

'NO KING IN ISRAEL': NARRATIVE CRITICISM AND JUDGES 17-21¹

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Summary

Scholars such as Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg have produced suggestive interpretations of sections of Old Testament narrative. This article applies their techniques to the stories in Judges 17-21, and argues that these techniques yield a coherent interpretation of the chapters, paying attention to features such as repetition, narrative analogy, and the use of narration and dialogue. It subsequently deals with some implications of this interpretation, according to which the narrator takes a negative view of pre-monarchic Israel.

I. Introduction

By 'narrative criticism' I refer to an approach to Old Testament narrative of which Alter and Sternberg are perhaps the best-known exponents (it is not an ideal term, but it is at least brief).² Narrative critics by no means have an identical approach to their task, but there is a good deal of common ground. I mention two features which seem to me to characterise narrative criticism. Firstly, a tendency to approach Old Testament narrative texts on the assumption (which in practice tends only rarely to be modified) that they are unities: this differentiates narrative criticism on the one hand from source- and form-criticism, which tend to argue that Old Testament

¹This article is a slightly extended version of a paper given at the Winter Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Studies in London, January 5-7 1993. A more detailed discussion of many of the points touched on can be found in my Ph.D thesis *Narrative Artistry and the Composition of Judges 17-21* (Manchester 1989).

²'Narrative Critics' could be glossed as 'those critics who have studied the artistry of OT narrative and its implications for interpretation'. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, Basic Books 1981); *The World of Biblical Narrative* (London, SPCK 1992); R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London, Collins 1987); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTS 70; Sheffield, Almond Press 1989); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield, Almond Press 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1985).

narratives are to various degrees composite;³ and, on the other hand, from the views of critics such as deconstructionists who argue that at a different level, the level of the conventions which allow a text to yield meaning, every text is necessarily divided against itself.⁴ The second characteristic feature is a conviction that Old Testament narrative in general displays considerable literary artistry. Much of the detailed workings of narrative criticism is a setting-forth of this artistry in diverse forms: hence the interest in literary patterning, the uses of repetition, characterisation, and much more.

I shall be trying to show that narrative criticism can successfully be applied to Judges 17-21. Much of the work of narrative critics has been on sections of the Old Testament previously already noted for their aesthetic qualities, such as Genesis 37-50, the book of Ruth, the books of Samuel. It was perhaps not surprising that their techniques should have met with some success there. I have chosen Judges 17-21 as a text because, with the exception of Judges 19, these chapters have not in general been esteemed for their literary skill. It has also been held that they are at many points composite. Judges 17-21 is thus quite a good test case for narrative criticism.⁵

I first of all discuss a number of individual passages where in my view we have instances of literary techniques similar to those noted by narrative critics in other parts of the Old Testament. I shall group these by literary technique rather than following the order of Judges 17-21.

Judges 17-21 falls into two main sections. Judges 17-18 describes Micah's shrine in the territory of Ephraim, and how it is pillaged by the tribe of Dan on its move from the south to the north of the land. Judges 19-21 starts with a Levite's concubine running away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem, and the Levite's journey from his home in Ephraim to bring her

³See, e.g., Sternberg, *op. cit.*, 13-23; Kermode & Alter, *Literary Guide*, 24-31.

⁴B.O. Long, 'The "New" Biblical Poetics of Alter and Sternberg', *JSOT* 51 (1991) 71-84.

⁵On Judges 19, H.-W. Jüngling, *Richter 19.1-30a; 21.25. Ein Plädoyer für das Königtum* (Analecta Biblica 84; Rome, Pontifical Biblical Institute 1981). For 'composite' views of Judges 17-21, see C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (London, Rivingtons 1918), G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1895), J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Basingstoke, Marshall, Morgan & Scott 1986), J.A. Soggin, *Judges* (2nd ed., London, SCM 1987).

back to his house. On the return journey, the Levite and his concubine stop in Gibeah, in the territory of Benjamin, are taken in by an Ephraimite living in Gibeah, but are then menaced by Gibeathite men. The Levite hands over his concubine to these men, and she is raped and subsequently dies. Judges 20 describes a punitive war waged against the tribe of Benjamin by all the remaining Israelite tribes, and Judges 21 deals with measures taken to provide wives for the Benjaminite survivors, which involves finding ways around an oath the Israelites have sworn not to intermarry with Benjamin. Four times during these chapters, twice in a shorter form, recurs the statement 'In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes' (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

II. Specific Instances of Literary Techniques

1. Patterns

1) Narrative critics note large-scale patterns in Old Testament texts.⁶ The two main blocks of narrative in Judges 17-21 chapters 17-18 and 19-21 seem to share a similar pattern. They both start by describing the doings of Israelite individuals (Micah in 17, the Levite and his concubine in 19) and then broaden their scope to Israel at the tribal or pan-tribal level (Dan in 18, all the Israelite tribes in 20 and 21). This repeated pattern seems to unify the chapters.⁷ As most of what both individual Israelites and the Israelite tribes do in these chapters is morally pretty dubious, I believe that the alternation between the individual and the tribal levels is meant to suggest a sickness in Israel which permeates all levels of society, personal, familial, and national.

2) There also seems to be some smaller-scale patterning in Judges 17-21.

17:1-6 and 7-13 have a similar pattern. Both sections begin with the phrase 'there was a man' and both end with

⁶On patterning, see Bar-Efrat, 'Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative', VT 30 (1980) 154-73; *idem*, *Narrative Art*, 98-105, 134-40.

⁷Note a further similarity, that both narrative blocks begin with a problem (the curse Micah's mother makes against him; the Levite's estrangement from his concubine) which seems to be solved almost immediately, but turns out in the course of the subsequent narrative to have further ramifications.

additions being made to Micah's shrine (respectively, cult objects and a Levitical functionary). This seems to be a progression: we see Micah's shrine expanding and prospering, which leads up to his expression of confidence in God in 17:13 ('Now I know that the Yahweh will prosper me'); the narrator appears to be 'setting us up' for what will follow, when Micah's confidence is overturned.

The war against Benjamin in (ch. 20) drags out over three days, and before each day's fighting the Israelite army makes an enquiry of God at Bethel: there is a threefold pattern of journey to Bethel, enquiry, response, journey to Gibeah, and battle (20:18-28). The Israelite enquiries become increasingly anguished as they are defeated on the first two days, culminating in their last poignant enquiry (v. 28): 'Shall we still go out to battle against our brothers the Benjaminites, or shall we cease?' In other words, the three-fold patterning is a structure of intensification.⁸ The mounting Israelite anguish is part of the narrator's portrayal of the war against Benjamin as an agonising civil war.

2. Repetition

Narrative critics have noted how points can be emphasised by the simple iteration of words or phrases.⁹ Three times towards the end of chapter 18 we are reminded that the cult objects which the Danites place in their shrine at Dan are man-made, once by Micah's words of protest to the Danites ('You are taking my gods which I made', v. 24) and twice by the narrator's comments (vv. 27, 31). This seems intended to condemn the Danite shrine as false, an impression reinforced by the reference to the 'house of God' at Shiloh in 18:31, which seems to make a pointed contrast.¹⁰

⁸This progression is underscored by the increasingly elaborate preparations made for enquiry: on third day weeping, fasting, the offering of sacrifices (vv. 26-8; note how the reference to the ark and the high priest, which might logically have been expected earlier, is delayed until this point to add weight to the climactic third appeal to God).

⁹See the various passages discussed by Alter, *Art*, 93-5 and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 104-8, 136, 212-4.

¹⁰It will be seen from this that I do not accept the view that some of the material in Judges 17-18 stems from a period not stamped by the orthodoxy of later centuries, in which, e.g., the appointment of personal priests and the use of idols were held to be quite in order. A.H.J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester* (FRLANT 89; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck &

At the beginning of chapter 20, the account of how all the Israelite tribes gather against Benjamin to avenge the wrong committed in Gibeah, we would expect the names 'Israel' and 'Benjamin' to recur somewhat; but they are used more than was necessary merely for the sake of clarity. An example would be 20:12-14: 'And the tribes of *Israel* sent men through all the tribe of *Benjamin* saying 'What is this wickedness which has taken place among you? Give up the men of Gibeah. . .so that we may put away evil from *Israel*.' But the *Benjaminites* would not listen to the voice of their *brethren, the people of Israel*. And the *Benjaminites* came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the *people of Israel*'. I believe this is another way in which the narrator stresses the idea of civil war: the repeated naming of the combatants reminds us that they are all Israelites; 'brothers', to use the term which occurs more than once.¹¹

3. Narration and Dialogue

Narrative critics argue that the spoken words of characters are often contrasted with the narrator's third person account.¹² Sternberg has suggested that within the framework of the narrative we draw a distinction between the narrator's words (to be seen as reliable in recounting fact or making evaluation) and the characters' spoken words, which are less reliable: they may stem from the speaker's misconceptions, biases, desires to misrepresent, and so on; they stand in need of confirmation by the narrator, which may or may not be forthcoming.¹³ Sternberg's suggestion has been criticised;¹⁴ but there are a couple of places in Judges 17 and 18 where his approach seems productive.

Ruprecht 1965) 18; Soggin, *op. cit.*, 268. Rather, a religious polemic seems to run throughout the chapters.

¹¹A similar example from ch. 20 would be the repeated characterisation of the men on both sides who fight and die in the battle as 'men of valour' or 'men who drew the sword' (vv. 2, 15, 17, 25, 35, 44, 46). The phrases suggest that those who died were valuable fighting men whom Israel could not afford to lose.

¹²See Alter, *Art*, 63-87.

¹³Sternberg, *op. cit.*, 58-83; 129-31; cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 17-23.

¹⁴D.M. Gunn, 'New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *JSOT* 39 (1987) 65-75, argues that there are points where the narrator appears to undermine the reliability of his own narratorial voice by allowing contradictions concerning matters of fact to stand in his text.

Micah and the Danites on separate occasions assert their confidence that they enjoy God's favour, Micah at 17:13, and the Danite spies at 18:10, where they inform the other Danites that God has given the land of Laish into their hands. The narrator says nothing to support these assertions, and in both cases I think we are meant to see that the confidence is misplaced. Micah's words are directly overturned in chapter 18 when everything which he saw as a sign of God's blessing (cult objects, Levite) is seized from his shrine; and the narrator, unlike the Danites, refuses to link God with the conquest of Laish.

This fits with another similar observation. In introducing Laish the narrator suggests its unpreparedness and defencelessness (18:7): Laish dwelt in security, quiet and unsuspecting; they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone—a rather unusual description for a non-Israelite city in the Old Testament, which is substantially repeated at verse 28. In reporting back to the Danites, the spies take a much less sympathetic view of the same facts, stressing not the distance that separates the Laishites from help, but the large expanses of fertile land by which they are surrounded (9-10). The contrast between the viewpoints suggests that the spies' attitude is cruel, and is part of a presentation according to which the sacking of Laish is an atrocity not sanctioned by God.

In all this we have been touching on the topic of implicit commentary. There is some explicit narratorial evaluation in Judges 17-21, most notably the 'no-king' formulae, which occur, indeed, at structurally significant points; but most of the examples discussed so far could be described as different forms of implicit commentary or evaluation. The narrator simply presents events and words in various configurations and leaves it to the reader to notice significant patterns and attempt an interpretation; it is a way of involving the reader in the interpretative process. This also applies to the remaining examples I shall consider.

4. Narrative Order; Narrative Proportions

Bar-Efrat suggests that we should always note how much space the writer allocates to different narrative incidents: if he dwells

on an event, it is probably because he wishes to invest it with significance.¹⁵

Examples in Judges 17-21 would include the following: at the beginning of 17 the narrator spends much of the introduction to the account of Micah describing how the silver which he used to make cult objects had been stolen and had been the subject of a curse. The aim of this seems to be to characterise Micah's worship and shrine as corrupt.

The section 19:1-10 begins with the concubine running away from the Levite who follows her to win her back. Yet most of the scene is taken up, not with the resolution of this initial problem (for a reconciliation of sorts takes place by 19:3), but with the attempts of the Levite's father-in-law to persuade the Levite to stay and enjoy further hospitality (vv. 4-10). We do not know why the father-in-law so urgently wishes to detain the Levite, but simply by dwelling on his protracted and importunate pleas, the narrator suggests that something is going to happen on the way home; and so we read on with a foreboding which turns out to be justified.

Many scholars think that 20:29-48 is composed of two sources, because it seems so repetitious.¹⁶ I have elsewhere suggested an alternative explanation: that the narrator deliberately slows down the narrative by various means, introducing shifts of viewpoint and narrative flashbacks, so as to dwell upon the appalling spectacle of retribution coming upon the Benjaminites.¹⁷

Not only is the relative space allocated to narrative incidents significant, but also their order and juxtaposition. 19:19-22, in which the Levite and his party are invited in by the Ephraimite, contain the most extensive description in Judges 19 of people enjoying hospitality (rather than simply being offered it, as at the beginning of the chapter). This full description, it seems to me, is delayed until this point in order to create the maximum possible contrast between the apparent security of the Ephraimite's home and the violent menaces of the

¹⁵Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 141-54, distinguishes between 'narrative time' and 'narrated time'.

¹⁶See Burney, Gray, Moore, Soggin, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*

¹⁷P.E. Satterthwaite, 'Narrative artistry in the composition of Judges xx 29ff.', VT 42 (1992) 80-9.

Gibeathites which follow immediately after. The disruptive effect of their onslaught is thus heightened.

At 21:7 and 21:18 the writer refers to an oath taken by the Israelites, apparently after the decision to attack Gibeah, which forbade intermarriage with Benjaminites. The oath has in fact already been referred to before. Some scholars have taken the fact that the oath is cited three times as an indication that more than one source underlies chapter 21.¹⁸ I would point, rather, to the fact that the oath is given in two different forms in verses 7 and 18, each of which are designed to lead into different strategies by which the Israelites circumvent the oath. That is, the wording of the oath in each case is altered to make it quite clear that the Israelite action described immediately afterwards violates the oath while maintaining a semblance of adhering to it. In verse 7 the form is: 'We have sworn by Yahweh that we will not give them any of *our* daughters for wives'; and, accordingly, the account of the sacking of Jabesh Gilead which follows is about how the Israelites were enabled to give, not their, but other people's daughters to Benjamin. In verse 18 the wording is 'Cursed be he who *gives* a wife to Benjamin'; which leads into an account in which Benjaminites are not given, but encouraged to seize, women who can become wives. Significantly, this most flagrant violation of the terms of the oath is prefaced by the oath in its strongest form: 'Cursed be he who. . .'.

5. Characterisation

Alter suggests that in biblical narrative people are often characterised by being contrasted with each other, often in a scene involving dialogue.¹⁹

In 18:23-6 the Danites are set over against Micah: Micah's words portray him as indignant, incoherent, and ineffectual; the Danites, by contrast, are cool, insolent, and in control. The narrator will go on to suggest that their assurance is less warranted than they think.

In 20:18-28, there is a contrast between the Israelites' increasingly anxious enquiries of God and the laconic responses they receive: 'Judah shall go up first' (v. 18); 'Go up against them' (v. 23); 'Go up; for tomorrow I will give them into

¹⁸See Burney, Gray, Moore, Soggin, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*

¹⁹Alter, *Art*, 114-30.

your hand' (v. 28). Throughout Judges 17-21 God seems to be distant from the Israelites, intervening among them seldom, and then only to bring judgment, as here. Strikingly, God gives no explanation for the defeats the Israelites suffer on the first two days, even though it is he who has told them to join battle. This both suggests an estrangement between Israel and God, and drives the reader to look for a reason why God, in effect, sends them to defeat on the first two days.

6. Style

Narrative critics are alert to differences of narrative style, so I include one example where this is relevant.²⁰ The styles of 19:25-9 and 19:30-20:17 differ quite considerably at points: 19:25-9 uses a string of short, simple sentences to describe the rape, death, and dismemberment of the concubine, in a passage which is startlingly powerful by understatement. 19:30-20:17 contains a number of longer, sometimes involved sentences (19:30; 20:1, 2, 10, 13, 17) which either express Israelite outrage at what has occurred, or describe the preparations for war against Benjamin. Perhaps these longer sentences are the literary equivalent of the pan-Israelite military juggernaut wheeling into action, suggesting an impressive military panoply by sheer weight of words. If so, the narrator is again setting us up for a reversal; for after all these preliminaries, the Israelite army runs into defeat on the first two days, and almost loses its impetus altogether. I mention the difference in styles between these two sections, because at least one scholar, H.-W. Jüngling, has used it as an argument that chapters 19 and 20 come from different sources. But surely no such argument can be mounted until possible reasons for the use of different styles have been explored.²¹

²⁰Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 65-6, 204-18.

²¹See Jüngling, *op. cit.*, 259-62 for the stylistic arguments. Another argument that has been used to allocate chs. 19 and 20-21 to different sources shows that there is a gross disproportion between the crime in ch. 19, which involves the death of one person, and the punishment in ch. 20, which involves the near-annihilation of an entire tribe by all the other tribes (Jüngling, *op. cit.*, 252-9, and the scholars cited there). This argument is less convincing than might appear. Chs. 20 and 21 reflect the view that Israel in the period described was a twelve-tribe confederacy whose members were under various obligations to each other; this view also underlies ch. 19, which has a concept of Israel as an entity with a territory (v. 29), whose members may be expected to behave more

7. Comment by Analogy

Sternberg has suggested that some Old Testament narratives deliberately evoke memories of other narratives, so that the reader is led to evaluate one set of events in the light of another.²²

There are three cases in Judges 17-21 where there seem to be allusions to other Old Testament narratives. The account of the Danites' journey from south to north of the land in 18 seems to allude to the narratives of the Exodus and Conquest in Exodus, Numbers and Joshua. There are a number of elements common to the two accounts: the sending of spies; the mustering of fighting men; the named places where the Danites camped along the way; the capture and re-naming of a non-Israelite city at the end.²³ But everything about this exodus and conquest is wrong: the Danites are unscrupulous plunderers, their cult is corrupt, and they destroy an innocent city.

Similarly with the scene in 19 where the Gibeathite men surround the house in which the Levite and his concubine are staying and with the account in 20 of the Israelite ambush against Gibeah. The account in 19 is reminiscent of the inhabitants of Sodom and Lot's visitors in Genesis 19—with the difference that here Israelites are violating the guest rights of other Israelites. The account in 20 (particularly the fact that the ambush comes after Israelites have been initially defeated) reminds one of the capture of Ai in Joshua 8—except that here Israelites are fighting Israelites.

hospitably towards each other than non-Israelites (vv. 11-12), and also to react in some way towards wrong done against one of their members (vv. 29-30). Given this starting-point, it is not unreasonable that a very serious breach of hospitality committed by the inhabitants of an Israelite town against a fellow Israelite should lead, via the decision of the tribe of Benjamin that they will not hand over these men to be punished, to punitive action against Benjamin; nor that the question of the survival of Benjamin should be the next topic to be dealt with. If the narrative is read on its own terms, the progression from ch. 19 to chs. 20 and 21 makes good sense.

²²Sternberg, *op. cit.*, 365-7; see also his discussion of 1 Sam. 15, 497-98, and cf. R.P. Gordon, 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-6', *TynB* 31 (1980) 37-64.

²³For similar views, A. Malamat, 'The Danite Migration and the Pan-Israelite Exodus-Conquest: A Biblical Narrative Pattern', *Bib* 51 (1970) 1-16, and B.G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTS 46; Sheffield, JSOT Press 1987) 184-6.

All these three allusions have a similar effect, that is, they suggest the theme of 'something going wrong in Israel'.

Some of the analogies in Judges 17-21 occur between different parts of the same narrative, or different characters within one narrative. At the end of 18, nothing could seem further apart than the situations of Micah and the Danites. Our last view of Micah shows him uselessly protesting to the Danites about the plunder of his shrine and meeting scorn and menaces in return (18:23-5). Yet the emphasis (already noted) at the end of the chapter that the Danites' cult objects are none other than those which Micah made suggests that in the long run they will do the Danites no more good than they did Micah, and that the fates of Micah and the Danites may turn out to be similar. The hint in verse 30 at the future dispossession of the Danites by an invading army ('until the day of the captivity of the land') reinforces this.

Similarly, we may compare Judges 19 and 21:19 describes the rape and death of one Israelite woman; 21 describes two incidents where respectively 400 and 200 Israelite women are violently seized and given to the Benjaminites as wives, with the sanction, indeed encouragement of the Israelite elders. It is not perhaps a close analogy; but a comparison of the two chapters suggests the thought that all the killing in 20, killing carried out with the aim of avenging the concubine's death, has not made Israel any safer a place for women.

Following on from this, there seems to be some sort of analogical patterning in Judges 20 and 21 between the tribe of Benjamin and the remaining Israelite tribes, strengthened, of course, by the fact that Benjamin is itself a tribe of Israel. In chapter 20 the Israelites distance themselves from Benjamin: they are keen to put to death the evil-doers in Gibeah, to 'burn the evil out of Israel' (20:13); and when Benjamin refuses to comply, they do not hesitate to attack Benjamin. In chapter 21 their attitude has changed, as though they have realised the fuller implications of the battle they have just fought: they lament the loss of Benjamin, and lament it specifically as a loss to Israel: 'O Yahweh the God of *Israel*, why has this come to pass *in Israel*, that there should be today one tribe lacking *in Israel*? (cf. v. 15: 'And the people were sorry for Benjamin, because Yahweh had made a breach in the tribes of Israel'). Their attempts to circumvent the oath against intermarriage

with Benjamin can be seen as an attempt to avoid a death-sentence which in principle stands over them and not just over Benjamin; and in the course of these attempts they become more and more like the evil-doers they sought to destroy. If the narrator explicitly condemns Benjamin and says that Benjamin only survives with great difficulty, he implicitly suggests that an equally corrupt Israel has only just survived intact. Benjamin, in other words, is Israel in miniature. This seems, incidentally, to be the narrator's explanation as to why Israel also suffers losses in the war against Benjamin.

III. Conclusion

The preceding observations, and others which I could have made given the space, can, I believe, be combined into a coherent interpretation of Judges 17-21, according to which the chapters are uniformly negative about pre-monarchic Israel.²⁴ At points I have indicated how features of the chapters which have been taken as evidence that they are composite can be given an alternative, unitary explanation. Again, I could have documented this more fully. Narrative criticism, which has been productively applied to other sections of the Old Testament, seems a fruitful approach to Judges 17-21.

Both Alter and Sternberg have argued that the narrative techniques they trace in the Old Testament, which often suggest an implicit commentary or evaluation, also convey a definite view of God and humankind: events unfold, their significance unclear until we set them in the light of past or subsequent events, and behind them all is a God who looks on, evaluates, and intervenes in judgment or blessing.²⁵ This

²⁴Broadly similar interpretations of Judges 17-21 may be found in Webb, *op. cit.*, 181-97; J.C. Exum, 'Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges', *CBQ* 52 (1990) 425-31. I note here the interpretations of M. Brettler, 'The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics', *JBL* 108 (1989) 408-15, and Y. Amit, 'Hidden Polemic in the Conquest of Dan: Judges xvii-xviii', *VT* 40 (1990) 4-20 according to which the chapters contain implicit polemic against, respectively, the Saulide dynasty and the Northern Kingdom shrines at Dan and Bethel. These are possible views (I find Amit's detailed arguments rather more persuasive than Brettler's), but seem to work at a different level of the text from my interpretation.

²⁵'...the world and the meaning are always hypothetical, subject to change from one stage of the reading *process* to another, and irreducible to any simple formula. . .' (Sternberg, *op. cit.*, 47); 'The implicit theology of

general view of Old Testament narrative style seems to apply to Judges 17-21: the chapters contain little in the way of direct evaluation, and God, though quite often referred to by the human characters, hardly intervenes in events, remaining distant; yet the patterns, the repetitions, the analogies, the use of narration and dialogue, all encourage the reader towards a negative evaluation of what happens, and suggest by implication that God disapproves of what goes on (hence when God does intervene, it is in judgment).

A narrative-critical interpretation of Judges 17-21 along the lines I have suggested has at least one significant larger-scale implication. Some scholars have argued that there are two layers of redaction in Judges 17-21, one negative about pre-monarchic Israel and in favour of kingship, the other positive about pre-monarchic Israel and opposed to kingship.²⁶ My reading suggests that there is little basis for finding more than one redactional layer: all the incidents narrated seem to support the negative evaluation of the 'no king' formula—'In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.'²⁷

Yet in what sense is Judges 17-21 pro-monarchic? The 'no king' formula indeed suggests that a king would have

the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and psychological realism in biblical narrative because God's purposes are always entrained in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for their continuing purpose' (Alter, *Art*, 14).

²⁶Jüngling, *op. cit.*, 244-84; Soggin, *op. cit.*, 280-1; R.G. Boling, *Judges* (New York, Doubleday 1975) 36-8; W.J. Dumbrell, "'In those Days there was no King in Israel; Every Man did what was Right in his Own Eyes.'" The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered', *JSOT* 25 (1983) 23-33.

²⁷I do not accept the view of Boling (*op. cit.*, 293) that this formula on its last appearance (21:25) addresses a post-exilic audience with a positive message ('The Israelites somehow got through then without a king, by thinking on their feet and doing what was appropriate, and so can you now'). I believe that the narrator takes a negative view of the 'solutions' of ch. 21; and it is surely a serious weakness to Boling's proposal that a phrase which on its previous three occurrences has had a clearly negative sense is now to be taken in a positive sense. Advocates of the view that Jdg. 17-21 have been subject to just one, pro-monarchic redaction include: T. Veijola, *Die Beurteilung des Königtums in der deuteronomistischen Historiographie* (AASF B198; Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedekatemia 1977) 15-29; G.E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBL Dissertation Series 87; Atlanta, Scholars Press 1986) 143-40.

prevented some of the wrongs described in the chapters: idolatry, destruction of family life, civil war. However, the impression the chapters leave us with is not of a capable, righteous king, but of various evil situations which stand in need of remedy (one of the strengths of narrative criticism is that it draws our attention to how forcefully and graphically this evil is portrayed). The chapters should be regarded as setting an agenda: not any king will do, but only a king who will set to rights wrongs such as these.

Finally, I have no grand theory to propose as to how the books Joshua-2 Kings reached their present form. Yet assume for the moment that Judges 17-21 was at some point included in a collection which also contained much of our present books of Samuel and Kings, maybe even that it was composed as the introduction to such a collection:²⁸ it is interesting to note that the very evils which Judges 17-21 ascribes to the lack of a king re-emerge in Samuel and Kings in monarchic Israel. Does Judges 17-18 criticise religious deviancy? Most of Israel's and Judah's kings are similarly guilty. Do Judges 19 and 20 lament the inter-tribal tensions which erupt into civil war with Israel? Already by the second half of 2 Samuel Israelites are fighting Israelites again, and in 1 Kings Israel splits to become two separate kingdoms. Does Judges 19 give a poignant account of the rape of a concubine? 2 Samuel 13 gives a similarly poignant account of how Tamar, a king's daughter, is raped by Amnon, a king's son, and how David, the king, does nothing about it. It may be that Judges 17-21 contains, so to speak, the protases of a number of narrative analogies whose apodoses occur only in Samuel and Kings. In other words, Judges 17-21, so far from being unqualifiedly pro-monarchic, is intended to lead one towards a highly critical evaluation of much of what the kings described in Samuel and Kings actually do.

²⁸For this suggestion, cf. I.W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings* (BZAW 172; Berlin, de Gruyter 1988) 168, n. 31.

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