* but in between he had a number of physical defects. His slowness of speech has been mentioned above and this could have been due to a congenital defect like a cleft palate although there is a midrash that states that it was a burning coal.[53] At the time of his call to prophesy[54] Moses was reluctant to accept the leadership of the people and in the process of persuading him to accept his calling God convinced Moses of His divinity by temporarily afflicting him with a scaly skin disease which would normally have taken many weeks to develop and a similar length of time to heal. That skin condition was later to became associated with impurity and exclusion from the community.[55] Just after Moses had accepted the call to leadership God threatened his life[56] and was only saved by the prompt action of his wife, Zipporah, who circumcised Moses' son and the blood spilt allowed Moses to live. Allowing for the ambiguity of the text it would seem that the phallic power in this episode was held by Zipporah and wounding the penis – the site of weakness rather than power – was what delivered Moses. The male body as well as the configuration of masculinity was transformed (Graybill, 2015). Shortly after leaving Egypt the Children of Israel were attacked by the Amalekites at Rephidim[57] and whenever Moses lifted up his arms Israel prevailed but when he lowered them, Amalek prevailed. Moses became weak and had to be helped by Aaron and Hur to keep his arms up for the duration of the battle.

After Moses had received the second pair of tablets from God at Mount Sinai his face was said to be '*radiant'*[58] and this so terrified Aaron and the Israelites that Moses was compelled to put a veil over his face. That veil was to be a permanent fixture when speaking to anybody other than God and was only removed when Moses was speaking directly with God. This veiling not only separates Moses from the rest of the Israelites as he became closer to God it also moves him away from normative masculinity. Veiling is very much a feminine activity; the other references to somebody using a veil are Rebecca when she met Isaac for the first time and Tamar when she disguised herself as a prostitute to have a child by Judah, so its use by Moses has been called a feminising mark (Graybill, 2015). The feminine theme was continued by Moses when he complained to God when the Israelites had grown tired of

[50] Genesis **1.** 27
[51] Exodus **2.** 2
[52] Deut. **34.** 7
[53] Midrash Rabbah Exodus **1.** 31
[54] Exodus **4.** 6-7
[55] Leviticus **14.**
[56] Exodus **4.** 24 - 26
[57] Exodus **17.** 8 - 13
[58] Exodus **34.** 29 - 34

manna. *"Did I conceive all these people, bear them, carry them in my bosom as a nurse carries an infant?"*[59] Moses switches from the female role as mother to an unspecified gender role as nurse (the masculine noun is used) so there is gender instability in the text. An alternative construction of masculinity lingers behind this apparent use of the feminine.

Despite all the defects in Moses' body he remains as the ultimate prophet, *"Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses"*[60] and in life he did not achieve the bodily perfection that hegemonic masculinity required. Instead he achieved an alternative form of masculine embodiment – a Mosaic masculinity. In death Moses achieved a wholeness that was not apparent in life.

Samson

"You are going to conceive and bear a son; let no razor touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite to God from the womb."[61]

After the passing of Moses and Joshua leadership became a problem for the Israelites. There were a series of Judges each holding sway for a period achieving their eminence to counter a specific threat. Samson was unique in that his eminence was foretold in an angelic prophesy before he was born, after his birth it was stated that, *"And the spirit of the LORD began to move him"*[62] so he was marked out as being special but what that meant is not specified.

As a young adult, Samson's behaviour seemed to change. He was not allowed alcohol – a normal substance at religious celebrations, he could not touch dead animals or humans but rebels against this in touching the lion that he killed, and he is forbidden to eat unclean food but has scooped out honey from the corpse of the lion. He 'married out' – the Philistine woman but his wife was given to another man whilst Samson was away and in revenge, he instituted a reign of terror destroying crops. He was subsequently given over to the Philistines but broke free of his bonds and single-handedly killed 1,000 men with a jaw bone of an ass.

After judging Israel for 20 years Samson visited a prostitute from Gaza but then subsequently fell in love with Delilah and she wheedled out the secret of his strength. After his hair was cut off his strength disappeared and he was captured and blinded by the Philistines. Samson had descended to the depths of humiliation, brought out as an object of fun for abuse by a drunken rabble. He called on God for one last feat of strength and he brought down the building killing himself and all the rabble. In his death he killed more than all the men killed in his lifetime.

The story of Samson is conventionally read as a violent and aggressive man brought down by the nagging of women – a classic 'battle of the sexes' – with heteronormative configurations of sexual practices and sexual identities. For example, in the course of psychoanalysis of a

[59] Numbers **11.** 12
[60] Deut **34.**10
[61] Judges **13.** 5
[62] Judges **13.** 25

man with a compulsion to seek repeated liaisons with women that he knew were going to betray him, Ilan Kutz made a reverse association between his patient and Samson claiming that understanding what the man was doing lead to a similar understanding of what Samson was doing (Kutz, 1989). The patient had endured a difficult childhood with a distant and unresponsive father and a mother who had had a series of lovers. The patient had channelled his latent aggression against his mother into seeking to re-enact encounters with women who he knew were going to betray him so he could have an excuse to give vent to his rage. Kutz named this association the 'Samson Complex.'

There is an alternative unconventional reading of the text by Marco Derks. He employs a queer perspective on the text to construct both a non-hegemonic and a hegemonic configuration of sexuality, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and class at their inter- sections to deal with issues of gender, sexuality and ideology (Derks, 2015). Samson's hypermasculinity and violence is viewed as his attempts to counter his queerness to produce a prototype of the modern heterosexual. He is trying too hard to be masculine and as a result reduces himself to a caricature. Heterosexuality, according to Judith Butler, is a cultural ideal, a regulatory fiction that is constructed by all those who live up to it, while its supposed naturalness is achieved by a continuous repetition of its gender norms (Butler, 1990 page 33). Samson treats women as cyphers; the woman from Timnah and the prostitute from Gaza are used only to gratify his sexual desire. They are specifically geographically located, unnamed and after use, discarded, as are all the women in his life. Delilah is exceptional in that she is the only one who is named and although the text states that Samson loved her in the valley of Sorek her origin is uncertain, neither definitely Israelite nor Philistine. She does not conform to Samson's phallogocentric scheme by refusing to submit as his previous women had done. Also, by withholding her origin and insistence on her name she has power that his previous women did not, and therefore deconstructs his masculine identity. Derks opines that Samson yearns to be overpowered and he and Delilah were playing a BDSM (bondage, domination, sadomasochist) game. His answers to Delilah's questions give ever more accurate clues regarding the origins of his strength, his elaborately braided hair. By investing his strength with his hair, Samson has made it a phallic symbol so when his hair is cut it is as if he had been castrated. In addition, Derks quotes Susan Niditch who believes that Samson was facing "the ultimate psychological dilemma for men": He simultaneously desires and fears to get "mixed up" in an emotional relationship. Derks concludes by arguing that Samson is to blame for his own downfall because he was unwilling to accept his queer positionality resulting in a performance of hypermasculinity, with different yet similarly damaging effects on both men and women. When he met a woman whose ambiguous identity forces open his androcentric worldview his "heterosexuality" dissolved back into queerness. It could be argued that Samson regarded male/female relations as a 'zero sum game' that is, if a man loses power to a woman he is diminished however if he voluntarily gave up some of his power, made an investment of power, he would gain in love and affection in the long term.

Through no wish of his own, Samson had been born with certain gifts and whether he appreciated the fact that his path had been pre-ordained by God to be a champion against the Philistines is not clear. His mother is not named in the text but she appeared to be the one with most agency before he was born – the angelic appearance was to her and not to Manoah, Samson's father. The quality of the relationship Samson had with his father is not specified but there is a sense of distance between them. The fact that the woman was barren but conceived immediately after the angel appeared to her may have raised doubts in his mind as to the paternity of the child. Manoah tried to detain the angel, offering food and asking his name on the pretext of honouring him when the words came true. Manoah's reaction when his offering was miraculously accepted – flinging himself on the ground and fearing that they would die – denotes panic and his wife's rebuke – that the offering would not have been accepted if they were to die – would have dented his self-esteem. Samson is the despair of his parents in the wish to take a wife from the Philistines, *"Is there no one among the daughters of your own kinsmen and amongst all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"*[63] It was however, to Manoah that Samson turned to facilitate the marriage and finally it was in the tomb of Manoah that Samson was buried by his brothers when he died. Samson's gift was a burden in that the restless energy that ensued caused him to have rest only in the lap of the woman he knew was going to betray him. His gift controlled him rather than him controlling his gift.

Boaz

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a man of substance, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.[64]

The book of Ruth narrates the history of the origin of the Davidic dynasty. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth return from Moab after the deaths of Naomi's husband and two sons after the family had left the land of Israel due to famine. The two women were destitute and were rescued and supported by Boaz, a distant relative of Naomi's husband and thus Boaz can be seen as an exemplar of chivalry. A close reading of the text of Ruth supports the use of Boaz as a male role model in his personal conduct and dealings with men and women (Schrock, 2013). He has respectful relations with his employees – *Boaz said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you" and they answered "The Lord bless you."*[65] and then noticed a poor foreign woman, *"Whose damsel is this?"*[66] On hearing of her plight, he undertook her protection and made sure that she would be cared for and not molested, "*Do not go to another field but stay with my maidens. I have warned the men not to touch you and when you are hungry and thirsty drink and eat from the provisions we have provided."*[67]

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[63] Judges **14.** 3
[64] Ruth **2.** 1
[65] Ruth **2.** 4
[66] Ruth **2.** 5
[67] Ruth **2.** 8-9 and 14

The narrative continues with Naomi instructing Ruth to wash, anoint herself and get dressed and come to Boaz after he had eaten a good meal and drunk wine after his hard day's work *"When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry he went to lie down and Ruth came and lay with him."*[68] Whilst it could be presumed that sexual relations occurred I do not think that is the case. When a named couple have intercourse, scripture is not reticent about stating that; euphemisms are only used in general cases, not specific. Here is an instance where a woman has made herself available but Boaz has not taken advantage. Midrash Ruth Rabbah (**6.**4) describes that *Throughout the night his evil inclination raged within him arguing: You are single and seeking a wife; she is single and seeking a husband. Sleep with her and make her your wife! He swore to his evil inclination, saying, "As God lives, I will not touch her!"* He tells her that there is a nearer relative than himself who is obligated to marry Ruth to preserve the names of her dead father-in-law and former husband. He is also at pains to maintain discretion in keeping Ruth's stay with him that night secret partly to preserve both his and her reputations *"Don't let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."*[69] The additional factor was that Ruth was a Moabitess which would appear to be a specific problem as intermarriage with the tribe of Moab had been forbidden since the time of Moses. This halakhic difficulty is the subject of a debate in Tractate Yevamot 76B which is resolved by revealing a tradition that the prohibition of marriage to Moabites only referred to males and not female (Miller, 2015).

Although Boaz was a leading member of his community who could have ignored legal protocol, he did not abuse his position of authority and he was punctilious in following the correct legal procedures. The morning after his encounter with Ruth he calls the relative who was nearer in kin to Naomi and takes charge by convening a court hearing. Boaz wants to establish the permissibility of marriage to a Moabite woman convert, but as a judge, he cannot make a general decision which affects him personally. He has to establish that it would be halakhically permissible for Ruth to marry the nearer kinsman. At the hearing, in two verses he lays out the facts of the case; that the land of Naomi's deceased husband is available for sale but accompanying redeeming of the land comes the obligation to marry Ruth and cause her to bear a child to continue the deceased's name and lineage. The nearer relative, who is only designated *"Mr So-and-so"*[70] declines the arrangement because it would mar the inheritance of his own children. By admitting that he would be next in line to redeem Naomi's land Boaz admits and deals with the weakness of his own case – that he would have an interest in the outcome of the proceedings. This admission would forestall any accusation that he had been secretive or underhand in his presentation to the court. The other relative's declining redeeming Naomi's field and marrying Ruth allowed Boaz to marry Ruth and the hearing concluded with the ceremony of *Halitzah* (loosening a shoe) prescribed by Mosaic

[68] Ruth **3.** 7
[69] Ruth **3.** 14
[70] Ruth **4.** 1

law.[71] The child born to Ruth and Boaz was named Obed and he was the father of Jesse who was the father of David.

Using Boaz as a role model would be useful for men in civilian occupations (not professional soldiers) but had been conscripted at times of war. When they had been discharged there would have to be a period of re-adjustment after active service having experienced the horrors of war and they were re-establishing themselves in peacetime livelihood. The injunction to forget the experiences of war is a peculiar and defining feature of twentieth century industrial wars fought by citizen-soldiers in their millions (Leed, 2000). Those men who had experienced the harsh, not to say, brutal discipline whilst on combat service would be encouraged to adopt a friendlier tone when dealing with their own subordinates or employees in their new working environment. In regard to the treatment of women, when on active service they had probably observed distressed and vulnerable women refugees (displaced persons) and on return home, due to the death of many young men in the war, there was an imbalance between numbers of men and women in their 20s and 30s with an excess of women so there were more women available to them. Sexual morality is generally laxer at times of social upheaval and stress and this was certainly observed during and in the immediate aftermath of the wars of the 20th century (the rise in incidence of sexually transmitted diseases during and immediately after wars is well documented) and the attitude towards women, especially those who appeared vulnerable as Ruth was in this text, was liable to be exploitative and abusive. The regard with which Boaz behaved towards Ruth served as a reminder not to take advantage of such women. The overall model that Boaz exemplifies is one of chivalry; a respecter of persons regardless of rank or gender and a respecter of the rules of law and due process.

David

'Then answered one of the young men, and said: "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valour, and a man of war, and prudent in affairs, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him."'[72]

This is the first description of David and is from a servant of King Saul. David is presented as a multifaceted character; a skilful musician but also a fierce warrior, clever and tactful but also very handsome, and most of all, he enjoys divine providence.

David has been held as the ideal male, the man against whom all other men are measured and found wanting. He dominates a large portion of the prophetical section of the bible and his influence is very much in evidence in the daily synagogue liturgy and the popular songs for children. In David Clines' introduction to his essay on David (Clines, 1995) he tabulates a set of rules to suggest a stereotype of being a man in the modern west: -

1. Don't be female. Whatever women do is *ipso facto* what a real man must not do.

[71] Deut. **25.** 5-10
[72] Samuel I **16.** 18

2. Be successful. Men's worth as husbands, friends, or simply as men is determined by their successfulness. The object is, not to be liked but to be envied.
3. Be aggressive. Boys are encouraged to be tough, to fight and not to run away. Sport and military training reinforce this.
4. Be sexual. Men are supposed to be sexually experienced and always interested. Sex isn't a free choice when you have to perform to be a man.
5. Be self-reliant. Men are supposed to be confident and independent. A 'real man' doesn't need others, particularly women. He depends and takes care of himself and relies on nobody.

These norms privilege young, heterosexual, strong and physical men and those who deviate from these norms will be characterised as such. In addition to the analysis of King David's general masculinity his hegemonic masculinity – that is, his dominance over others, specifically over Joab, Bathsheba and Uriah – is discussed by Sara Koenig (Koenig, 2015).

Clines assesses David against the masculine standards as follows: -

1. The fighting male - He is personally responsible for the deaths of 15 and in his wars the body count exceeds 140,000 men. His strength and capacity to kill shows courage to the point of recklessness. This warrior image is in accord with George Mosse's heightened image of masculinity that the warrior projected (Mosse, 1996 Page 53).
2. The persuasive male – David persuades Saul that he is capable of killing Goliath, he explains why he did not kill Saul in the cave and Saul admits his error. Words are instruments of control and thence power.
3. The beautiful male – In the bible both men and women may be described as beautiful. In the bible, beauty is not a matter of chance, it is an aspect of 'real manhood' for which a man can expect praise and admiration. Physical beauty is equated with virtue and ugliness with dishonesty (Mosse, 1996 Chapters 2 and 4).
4. The bonding male – Male bonding is not a vehicle for male to male emotional relationships, but rather is a substitute for them as comrades in arms. The friends are typically young, aristocratic, brave and beautiful. There is a free and wholehearted response to each other declaring their mutual affection and admiration. This pattern of heroic male bonding is one important way masculinity was constructed in ancient Israel. Note, that in the ancient world (e.g. Greece), homosexual love was typically between an older lover and younger beloved, whereas male bonding was between peers – as were David and Jonathan.
5. The women-less male – David was very casual about women and on the whole, there is no courtship. There is sex but rather perfunctory and often for political purposes – Absalom has sex with 10 of David's secondary wives in public to support his claim to be the heir apparent. Where lust comes to the foreground it has negative connotations; Amnon's obsession with, and subsequent rape of, his half-sister Tamar is followed by her being thrown out of the palace and Amnon himself is subsequently killed. David's taking of Bathsheba, the wife of one of David's elite warriors, is a

demonstration of his 'hegemonic masculinity' and when his virility/potency is questioned the Talmud glosses: *And the damsel [Abishai] was very fair, and she became a companion to the king and ministered unto him. She said to him, "Let us marry," but he [David] said: "Thou art forbidden to me." "When courage fails the thief, he becomes virtuous," she gibed. And he said to them [his servants], "Call me Bath-Sheba." And we read: And Bath-Sheba went to the king into the chamber. Rab Judah said in Rab's name: On that occasion Bathsheba dried herself thirteen times.*

6. The musical male – Men play stringed instruments and the dexterity required denotes a higher level of skill than women who play timbrels[73] to accompany singing. The frequency of mention of the harp is represented in the narrative as an essentially male trait.
7. A conflict of masculinities? – David has occasional lapses from ideals of traditional masculinity; his distress over the death of Absalom after the failure of Absalom's revolt and not responding to Joab's criticism. David fasted and prayed during the sickness of the child resulting from his first taking Bathsheba, but then promptly resumed normal activity once the child died; he entreated God whilst the child was alive but as soon as that had failed David saw no reason to continue self-serving piety – his response demonstrates an ultimate macho act.

David exerts domination over Joab by violence, Bathsheba by sex, and Uriah by race. Joab was David's principal general who carried out his sovereign's wishes to assassinate anyone who threatened the king's position or authority. Dominance was vital for David both externally in regard to his war with Ammon and internally when his son Absalom attempted to usurp the throne. If David had not avenged the insults his authority would have been weakened. That Joab colluded with David and was willing and able to murder on David's command confirmed the dominance David had over Joab.

David's encounter with Bathsheba is notable by its very terseness; there are no expressions of tenderness or love or indications of her consent, just the comment that David sent messengers to fetch her and she came. In this regard David's taking of another man's wife is a demonstration of the royal prerogative over all his subjects and this behaviour was presumably what was to be expected in the ancient near east as demonstrated by Pharaoh's attempt to take Abraham's wife – Sarah (Genesis Chapter 12) and Ahasuerus's dismissal and summoning women at whim (Esther). The text makes no attempt to justify the treatment David metered out to Uriah and David is severely criticised by God *And what David had done was bad in the eyes of the Lord*[74]. It is notable that Uriah is always designated as *Uriah the Hittite* that is, he was a non-Israelite and that brings his foreignness into view as his primary identity. He was an alien and although he was undoubtedly one of the elite troops he was

[73] Presumably tambourines which are just hit and shaken.

[74] Samuel II **11.** 27 The punishment meted out to David for this episode was that he would have rebellion in his own household and that another man would have sex with his wives in public. This was fulfilled with Absalom's revolt (Samuel 2 Chapter **16.**22). David's wish to build a temple to God was denied because he was a man of battles who shed blood (Chronicles 2. **28.**3)

never regarded as within the brotherhood of Israel and therefore somehow, a lesser person, of whom use could be made. Uriah's focus on war characterises him as a stupid, brute soldier.

In David's world the spheres of men and women were so distinct and their cultural scripts so diverse that there was no need for people to define themselves against the 'other.' So, there was no problem in men being described as beautiful whereas now one would not use that particular adjective. Being persuasive is now regarded as a feminine trait with men being the strong, silent type however words can be controlling and used as aggression in a business or political situation. David cried at the death of Absalom and Jonathan without detriment to his masculinity but today although there has been some change in attitude, a man's tears are usually a source of embarrassment. David's display of conventional masculinity regarding violence and sex is combined with traditionally feminine traits of music, poetry, friendship and overt emotionality which bespeak of an androgynous paradigm. In view of the negative traits in David's character it is somewhat surprising that his faults are generally overlooked and that Michelangelo chose him as the ideal Renaissance man.

David's poetry – the psalms – are used extensively in the liturgy of Synagogue and Church and have inspired writers for centuries. Robert Kilgore notes than when poets want to use the power of David's music and as an inspirational model of overcoming tribulation they latch on to David's story before he became king (Kilgore, 2014) but once installed as monarch matters become more difficult. The Bathsheba episode mentioned above is specifically referenced in Psalm 51 which is used as a penitential psalm. A fragment of David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan *"Beloved and cherished, never parted in life or in death"*[75] in often seen on the headstone of a double grave of a husband and wife. On a joyous note the song *Dovid Melech Yisrael; Chai, chai v'kayom* (lit. David, King of Israel, live forever) is a frequent refrain on nearly every happy occasion in the Jewish community.

Conclusion

How and who wrote the bible is not part of this project. The text that has come down to us is a collection of stories, ballads and myths (not a pejorative word) that had been part of an oral tradition told over generations before being redacted into the accepted present form. Whilst the authors would have been influenced by theology they would want to be sure that their account had a historical basis so although ideology may affect historical narrative it does not originate it (Barr, 2005 Page 88). The text has not sought to make its characters flawless; to do so would have detracted from their humanity and believability. We have scripts of extraordinary people living and coping with extraordinary circumstances and problems and sometimes they make questionable decisions and it is these scripts which incorporate certain elements of the human experience. The scripts portrayed here are focussed on how their masculinity became apparent from the decisions they made and actions that they took and it is those modes of masculinity that provide the thread into the continuation of this thesis.

[75] Second Samuel **1.** 23

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