

*SBL*

Society of Biblical Literature



INTERESTED READERS

ESSAYS ON THE HEBREW BIBLE

IN HONOR OF DAVID J. A. CLINES

*Edited by*

James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier

of accounting for complex relationships of power as identified in reading texts and contexts. The postcolonial endeavor goes beyond the accusatory mode, which insists on the absolution of guilt. Postcolonial work reacts to guilt by perpetration but also to implicated guilt due to the reestablishing of other replacement structures of privilege and want, oblivious to hegemonic patterns criticized previously. Postcolonial interpretation brings these relationships built upon unequal power and existing at both geopolitical and local or subsidiary levels into focus, emphasizing the complex yet co-constituting interrelationships between powerful and marginalized. A postcolonial optic, whether with ancient or contemporary alignment, focused on framing and investigating hegemony, and construing and analyzing power relations in and through and of texts, holds great promise for South African biblical interpretation.<sup>61</sup>

## DEPLOYING THE LITERARY DETAIL OF A BIBLICAL TEXT (2 SAMUEL 13:1-22) IN SEARCH OF REDEEMPTIVE MASCULINITIES

Gerald O. West

### INTRODUCTION

Until recently African biblical hermeneutics was characterized as a comparative project.<sup>1</sup> Analysis was done of both the biblical text and the African context, and the two sets of analysis were then "compared," in a range of different ways.<sup>2</sup> What has become more evident on closer scrutiny,<sup>3</sup> however, is that this "comparison" of text and context is a mediated process, involving a third pole, that of forms of ideological/theological appropriation.<sup>4</sup>

1. Eric Anum, "Comparative Readings of the Bible in Africa: Some Concerns," in *The Bible in Africa: Trajectories and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 457-73; Knut Holter, "Old Testament Scholarship in Sub-Saharan African North of the Limpopo River," in West and Dube, *Bible in Africa*, 54-71.

2. Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in West and Dube, *Bible in Africa*, 11-28.

3. Gerald O. West, "Interpreting 'the Exile' in African Biblical Scholarship: An Ideo-theological Dilemma in Post-colonial South Africa," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007* (ed. Bob Becking and Dirk Human; OSt 50; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 247-67.

4. Jonathan A. Draper, "For the Kingdom Is inside You and It Is outside of You: Contextual Exegesis in South Africa," in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 235-57; Jonathan A. Draper, "Reading the Bible as Conversation: A Theory and Methodology for Contextual Interpretation of the Bible in Africa," *Grace and Truth*

61. Criticism against postcolonial theory and practice has not stayed out South African interpretation, found among others by scholars promoting liberation hermeneutics and those advocating a Marxist approach; cf. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 136-40. Postcolonialism's reach extends to the global academic world, providing "an ethical paradigm for a systematic critique of institutional suffering" (Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 174).

Because the two "comparative" poles have been apparent to the scholarly gaze for longer than the third pole, they have received more careful critical attention. The critical techniques and discourses that have been forged over centuries to interrogate the various dimensions of "text" are often referred to as "exegesis." And although exegesis has had a quite narrow connotation in the earlier parts of the last century, being restricted to historical-critical analysis, the term has expanded its embrace, even if reluctantly, to the literary, semiotic, and sociological detail of "text," roughly in that historical order.<sup>5</sup> Of these "textual" dimensions, African biblical scholarship has tended to emphasize the sociohistorical, seeming to follow the dominant fashions of the wider guild, but doing so for local contextual reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Within African biblical scholarship, as in other "contextual" forms of biblical interpretation, the other pole, that of "context," has also developed a critical discourse, though not a discourse specific to biblical studies. With respect to "context," African biblical scholarship has drawn on the social sciences to analyze African contexts. While we have not always been as meticulous and rigorous in our use of social scientific forms of analysis with respect to context as we have with the textual forms of analysis, we aspire to a careful and critical analysis of context, moving beyond the anecdotal.

Here, then, is the "science" of our work as African biblical scholars.<sup>7</sup> And while we too have followed other scholarly discourses in downplay-

19.2 (2002): 12-24; Gerald O. West, "Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa," in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; London: SPCK, 2010), 21-31.

5. Bernard C. Latagan, "Current Issues in the Hermeneutic Debate," *Neot* 18 (1984): 1-17.

6. Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

7. I invoke the term *science* here for three reasons. First, an earlier form of this article was presented as a paper at the second Joint Conference of Southern African academic societies in Pietermaritzburg from 18-22 June 2012, which had the theme "Knowing, Believing, Living in Africa: Perspectives from Religion, Theology and Science." Second, I offered an earlier version of this article to honor the work of my South African colleague Jurie le Roux, who regularly recalls us to the scientific rigor of our discipline. Third, in offering this version of the article to honor the work of David Clines, I celebrate the role he has played and the path he has paved in problematizing the very notion of "scientific exegesis."

ing claims to neutrality and objectivity, we still want to insist that our work with "text" and "context" is done "critically," that is, using an array of structured and systematic "scientific" questions. Indeed, as Itumeleng Mosala has cautioned us, in contexts such as ours, where the Bible matters, an "unstructural" analysis of the Bible often "reinforces and confirms" an "unstructural" understanding of the contemporary context in which the Bible is being appropriated.<sup>8</sup>

However, precisely because we have insisted on the "scientific" quality of our work, we have been reluctant to acknowledge *how* we connect "text" and "context." A hallmark of most African biblical scholarship is that we do connect "text" and "context," as I have indicated. This has long been acknowledged. But we are still developing a vocabulary for *how* this takes place. Throwing the term *hermeneutics* at the two poles of "text" and "context" is not sufficient. Precision about what is we are doing when we connect "text" and "context" is required, and an overtly "tripolar" model is offering us further theoretical incentive to do so.

As in many other aspects of African biblical scholarship, the late Justin Ukpong has shown the way: "The goal of interpretation is the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation."<sup>9</sup> Following his lead, Jonathan Draper and I have become more overt about the ideological dimension of appropriation. Clearly African biblical scholarship is driven by both ideological and theological agendas in the dialogue between biblical text and African context. And among the most common forms of appropriation within African biblical hermeneutics are inculturation, liberation, African feminism, and post-colonial forms of ideological-theological (ideo-theological) appropriation.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE EXEGESIS/APPROPRIATION NEXUS

My focus in this essay is on the relationship between exegesis and appropriation. So in a sense I am negotiating here the relationship between "science" and "ideo-theology." In so doing I journey with two colleagues, one

8. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

9. Ukpong, "Developments," 24.

10. The shift from the slash (/) to the hyphen (-) to the hybrid form (ideo-theological) is deliberate, signifying a growing recognition within African biblical hermeneutics of intersections between sociopolitical and religio-cultural agendas.

who has emphasized the former and one who has emphasized the latter. Jurie le Roux has been at the forefront of reminding us African interpreters that our work must not neglect the "substantial contribution" of the "critical scholarship of the past two centuries."<sup>11</sup> And though his own work has emphasized the historical detail, he affirms the synchronic dimensions of text as well.<sup>12</sup> "Detailed exegesis" is what is important, requiring "an investigation of the smallest detail in the text."<sup>13</sup> David Clines has, as both the title and subtitle of one of his books asserts, long recognized the role ideology plays in the work of both the writers and the readers of the biblical text, and indeed in the relationship between particular readers and particular texts.<sup>14</sup>

Like the bulk of African biblical scholars, le Roux refuses to terminate the interpretive process with exegesis. The detail is important precisely because it offers the potential for African appropriation. Critical *historical* scholarship, which is le Roux's focus, offers this potential in two related ways. First, it offers "information on how the Old Testament was appropriated in different contexts and how it addressed social issues,"<sup>15</sup> and in so doing enables a responsible appropriation as we locate ourselves and our "re-telling" and "re-living" of Israel's story within the long conversation of Israel's "constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation, appropriation and actualisation."<sup>16</sup> "Thus," argues le Roux, "the actualisation of the Old Testament for the present day depends on the exegete's competence to immerse him-/herself in the text and relive Israel's past."<sup>17</sup>

Le Roux is profoundly aware that entering into this hermeneutical process cannot be done "in a detached and formal way, merely describing objectively what was going on in the Hebrew text or what happened in the history of Israel."<sup>18</sup> What I have called *ideo-theological* appropriation

11. Jurie le Roux, "Africa and the Future of Our Scholarly Past," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 307–8.

12. Jurie le Roux, "Old Testament Studies: The Story of a Department," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30.3 (2009): 1–9.

13. *Ibid.*, 4, 5.

14. David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

15. Le Roux, "Story of a Department," 2.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

is part of the hermeneutical process, though le Roux does not use such terms. In his words, "the exegete's life context determines the exegesis of a text. The exegete's own life context (or 'praxis') influences the exegetical process right from the beginning. Right from the onset the exegete 'sees' things in the text and this is determined by his/her own life context."<sup>19</sup> So, in sum, le Roux argues that "we in Africa must not shun from the scholarly challenges and results of the Old Testament science of the past two centuries. We must rather appropriate them because there-in lies great possibilities for understanding the text and our context."<sup>20</sup>

Clines too is interested in the ideology of scholarly interpreters, "especially the ways in which they either uncritically adopt the ideology of the text they are commenting on or impose the values of their own ideology upon the biblical text."<sup>21</sup> What interests Clines is this "clash of ideologies," as well as how *ideo-theologies* "influence people's actions" within a world in which there "is almost always a dissymmetry of power."<sup>22</sup> And whereas le Roux has championed the historical detail of text (when most of his colleagues were focused on forms of structuralism), Clines has been a defender of the literary detail of the text (when most of his colleagues were focused on forms of historical criticism). Clines's recognition and advocacy of literary modes of reading, since the 1970s,<sup>23</sup> has enabled a whole generation of scholars to find a place in the biblical studies academy.

Leaning on the contributions of these two scholars, le Roux and Clines, I will use the remainder of this essay to explore a recent example of exegesis seeking appropriation and appropriation seeking exegesis. I begin with the "science" of exegesis of a particular text, recognizing from the outset that I am using a rather constrained notion of "exegesis." Some would contend that there is a separate moment of "exegesis," insisting that all "exegesis" is already appropriation.<sup>24</sup> However, I allow myself to be constrained by the traditional denotations of "exegesis" because I want to affirm the

19. *Ibid.*, 2.

20. Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 311.

21. Clines, "The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties*, 18.

22. *Ibid.*, 18, 24.

23. See, e.g., David J. A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976); *idem*, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

24. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 11–27.

importance of the detail of the text, along with le Roux and Clines, in all the many dimensions of textual detail.<sup>25</sup>

In 1984 Phyllis Trible published a landmark book, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*.<sup>26</sup> All three poles of the interpretive process are present in her work, but the bulk of the work is focused on literary exegesis. Indeed, a careful reading of the book today demonstrates that Trible's treatment of "context" and "ideo-theological appropriation" is rather modest. The power of the book lies in its (literary) exegesis.

As one of the pioneers of literary exegesis (like Clines), at a time when conjoining these two terms would have been considered odd, Trible is attentive to her exegetical craft/science. I remember well reading this book, together with a group of postgraduate students from different parts of the world, under the tutelage of Clines, at the University of Sheffield, in 1985 or 1986. And while most of us were in the class because of our contextual commitments (that is, because of our ideo-theological concerns), we were spellbound by Trible's close and careful exegesis, what she did with the detail of the text.

I offer one example here, the story of Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-22). Trible identifies the literary unit as combining "chiasmus and alternation,"<sup>27</sup> framed within a ring composition:<sup>28</sup>

- A. Introduction: Characters and Circumstances, 13:1-3
- B. Jonadab and Amnon, 13:4-5
- C. David and His Children, 13:6-9c
  - D. The Crime: Amnon and Tamar, 13:9d-18
- B'. Tamar and Absalom, 13:19-20
- C'. David and His Children, 13:21
- A'. Conclusion: Characters and Circumstances, 13:22

25. My emphasis will be on literary or synchronic exegesis, but my arguments hold for sociohistorical exegesis as well; see Gerald O. West, "Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study," *AThR* 93 (2011): 431-49. Indeed, my identification of this text as a literary unit, having an earlier "independent" existence outside the so-called Succession Narrative, is based on historical-critical criteria.

26. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

27. *Ibid.*, 61 n. 50. For the whole outline, see 37-55.

28. *Ibid.*, 37, 49.

Given her ideo-theological commitments, which she is overt about, she attends in particular to the female figure of Tamar within this literary composition. In a footnote she makes an astute comment with regard to the relationship between exegesis and appropriation, noting that by employing "a feminist perspective" her "hermeneutical emphases" are different from those of other scholars, "even when literary observations concur."<sup>29</sup> In what follows I will examine how "hermeneutical emphases" (or ideo-theological orientations) and "literary observations" (or textual details) engage each other.

Trible's attention to the literary detail of this text dwelt with me for many years before some of this detail was activated by a contextual call for appropriation. It was in 1996 that colleagues and I from the Ujamaa Centre, an interface between socially engaged biblical scholarship and local communities of Bible "readers,"<sup>30</sup> were invited by a group of women to facilitate a workshop on the theme of women and violence.<sup>31</sup> Tamar's story, opened up to me by Trible's careful exegetical work, seemed a fitting biblical text to interpret together in this specific context, offering as it did considerable detail that might be appropriated. Following what was then an emerging shape of what has come to be called Contextual Bible Study, in which the Bible study begins and ends with the knowledge of the participants but includes the resources of biblical scholarship in between, we began to develop a Bible study on 2 Sam 13:1-22 that has come to have the following shape:

We read 2 Sam 13:1-22 aloud, preferably dramatically. A series of questions follow.

1. Read 2 Sam 13:1-22 together again in small groups. Share with one another what you think the text is about.
- Each small group is then asked to report back to the larger group. Each and every response to question 1 is summarized on news-

29. *Ibid.*, 57 n. 2.

30. Gerald O. West, "The Not So Silent Citizen: Hearing Embodied Theology in the Context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa," in *Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged* (ed. Trygve Wyller; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 37-40.

31. Gerald O. West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, "The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond)," *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004): 4-12.

print. After this report, the participants return to their small groups to discuss the following questions.

2. Who are the main characters in this story, and what do we know about them?
  3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
  4. What does Tamar say, and what does Tamar do? Focus carefully on each element of what Tamar says and does.
- When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of its discussion. After this report, the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following questions.
5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.
  6. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?

Once again, the small groups present their report back to the plenary group. Creativity is particularly vital here, as often women find it difficult or impossible to articulate their responses. A drama or a drawing may be the only way in which some groups can report. Finally, each small group comes together to formulate an action plan.

#### 7. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?

The action plan is either reported to the plenary group or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

The Contextual Bible Study is framed by "community knowledge" questions (questions 1, 5-7), with "critical biblical studies knowledge" in the form of questions in between (questions 2-4).<sup>32</sup> This format to "The Tamar Campaign" Bible study has taken years to evolve as we have worked with it in the action-reflection cycle of our praxis. We worked through a range of critical questions before we found the question that would focus the participants on the extensive literary detail of Tamar's story. While the

32. Gerald O. West, "The Contribution of Tamar's Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities," in *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim; LHOTS 465; London T&T Clark, 2010), 184-200.

overall shape of the Bible study draws on the exegetical detail of Tribble's work, focusing, as she does, on character, it is her careful work on the "central unit" of this text that has given this Bible study its impact in communities across the world.

The rape, or "the crime," is identified by Tribble as the "central unit" (D) (see above). Here, she says, "form and content yield a flawed chiasmus that embodies irreparable damage for the characters."<sup>33</sup> "The rape itself," she goes on to argue, "constitutes the center of the chiasmus. This design verifies the message of the preceding circular patterns: Tamar is entrapped for rape."<sup>34</sup> So within the central unit (13:9d-18), Tribble identifies the following "flawed" chiasmus, which she then goes on to analyze in detail.<sup>35</sup>

- a Amnon's command to the servants and their response (13:9de)
- b Amnon's command to Tamar and her response (13:10-11a)
- c Conversation between Amnon and Tamar (13:11b-14a)
- d Rape (13:14b-15b)
- c'-b' Conversation between Amnon and Tamar:  
Amnon's command to Tamar and her response  
(13:15c-16)
- a' Amnon's command to a servant and his response (13:17-18)

This exegetical analysis became crucial to our work and is offered to the participants in the form of question 4. Question 4 compels the participants to return to reread the text, yet again, this time focusing carefully on this central unit. Our question 4, however, expands Tribble's central unit, extending it to include Tamar's actions (13:8-19), for in our analysis Tamar is an agent before and after she is a victim. The chiasmus we work with begins and ends with Tamar, not Amnon.

- a Tamar "went" (and other actions) ... (13:8-9b)
- b Amnon's command to the servants and their response  
(13:9de)
- c Amnon's command to Tamar and her response  
(13:10-11a)

33. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 43.

34. *Ibid.*, 44.

35. *Ibid.*



- d Conversation between Amnon and Tamar (13:11b-14a)
  - e Rape (13:14b-15b)
- d'-c' Conversation between Amnon and Tamar: Amnon's command to Tamar and her response (13:15c-16)
- b' Amnon's command to a servant and his response (13:17-18)
- a' Tamar "put" (and other actions) ... (13:19)

Why did we expand the chiasmus? What made us reexamine Tribble's literary analysis? Surely a chiasmus is an "objective" structure? My tone here is ironic, for all exegetes know that our science remains open to contestation and even "falsification,"<sup>36</sup> that most noble of scientific virtues! The honest answer is that our African feminist ideo-theological appropriation, shaped by the women's struggle in our South African context, wanted to emphasize the agency of women. And as we brought this contextual concern to the text, via the mediating conversation of our African feminist ideo-theological framework, we noticed a detail that Tribble had "missed." Our chiasmus is in the text. We are not importing it into the text; we are not doing eisegesis. Our ideo-theological orientation has opened up a detail of the text not previously picked out by Tribble's analysis. Our appropriation has led to exegesis.

So question 4, to some extent, takes us beyond Tribble's emphasis, for just as our extended chiasmus emphasizes the agency of Tamar, so too does the focus of this question. In her analysis of what is the third element of her construction of the chiasmus (c), Tribble does give careful attention to the detail of Tamar's "deliberations,"<sup>37</sup> but her emphasis is on how the narrative design "verifies the message of the preceding circular patterns. Tamar is entrapped for rape."<sup>38</sup> This is a persuasive reading of the details, particularly when we remember that Tribble's intention in this book is to offer "a third approach" to feminist hermeneutics. The first and most familiar approach "documents the case against women," showing "the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel and the early church." The second approach "discerns within the Bible critiques of patriarchy it

36. Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1978).

37. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 45.

38. *Ibid.*, 44.

upholds forgotten texts and reinterprets familiar ones to shape a remnant theology that challenges the sexism of scripture." The third approach, says Tribble, "incorporates the other two. It recounts tales of terror in *memoriam* to offer sympathetic readings of abused women."<sup>39</sup> While Tribble seems to lean in her exegesis of 2 Sam 13:1-22 more toward the first approach (as part of her third approach), we have tended to lean in the direction of the second approach, emphasizing the resisting detail of the text.

Tribble notes that Amnon's imperatives in elements (a) and (b) of the chiasmus are met with "objection" from Tamar. In the presence of the rapist, Tamar does not panic. "In fact," asserts Tribble, "she claims her voice."<sup>40</sup> But while Tribble gives careful attention to each of the components of Tamar's direct speech, noting how the deliberations of Tamar "slow the movement of the plot," Tribble's emphasis is on how "they are unable to divert it."<sup>41</sup> The plot, together with the narrator (who does not use Tamar's name in introducing her speeches), argues Tribble, portrays "her powerlessness."<sup>42</sup> Our emphasis, as I have said, is on Tamar's speech as resistance. By extending the chiasmus as we have done to include the actions of Tamar in verses 8-9b and 19, we are able also to emphasize the agency of Tamar in her conversations/contestations with Amnon (d, and d'-c'). Question 4 has the potential to open up these dimensions of the detail of the text.

This process of exegesis offering us a form of appropriation in the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, and of the Tamar Contextual Bible Study returning us to the text "to see" new ("objective") detail in the text, has continued. The decades in which the Tamar Contextual Bible Study has been done around the world have produced a common refrain from the many women with whom we have worked. The focus on Tamar, a young woman who is sexually abused, is important, but what about a focus on men? The Ujamaa Centre has endeavored to heed this call (as has David Clines in his work)<sup>43</sup> and has produced a series of Contextual Bible Studies exploring a range of aspects of masculinity.<sup>44</sup> The reason we did not use

39. *Ibid.*, 3.

40. *Ibid.*, 45.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 46.

43. David J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties*, 212-43.

44. See the series on "Redemptive Masculinity" Online: <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Practical.aspx>.

the Tamar Contextual Bible Study in our emerging work on masculinity was that the text portrays each of the male characters as implicated in the rape of Tamar. We were in search of "redemptive masculinities" and so had to look elsewhere in the Bible for resources. But because we continued to do the Tamar Contextual Bible Study we continued to be confronted with the text. While working with the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, as part of the Fourth Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Yaoundé, Cameroun, in 2007, I reread (again) 13:2, seeing it in a new way. Tribble had translated this verse as follows:

So tormented was Amnon that he made himself ill on account of Tamar his sister, for a virgin was she, and it was impossible in the eyes of Amnon to do to her anything.<sup>45</sup>

Here is a powerful portrayal of character, full of detail. Tribble's analysis picks up on Amnon's "desire, lust-sickness and violent yearning" as she carefully probes the narrator's emphasis on familial ties.<sup>46</sup> In terms of plot, 13:2 is, for Tribble, the start of the complication. Though she does not use this form of plot analysis, her analysis indicates that 13:2 is part of the plot's "complication." There are, of course, many ways to approach plot. But a common way of analyzing how plots "move," since Aristotle,<sup>47</sup> has been to see plot as having three fundamental movements: exposition, complication, resolution.<sup>48</sup> "Plots move," argues Jerome Walsh, "like an arc from a situation of (relative) stability, through a process of tension or destabilization, to a new situation of (relative) stability."<sup>49</sup> For Tribble, verse 1 is the exposition (a situation of relative stability), and verse 2 is the beginning of

45. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 39.

46. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

47. Aristotle, *Poetics* (trans. Gerald F. Else; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 30.

48. David J. A. Clines, "Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text," in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (2 vols.; JSOTSup 292–293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1:5.

49. Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 14.

the narrative tension. But what if 13:2 is part of the "exposition"? What if the "complication" or tension only begins in 13:3?

Our problem with using this text in our work with men was that it portrayed men as perpetrators, with each of the male characters playing some role in the rape of Tamar. Indeed, question 3 of the Bible study above invites such an analysis. But if verse 2 can be considered an aspect of the narrative's exposition, then it portrays an Amnon who is full of desire but who does not act, precisely because, as Tribble notes, "as a virgin, Tamar is protected property, inaccessible to males, including her brother."<sup>50</sup> Amnon's state of heightened desire could be considered a state of relative stability! Verses 1–2 form the exposition, introducing the family (13:1), and introducing the initial "stable" state of the relationship between Amnon and Tamar. On this exegesis of the text, Amnon is a normal male. Like most males he experiences sexual desire, but he does not (initially) act on this desire, because of a whole range of sociocultural constraints. It is Jonadab who ushers in the complication (13:3).

This insight, this recognition of the detail of the text, offered us a way of working with this text with men. So we have returned to this text and have begun to evolve a Redemptive Masculinity Contextual Bible Study using this text. At the moment, its form is somewhat flexible, but a relatively stable version of it is as follows:

We read 2 Sam 13:1–22 aloud, preferably dramatically. After the text has been read, a series of questions follow.

1. Have you heard this text (2 Sam 13:1–22) read publically ... on a Sunday? Share with one another if and when and where you have heard this text read.
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
4. How would you characterize Amnon's masculinity in this text? Consider:  
What prevents Amnon initially from acting on his love/lust for Tamar (v. 2)?

50. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 38.



What is it that changes Amnon's love (v. 1) to lust (v. 2), and then enables him to act on his desire/lust (vv. 4-6)? What is it then that enables him to act on his love/desire/lust (vv. 4-6)?

How does he react to Tamar's arguments (v. 14)?

How does he behave after he has raped Tamar (vv. 15-17)?

5. What does Tamar's response to Amnon's assault tell us about her understanding of masculinity? Consider: What does she say (vv. 12-13, 16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of what it means to be "a man"?

What does she do (v. 19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be "a man"?

6. What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in various age groups), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?

7. How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age groups?

The action plan is either reported to the plenary or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

Question 1 performs a similar function to that of the first question in the Tamar Contextual Bible Study, but draws attention to the absence of the text in the male-dominated world of religious life, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim (and this Bible study has been done by participants from each of these faith traditions, in each case at their own initiative). Questions 2 and 3, as in the Tamar study, draw attention to the details of characterization in the text and provide an overall orientation to the story. Questions 4 and 5 slow the "reading" process down considerably,<sup>51</sup> posing two related and quite difficult questions. In working with this Redemptive Masculinities Contextual Bible Study, we have wrestled with these two questions, often reformulating them, in order to devise a form of question that combines a careful reading of the text with the participants' own

51. John Riches, ed., *What Is Contextual Bible Study? A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010), 41.

understandings of notions of "masculinity." So far, we have settled on a general question and then some prompting subquestions that focus the participants on particular details of the text, such as the characterization of Amnon in verse 2. By introducing these prompting subquestions in question 4 we direct the rereading process to particular textual details and so offer participants some of the fruits of the critical literary analysis of biblical scholarship, including the kind of detail Tribble identifies in her exegesis of the central chiasmus.

By introducing the prompting subquestions in question 5 (of the Redemptive Masculinities Contextual Bible Study), we again offer participants the opportunity to engage with the kind of literary detail discussed in terms of the Tamar Contextual Bible Study (above). But in addition we offer participants the opportunity to retell and relive Tamar's story by imagining with her what kind of masculinities she and we yearn for. Question 5 enables participants both to focus "on the smallest detail in the text, by a close reading of each word," and to "re-enact" part of Israel's past.<sup>52</sup>

Once again, appropriation has opened up details of the text not emphasized by Tribble. Appropriation has led to exegesis, for it is clear that the detail is "in the text." And while this detail is literary rather than historical, the argument *le Roux* puts forward holds: "Historical [and literary] investigation illuminates the many facets of our shared humanity; it is a way of relating to life and its challenges, a way of discovering life's meaning by understanding the lives of others, a way of understanding humanity's hopes and fears, and a means of providing some direction and orientation in this life."<sup>53</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The science of exegesis will remain a resource beyond the confines of the academic community as long as the Bible is a significant text for faith communities, for exegesis offers important details to ordinary readers of the Bible that they do not usually have access to. Often, the very details denied them by the church is vital in their daily struggles to live full abundant lives. Second Samuel 13:1-22 is not normally read in church on a Sunday (or other Sabbath days), as any lectionary will demonstrate. Yet here is a

52. *Le Roux*, "Story of a Department," 5, 6.

53. *Ibid.*, 6.

text with important details for women and men in the context of gender violence.

But as I have also shown, bringing our contexts to bear on the Bible, acknowledging the ideo-theological orientations that enable this encounter, provides the impetus to exegetical innovation, enabling the (socially engaged) scholar "to see" details of the text that have gone unnoticed.

### PART 3

## LANGUAGE AND LEXICOGRAPHY