FACING THE DARK: ENCOUNTERS AT THE JABBOK (GEN.32:22-32)

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Abstract

The identities of Jacob and his assailant have long presented an exegetical quandary for interpreters examining the encounter at the Jabbok. Characterizing Elohim/ish is particularly complex, as evidenced by the sheer number of possibilities offered by scholars—a river demon, a specter of Esau, Yahweh in disguise, and even Jacob's own psyche. Moreover, Jacob himself is plagued by his dual nomenclature and by an ambivalent relationship to the land he has been promised. In this dissertation, I argue that the ambiguous identities of this story's characters are strategic in that they create a permeable narrative space for the anxieties and desires of the exilic and post-exilic community to find voice. A number of metaphors/images in the text—name, face, wound, darkness, and crossing—allow the community producing the story narrative places to wrestle with their origins, their relationship to proximate others, and to God.

At the Jabbok, Jacob says his name, inquires about his assailant's name, and is renamed (Gen.32:27-29). The polynomialism of Elohim/ish, as well as the place label, Peni*el,* obscures his identity, as does his refusal to disclose his name. When Jacob wrestles with his opponent, he claims to have seen God "face to face," yet this figure is cloaked in darkness (Gen.32:30; cf. 33:10). Jacob also sustains an invisible wound at the hand of this invisible opponent (Gen.32:25, 31-32). At the Jabbok, Jacob is in darkness (Gen.32:22-24), and examination of the larger narrative reveals that it is in darkness where Jacob frequently deceives others, is himself deceived, or encounters God (Gen.

27:1-29; 28:10; 29:21-30). Finally, the metaphor of the crossing (Gen.32:23) symbolizes Jacob's exile and return from home.

Each of these metaphors/images contributes to the identity of the exilic/post-exilic community by constructing a story that depicts its ambivalent relationship to itself, to others, and to God. Therefore, this story is no casual, disinterested recollection of a shared past. Rather, it is a highly charged textual space where the communal memory of wounded storytellers is recalled.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Interpretive Issues

The Jabbok encounter (Gen. 32:22-32) is set within a narrative that is richly complex, not least because of the relational interplay of the protagonist and his god. The faces of protagonist, Jacob, and antagonist, Elohim/ish, are both revealed and concealed in their darkened encounters with one another. Their identities are, like the scene in which the story is situated, obscure. It is this obscurity that has led Samuel Tongue to express a sentiment similar to my own: "I have been attracted to this story as an exemplary text that raises dust, obscuring the scene, provoking many commentators to try and interpret what is going on before the dust settles again."[1] It is the obscurity of the story—demonstrated through the images of name, face, wound, darkness, and crossing—that drew me to it in the first place. Those images draw me still and compel me to make the central claim of this study—the poetics and rhetoric of the narrative around name, face, wound, darkness, and crossing constitute a fruitful way of understanding embodied and contested individual and collective identity in the exilic/post-exilic period. The driving theme is one of identity—the identities of the characters, of the community that produced the text, and of contemporary readers who engage the text. These multiple identities correlate to the multiplicity of meaning within the text itself and the rhetorical reasons for that multiplicity.

The Jabbok text is one that asks, like Elohim, "Why do you ask my name?" Why ask for one meaning, for one name, for one face, when many possibilities have opened themselves? In its unwillingness to surrender to, its unwillingness to be the target of

[1] Samuel Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretive Struggles Over Genesis 32:22-32* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 3.

singular interpretation, the story continues to unfold and to multiply meaning.[2] Therefore the link between *how* the text multiplies meaning and *why* the text multiplies meaning will also be explored. This is a text that asks about names, reassigns names, and is a discursive space for a community to reconsider identity, especially in the time space of the post-exilic period.

Methodology

My method of approaching the text is decidedly interdisciplinary and eclectic. First, I ground my approach in biblical narrative criticism. In order to "face the dark," I acknowledge that faces must be put on the characters in the story. Narrative criticism provides a sense of who these characters are, spotlighting Jacob's many failures as a moral agent in relation to everyone else in the story world. More importantly, in this case narrative criticism exposes just how arduous it is to draw a "face" on Jacob's antagonist. The anonymous nature of Jacob's opponent dovetails into the theological implications of a divine character who pursues and wounds in the dark. Second, my approach is ethically nuanced, giving attention to the various faces which are put in jeopardy by Jacob in the story world, or which are depicted negatively for rhetorical ends. Third, this study is socio-politically aware, considering not only the story's poetics but also its rhetoric. The three-pronged nature of my approach necessitates multiple tools for analysis. Therefore I use an array of lenses, including deconstruction, psychoanalytic theory, feminist analysis, Levinasian ethics, narratology and socio-narratology. The variety of methods employed

[2] In Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 85, Derrida's assessment of apophatic literature rings true for the Jabbok story: "This literature forever elliptical, taciturn, cryptic, obstinately withdrawing, however, from all literature, inaccessible there even where it seems to go, the exasperation of a jealousy that passion carries beyond itself . . . It holds desire in suspense, and always saying too much or too little, each time it leaves you without ever going away from you." It is, Derrida claims, literature meant for exile.

in this study correlate to the images/metaphors in the text which I intend to explore—name, face, wound, dark, and crossing.

Consequently a discussion of how images/metaphors function in narrative is critical for grounding my methodology. David Gunn and Danna Fewell have noted that the multivalence of language creates a "thick" texture where words can participate simultaneously in more than one pattern. In their words, "Language lures us—allures us—from one word to another, from one meaning of a word to another, from the literal to the metaphorical, from one part of a text into another, from one text to another. The text lures us, and we cast the lure as readers."[3] As a result the connection between text and reader is central. The interface between the face of the reader and the textual face allows for the reification of meaning—and more importantly, a plurality of meanings. No word or sign is ever in a completely fixed relationship with meaning—what is signified. Meaning is difference, and the meaning of words is in constant deferral.[4] Drawing on Jacques Derrida's first essay to Edmond Jabés, Francis Landy affirms that metaphor is an agent of différance, a non-signifying difference that marks the origin of poetic speech. Metaphor, infinitely equivocal, is the origin of language.[5] It is this infinite equivocality which allows a metaphor to exist in a particular time, but also to transcend that time. The images/metaphors in the Jabbok story are rooted in their multiple literary histories (e.g. the retelling by the prophet Hosea, cf. Hos. 12:2-6)—and within the socio-political contexts undergirding them—even as they transcend those contexts. Moreover, words—

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[3] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 147.
[4] Ibid., 155. Gunn and Fewell are obviously, but implicitly, thinking in Derridian terms.
[5] Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 263.

metaphors—make "worlds," as Ellen van Wolde has said.[6] Indeed, Gunn and Fewell assert, "Whole stories can become metaphors that point to particular ideas or experiences. The telling of a story, the writing of a text, is often an attempt to control—to influence an attitude, to reinforce a worldview, to reconfigure a critical experience."[7]

Within the Hebrew Bible the Babylonian exile and its aftermath is *the* "critical experience." This experience is, in one way or another, the central trauma undergirding every major story in the Hebrew Bible. The Jacob Cycle generally and the Jabbok text specifically is also a "whole story" which attempts to "remember" Israel's tenuous and tumultuous relationship with God, with itself as a nation, and with proximate others. This happens in part through the use of metaphor.

The metaphor of the name, for example, demonstrates a self-awareness on the part of the community producing the text around the character of Jacob. Within the Jacob Cycle, he is an ambiguous figure who appears destined from the beginning to supplant his brother (Gen. 25:23). His actions are nevertheless censured, to an extent, by Esau whose tirade centers on the aptness of Jacob's name (Gen. 27:36). Some prophetic traditions even utilize Jacob's name to excoriate the people (e.g. Mic. 2:7; Isa. 48:1). The name therefore becomes a kind of spoken admonition—do not act like *Jacob*. Elsewhere Jacob's name suggests a close relationship to God, where iniquity will be forgiven and fortunes will be restored (e.g. Isa. 27:9; Jer. 30:18; cf. Ps. 46:7; 20:1; 24:6; 75:9). Likewise, the metaphor of the name also symbolizes other realities—the inscrutability of

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[6] Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
[7] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 157.

God, who refuses to reveal his name (Gen. 32:29)—and the reality of the nation's self-understanding as one who struggles both with *Elohim* and *anashim* (Gen. 32:28).

The metaphor of face underscores the anxiety surrounding looking upon the divine and living (Ex. 33:20) but also the reality that such encounters might nevertheless take place (Gen. 16:13; cf. Deut. 34:10). Philologically speaking, the duality/multiplicity of "face" in Hebrew correlates to the many faces which linger at the Jabbok. These include the many iterations of the divine face Jacob encounters throughout the story, which may or may not be the same face he encounters at the Jabbok. Also included in the multiplicity of face are the faces of those who have deceived, been deceived, or been discarded throughout the story—Esau, Isaac, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and the children. At the Jabbok, and in the face of his opponent, Jacob must face these faces too. The metaphor of the wound symbolizes the central trauma of the Hebrew people—the Babylonian exile—which was believed to be orchestrated by the hand of God (Hab. 1:1-11). The wounds in the story, like the names and the faces, are multiple: the psychical wounds sustained by Jacob before arriving at the Jabbok; the invisible wound received by Jacob at the hand of an invisible assailant at the Jabbok; the wounds of Jacob's antagonist which propel him to pursue, wound and bless Jacob in the first place; and the wounds of the community telling the story. Closely aligned to the wound is the metaphor of the dark, which functions spatially and temporally to represent the "darkness of exile." Jacob's journey is based on a dispersion, an expulsion (Gen. 28:10), where he is, more times than not, encountering and bartering with God in the dark (Gen. 28:20-22; 32:10-13, 22-32); or likewise deceiving or being deceived with darkness as his temporal companion (Gen. 25:29-34; 27:1-29; 29:21-30). Darkness is embodied in the multiple

time spaces of Rebecca's womb, and the nocturnal spaces of Bethel and the Jabbok. Finally, the metaphor of the crossing symbolizes all that has taken place to exile Jacob and the nation of Israel from home—and all that must take place to return. Crossing is predicated upon expulsion and the deferment of promises made to another patriarch, Abraham (Gen. 15:12-16). Jacob's crossings are also multiple—he must cross the Jabbok itself; he must reconcile with Esau; and he must cross past a divine or divine-human opponent. The metaphors of the name, the face, the wound, the dark, and the crossing function in multiple ways. Metaphor becomes the primary way in which this particular story multiplies meaning.

Each of these metaphors, then, are useful for the interdisciplinary work of this project. They demonstrate not only *how* the text multiplies meaning—but also *why* the text multiples meaning. The metaphors help to underscore the work that the text is doing, namely—the Jabbok encounter is a "whole story" that represents the ambiguity felt by the Israelite community around its origins, its relationship to God, and to the experience of exile and return. As Gunn and Fewell have affirmed, moving beyond the surface meanings of words into the realm of metaphor allows for multiple meanings, which present the reader with ambiguity.[8] In the Jabbok encounter, ambiguity is a central feature to the story. This is demonstrated by the uncertainty of the identities of the characters and their interrelationship(s). It is also demonstrated through the undecideability of the text itself (e.g. who is acting and being acted upon), variously described by Roland Barthes as unmaking, explosion, and dissemination.[9] Nevertheless,

[8] Ibid., 156.
[9] Roland Barthes, "Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 247.

this allows for what Gerhard von Rad called "inner spaciousness."[10] This inner spaciousness allows not only for a multiplicity of meaning, but also a multiplicity of tellings.

As Derrida and Landy have both stated, metaphor is a form of memory, and it is metaphor which "transfers," creating the "possibility of continuity."[11] In this way, the metaphors in the story work to create a past for ancient Yehud, making the present—which is painful and liminal—a habitable space. The Jabbok story is, to borrow a phrase from socio-narratologist Arthur Frank, a story for Israel to grow up on.[12] Nevertheless, the story is also adaptable to contemporary readers who would see in its metaphors something useful to describe their own lives. Samuel Tongue's "multiple canonicities" extends "traditional" biblical authority (such as poetic, historical, moral, and philological/critical) into the ways in which these canons of authority enact the paradox of both limit and permission in poetic retellings. Contemporary poems such as those by Alden Nowlan, Yehuda Amichai, and Jamie Wasserman all point to an intertextuality that is both affective and culturally adaptable.[13] While analysis of these contemporary poems are beyond the scope of this study, these (re)tellings do demonstrate the portability of this particular story. The dark encounter between God and Jacob slip textual boundaries and represent fears and desires centering on relational reconciliation. The Jabbok story displaces safe or comfortable pictures of God for pictures that are at best confusing and at worst distressing. The resulting *effect* is *affect*—this is a story that disturbs because it

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[10] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 324.
[11] Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible*, 265.
[12] Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20.
[13] Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretive Struggles Over Genesis 32:22-32*, 167.

withholds something of God's quiddity—[14] God is the presence of an absence, or an "elusive presence," Samuel Terrien has said.[15] The elusiveness or ambiguity of this story, its characters, and its meaning(s) will form the basis of an analysis that is both exegetical and meditative.

Outline of Chapters

This study opens with the two metaphors which speak to Jacob and Elohim/ish's identities—name and face. In order to "face the dark," I must first discuss the names and faces of the characters who find themselves in that darkness. In the chapter entitled "The Name," I utilize the tools of biblical narrative criticism, specifically borrowing from the insights of poststructuralists such as Derrida to explore the names Jacob, Israel, and Jacob's wrestling partner. The encounter at the Jabbok invites an exploration of the idea of giving, receiving, and saving names. When interpellation occurs around names (personal, political, divine, or geographical), subjects and places are linked in ways that reveal but do not exhaust individual or collective identity.[16] In particular, in refusing to be named, Jacob's opponent transcends the notion that a name can act as a container for identity. Here I also link Derrida's poststructuralist analysis to an interpretation of The Name that borders on the *via negativa*. In dealing with a critical intertext Ex. 3:1-17, I

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[14] By suggesting that in the Jabbok story the character of God may share the same spectrum of good inclinations and evil inclinations as does Jacob, the narrative deconstructs the notion that God's inclinations must always be good.

[15] Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

[16] In Louis Althusser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), 116-118, Althusser defines interpellation as a "hailing" that takes place where a subject is cast into a specific mold by the ideological world in which s/he inhabits. A subject is thus fixed, locked into the contours of time, space, and characterization that the hailing subject has created. Althusser's concept of interpellation is dealt with in greater detail in the chapter on "The Name."

explore the challenges associated with “naming God,” demonstrating the possibility for escaping a presumed finality to giving/receiving names.

Chapter two, “The Face,” explores the claim that Jacob sees Elohim “face to face” and lives (Gen. 32:31). Like “The Name,” this chapter is also an exploration of the identities of the story’s central characters. In particular, I draw from the feminist analysis of Serge Frolov to foreground the faces of the women and children in the story, though I do not use Frolov’s work uncritically. His reading, when coupled with the ethical works of Emmanuel Levinas, exposes Jacob’s failures as a moral agent. In this way, I engage the many other faces who are sent on ahead of Jacob, potentially into harm’s way, but whose presences nevertheless linger at the Jabbok. Here too I draw on a crucial intertext, Gen. 16:1-21, and its doublet, Gen. 21:9-21, to highlight the Janus-faced nature of the divine character who at once appears compassionate, elevating the oppressed to agency and subjectivity; but who also appears to sanction the well-being of the men he chooses to the detriment of others in the story. God appears behind it all, bringing about his designed plan or purpose, as in the story of Jacob. In particular, the (s)election of Jacob indicates the (dis)election of Esau, as well as the narrative expendability of the women and children. In this chapter, I argue that at the Jabbok, Jacob is presented with the ethical imperative to answer for all the faces he has put in jeopardy.

In chapter three, “The Wound,” I transition from the identities of the characters to the identities of those telling the story. I argue that the Jabbok encounter is composed by a community of “wounded storytellers” who discover in Jacob’s wound (Gen. 32:25-26) a source for their own trauma. As a community who experienced a fracturing of all that was known—family, land, and ritual—Jacob’s wound is an invisible symbol of

communal pain. Drawing on the socio-narratological insights of Arthur Frank and the poststructuralist work of Jacques Lacan, I trace the contours of Jacob's wound narratively and sociologically. Narratively, I argue that the Jacob Cycle opens with lack—with a desperate man pleading to Yahweh on behalf of his barren wife (Gen. 25:21). Lack is central to the events that unfold and for understanding what motivates the characters to act in the ways that they do. Here I also demonstrate that Jacob and Esau are mirrors for all the other lacks. Jacob is wounded or "cut," in the words of Lacan, the moment he discovers himself to be trapped in the discourse of the Other. His alienation, however, ironically leads him towards subjectivity. In this chapter, I also argue that at the Jabbok, both Jacob and his wrestling partner experience a mutual vulnerability. Moreover, whatever else may be said about Jacob's opponent, at the Jabbok he demonstrates a profound relationality. His desire renders him vulnerable to Jacob, who he pursues, wounds, and blesses. Finally, I suggest that Jacob's wound and limp are the "excess" or "trace" of trauma that never goes away. The excess of Jacob's wound indicates that Israel's story is both about the chaos of communal disintegration and the quest to wrestle honestly and to make meaning out of suffering. Their grasp on life, on the land, on God, is tenuous and always already wounded and wounding. The wound is already there before the story is (re)told—a story with an invisible assailant and an invisible wound. The story remains, like Jacob's wound, half-open.

Chapter four, "The Dark," moves beyond questions of identity and identity politics to a discussion of temporality and space. I trace the many images of darkness in the Jacob Cycle and in the Jabbok text. The darkness of Rebekah's womb is a space where Jacob and Esau's bodies and stories are kept, as well as a temporal period of

gestation (Gen. 25:19-26). The dark of the night, at both Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22) and the Jabbok (Gen. 32:22-32), are places where Jacob encounters a divine being or beings. Finally, the darkness covers Isaac's aged eyes, blurring his vision and enabling Jacob and Rebekah's deception (Gen. 27:1-29). In this chapter, I draw on the theo-poetic writings of Catherine Keller to destabilize a wholly negative interpretation of darkness and to situate it theologically. I also utilize Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to argue that the Dark authors and is authored by those who inhabit it, traverse it, and sojourn in it. In so doing, human and divine agency function alongside the dark in order to form identity. What follows is a discussion of the darkness in the divine figure Jacob encounters, drawing on Derrida's concept of trembling and the *kryptō*. This metaphor, like all the others, is not merely about the story world of the Jabbok scene. It is also an expression of the darkness of the Babylonian exile.

In my final chapter, "The Crossing," I argue that the crossing of the Jabbok River functions on three levels: the spatial, the human, and the divine (Gen. 32:23-24). It is the threshold of Rebekah's womb which must first be crossed, and the oracle at the boys' birth attests that the struggle between Jacob and Esau would extend to their ancestors (Gen. 25:21-26). In this chapter, I explore multiple citations within the Hebrew Bible (Num. 20:14ff; Ps. 137; Lam. 4:21-22; Mal. 1:2-3a, 4a; Obad.) which demonstrate the complex and protracted relationship between the Israelites and the Edomites. This literature attests to the reification of boundaries crossed by Jacob and Esau. Jacob's interactions with Esau—and also with Laban—reveal a text which delights in trickster antics amidst the very real struggle for resources and power. Here I bring collective memory studies into conversation with the socio-narratological insights of Heather

McKay, arguing that the Jabbok encounter is in part a story about a displaced person transitioning from home and back again. Here too the story represents the fears and needs of the post-exilic community of Yehud.

In conclusion, this study has implications for the Jacob Cycle as well as for the ancient community of Yehud. The Jabbok encounter "remembers" a past that is, at every literary moment, punctuated with a question mark. From the end of Deuteronomy where the people stand on a precipice and wonder whether they will take hold of the promises made to them so long ago, to the end of Israel's primary history where monarchy fails and land is lost, the children of Israel's (hi)story represent the partial fulfillment of deferred promises. It is about exile. It is about wandering in wilderness and in darkness and asking "how long?" It is about a melancholy search for home. For a community grappling with its identity, with its relationship to God, and to the land, the Jabbok encounter encapsulates each of these fears and anxieties. It demonstrates that blessing may not turn out the way they envision it. It demonstrates that blessing is frequently ambiguous and complex. Beyond Yehud, the Jabbok encounter testifies to the power of stories not only to represent worlds—but to continue to create them. To tell and to read stories is to engage in a decidedly human endeavor, one with implications for how individuals live and move and have their being in the world. The characters of Jacob and God are, like those of us who read and write about them, complex, flawed, and surprising. Their names, their faces, their wounds—the darkness they inhabit and the spaces they cross over—are always already ambiguous and multiple. It is this multiplicity of meaning, the multiple spaces they occupy, which make their story compelling and allow us to find our place in it. The story's inner spaciousness creates space for us, too.

The Name

"You have a name you did not ask for. All your life, this name will prey on you. But at which moment do you become aware of it?"[1]

Within the Hebrew Bible, the giving of a name is intertwined with a character's identity and destiny. Biblical characters are named by someone other than themselves—parent(s), narrator, even the divine. In one notable instance, even the divine character is named by someone else (Gen. 16:13). In her study of anonymous characterization in the Hebrew Bible, Adele Reinhartz says that proper names "define" biblical characters.[2] Following Reinhartz, a proper name must refer to a character's essence, represent the core of *Dasein*. Reinhartz's comments on the function of a proper name are an indispensable introduction to the subject but nevertheless fail to consider the emotive and ethical dimension of naming—*namely, that if a name is given, then a name is also received, whether one wants to receive it or not.* If a name limns a character—defines him/her, as Reinhartz says—then a name also limits a character. Like an oracle that foreordains a character's destiny (Gen. 25:23), a name may suggest that a character's identity is closed—consonant, vowel, consonant, nothing further to be said. For flat characters or characters that are mere functions of plot—perhaps such a narrative sacrifice is not to be mourned. A bit of wreckage remains in every narrative, after all. But such is not the case in the Jabbok story, where character and plot are foregrounded in equal measure. Indeed, the encounters at the Jabbok hinge on the saying and saving of

[1] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, Vol. 1 (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 37.
[2] Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name*?: *Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-8. Reinhartz notes that a proper name fulfills four related functions with respect to characterization. First, the proper name itself may carry meaning. The meaning may be derived from its etymology or from associations with or similarities to other names in various literary contexts. Second, a proper name serves as a "peg on which the other traits and features of the character may be hung," unifying disparate bits of information under one rubric. Third, a proper name is a convenient way of referring to that character. Finally, a proper name distinguishes one character from another, particularly useful with twins such as Jacob and Esau or Perez and Zerah.

names—Jacob, Israel, and the Name that refuses to be named.[3] Both Jacob and the Name are faced with the choice to say their name(s) and thus reveal their identit(ies), or to save them. The signification and lack thereof that occurs at the Jabbok offers a Lacanian reminder about characterization— that characters may not be stable amalgams of consciousness but rather multiple signifiers crowding around a proper name. The unwillingness of Jacob's opponent to reveal his name further destabilizes his identity, complicating their encounter. What remains is polynomialism—excess—a plurality of names—and pronominal presence—the remnants of names confused or left unsaid (cf. Gen. 32:26a, 27a). Polynomialism and pronominal presence are therefore additional complications to the story.

In this chapter, I will first argue that the encounter at the Jabbok requires an exploration of the ideas of giving, receiving, and saving names. Jacob must say his name as both an expression of suppressed identity and also as a confession of guilt; only then can his subject position change. Nevertheless, even as he transcends his name for a moment in the dark, he is "hailed" in a different way, (re)named Israel, and again by someone other than himself. Second, when interpellation occurs around names (personal, political, divine, or geographical), subjects and places are linked in ways that reveal but do not exhaust individual or collective identity. Indeed, the Name is able to transcend narrative expectations that a name can act as a container for identity. This possibility of escaping a presumed finality to giving/receiving names is an important ethical and emotive aspect to the biblical story in its narrative and psycho-historical legacy.

[3] In this chapter, the Name will refer to Jacob's wrestling partner, who is named by the narrator as אִישׁ and by Jacob as אֱלֹהִים. The character himself, however, resists such signification, choosing instead to keep his name a secret.

Therefore the names Jacob, Israel, and the Name are central to the Jabbok encounter and to the larger post-exilic reality that they represent.

Giving and Receiving Names

"And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.'" (Gen. 32:27)

At the beginning of the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25-50), Esau receives a name that aptly describes him: "The first one came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so *they* called his name Esau" (Gen. 25:25 ESV). Whoever did the actual naming, the plurality of the naming indicates a communal desire to name him and to welcome him appropriately into the arms of the barren woman and the husband who prayed for his birth. By contrast, Jacob is behind—אַחֲרֵי —and grasping tight—אֹחֶזֶת—vividly described by Avivah Zornberg: "his perspective filled with his brother's legs."[4] The duality of coming from behind and grasping onto someone else is no mere birth report; it is a reality that illuminates Jacob's character as the narrative unfolds. The narrator describes Jacob only in relation to Esau and forestalls the telling of his name as long as possible. He is אָחִיו, "his brother," who grasps his hand, בַּעֲקֵב, "on the heel" (Gen. 25:26). When Jacob is named, he is named only in relation to Esau. Zornberg notes that Jacob is described "only in not being clearly characterized at all. There is a neutral quality to him; he defines himself as Esau's shadow."[5] The twins are (mirror) opposites of one another, with Jacob appearing second. Still, Jacob is no mere afterthought of the womb; this birth sequence, which is linked to name-giving, is part of what connects Esau and Jacob. The naming of these brothers is just one instance in over 100 in the Hebrew Bible where a name is

[4] Avivah Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 165.
[5] Ibid.

conferred on a person or place.[6] The sheer volume of these occurrences raises questions about the significance and meaning of giving and receiving names, particularly as it relates to Jacob and Esau.

Regarding the giving and receiving of a name, the consensus among scholars has long echoed the sentiment of Gerhard von Rad: "Name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."[7] Similarly, Johannes Fichtner avers: "The name is not only an indicator of the distinction of different entities but also the *determination* of the essence of the named entity—be it person, place, or object."[8] R. Abba adds: "A name is regarded as possessing an inherent power which exercises a constraint upon its bearer: he must conform to his essential nature as expressed in his name."[9] In his examination of the giving of a name in the Hebrew Bible generally and in Genesis 2:23 specifically, George W. Ramsey argues that this understanding of naming should be reexamined. While his comments are targeted primarily at offering a minor corrective to Phyllis Trible's examination of the naming of Eve, Ramsey's general statements about the giving of names help to illuminate the giving and receiving of names vis-à-vis Jacob and Esau. Ramsey outlines three primary ways in which names are given and received in the Hebrew Bible.

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[6] Andrew F. Key, "The Giving of Proper Names in the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 1 (1964): 55.
[7] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 83.
[8] Johannes Fichtner, "Die etymologische Ätiologie in den Namengebungen der geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments," *Vetus testamentum* 6, no. 4 (1956): 372.
[9] George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1989): 30.

First, Ramsey concedes, there are certain texts in the Hebrew Bible that seem to indicate that the giving of a name is intended to exemplify control or authority over the person being named. Here, Ramsey cites several instances where kings bestow a new name upon individuals (e.g., Gen. 41:45; 2 Kgs. 23:34; 24:17). In this category Ramsey also includes warriors who conquer a territory and name it after themselves (e.g., Num. 32:31-42; Josh. 19:47; 2 Sam. 5:6-9).[10] Second, Ramsey categorizes instances of naming which commemorated something that had already happened at the time of naming (and not necessarily to the recipient of the one named) (e.g., Gen. 26:20-21; 29:33; 30:6; Josh. 5:9; 1 Sam. 4:21). Third, Ramsey provides several counterexamples which appear to militate against naming as an act of subordination or control. Ramsey cites the episode where Hagar names God after experiencing him by the spring in the wilderness on the road to Shur (this episode is dealt with in further detail in chapter two, The Face). Ramsey states, "It is difficult to imagine that the narrator intended us to understand that this woman who marvels at her encounter with the divine is exercising some sort of control over God."[11] Ramsey concludes, "Taken all together, the evidence indicates that, instead of thinking of name-giving as a determiner of an entity's essence, the Hebrews regarded naming as commonly determined by circumstances. The naming results from events which have occurred."[12] In the case of Jacob and Esau specifically, Ramsey views their names as related to characteristics the bearer has already exhibited: "As a person is, so he is named," Ramsey claims.[13] Ramsey's general statements about naming are useful in challenging traditional assumptions about naming in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless,

[10] Ibid., 32.
[11] Ibid., 33-34.
[12] Ibid., 34.
[13] Ibid., 33.

his comments, like Reinhartz's, fail to capture adequately the complexity of giving, receiving, and saving names in the Jacob Cycle.

Namely, what does it mean to *receive a name*? In the Jacob Cycle, I argue that receiving a name involves three things: being written into, rather than writing, a script; recognition that a script is not only about the one receiving the name—but it is also about the one(s) giving the name; and coming to understand the implications and meaning(s) behind one's own name and deciding whether to uphold the name or undermine it. First, as socio-narratologist Arthur Frank has indicated, receiving a name means being cast into a script written by someone else. Not only is an individual's agency at stake; so too is that individual's knowledge about his/her own life. When Jacob receives his name, the community scripts a truth about him that he will recognize only later at the Jabbok. His naming functions as a kind of communal, narrative whisper, a secret script—"We know a truth about you that you yourself have not yet recognized. We name you Jacob, because we have recognized something *Jacobish* about you." Indeed, Frank has said that stories are about characters resisting or embracing (or perhaps failing to recognize) the character into which they have been cast, usually as the result of some Trouble.[14] This recognition, whether a character welcomes the mold into which s/he has been cast or eschews it, occurs when subject meets subject. Louis Althusser has noted that all persons are "hailed" as subjects by other subjects. When a person is hailed on the street—"Hey, you there!"—the moment s/he turns to address the one speaking, s/he is always already a subject. For Althusser, hailing, or what he has labeled the "interpellation" of individuals,

[14] Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 30.

is akin to ideology that casts characters into a specific mold. By responding, "Yes; it really is me!" a subject obtains the recognition that s/he occupies a specific place in the world, a "fixed residence."[15] Thus a subject is fixed, locked, into the contours of time, space, and characterization that the hailing Subject has created. For Althusser, God is the Subject par excellence, he who is through and for himself ("I am that I am") and who interpellates his subjects in relation to himself.[16] Only after acknowledging that s/he has been interpellated—by narrative ideology, the expectations of others, or even God—can a character change his/her subject position.[17] In the case of Jacob, however, I will later show that his subject position does not change much; he receives another name, but it is not a name of his own choosing. He is interpellated once more, this time by his opponent.

Regarding the possibility for a change in subject position, Frank states, "The subject…feels a tension between hitching a ride on the immanent volition of the story and being carried where a story usually goes, versus the *possibility* that this time things could turn out differently: either the story might have changed, or the protagonist might this time, through some act of will, rewrite the story by acting differently from what the old story required" (italics mine).[18] Surely in the case of the naming of the child, the intention is not to subordinate or totalize, as Ramsey notes.[19] Nevertheless, receiving a name—from parent(s) or in the case of Obed (Ruth 4:17) from a community—does suggest that a

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[15] Louis Althusser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), 116-118.
[16] Ibid., 121.
[17] Frank's *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* defines subject position as the character's more or less reflective awareness of who the type of narrative requires him or her to be, and what being that character requires him or her to do.
[18] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 51.
[19] Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?," 32-33.

script, a reality, has been composed that a subject must first recognize and then choose to accept or reject. Will a subject remain an *Obed*—a servant—to a community or will s/he rewrite the story, change the name? A subject must in fact *receive a name*—recognize it, take stock of it, and determine whether to uphold or undermine it. For much of the story, Jacob does in fact "hitch a ride" on the narrative already written for him. At the Jabbok, the possibility for revision is extended to both Jacob and the Name, yet a question remains as to whether the community's giving of the name "Jacob" is intended as a derogatory riposte, a label to be eschewed, or one to be celebrated. Jacob's name, like his relationship with both father and mother, is one fraught with ambiguity.

The narrator explains that Isaac loved Esau because of the game in his mouth (Gen. 25:28a). Rebekah loved Jacob, but no reason is given for her love. Moreover, the text is taciturn regarding Isaac's love for his second son; his feelings are not named. Instead, it is Rebekah who holds the story in her womb, a place dark and undefinable; it is a "place" that Isaac will symbolically experience when he must pronounce his blessing as a "blind" person (Gen. 27:1). Indeed, the boys' relationships to both father and mother are central to their characterizations and to the polyphonic nature of the narrative itself. These interrelationships also betray a second aspect of receiving a name—that such an act is not merely about the one named but rather occurs in conjunction with a host of (inter)relationships that are brought to bear upon the one named. Thus naming is not only about one script; it is about multiple, concurrent scripts—mothers, fathers, and the scripts into which *they* have been cast.

In his treatment of the Jacob Cycle, Leslie Brisman distinguishes between two disparate authorial voices or "scripts"—Eisaac, the named author of the non-Jacob

materials in Genesis, and Jacob, the name for the belated author. As an author, Eisaac represents the "preservative character of religious tradition" and that which is "carved in the altar stones, always already inscribed."[20] Eisaac's is a "script" marked by the trauma of the *Akedah* and by the semantically ambiguous nature of his name—one who is the child of the promise but who nevertheless bears the moniker of one who may "play around." The reality that children are engendered in the loins, not in the mental "conception" or wishful thinking of parents is juxtaposed with the sacerdotal nature of his birth.[21] By contrast, the secondary nature of Jacob's birth—he is born from behind—reveals a trauma of a different order. Brisman avers,

> Jacob's characteristic anxiety is that a less desirable secondariness might prove his lot in life. Where Isaac's birth is announced by the angel, Jacob's has to be specifically entreatied of a God who may have slumbered… We can fill in the childhood traumas, however, by voicing for the child a midwife's observation… "Jacob, you are a heel, a hanger-on, an afterbirth or after-word, a secondary talent and no original!" It is against this that Jacob asserts himself as *the original*, patron of writers who achieve that mastery we call having one's own voice.[22]

The supposed anxiety of Isaac as character and Eisaac as author is that the tradition must be upheld; there is no room for playing around. Roles must be chiseled like stone, certain and fixed, yet the oracle before the boys' birth appears to undermine the tradition that the Eisaac author appears so keen to uphold; the oracle destabilizes tradition. Nevertheless, Esau's position appears certain—first—and his identity seems sure. Esau became a man יֹדֵעַ, knowing game, a man of the field. He is associated with a specific skill, a specific station or calling in life, one that gets him out of doors and entangles him in the world

[20] Leslie Brisman, *The Voice of Jacob: On the Composition of Genesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xvii.
[21] Ibid., xvi.
[22] Ibid., xvii-xviii.

outside the family tents. Esau's life involves risk, and it is one that focuses on the immediate; his is a life outside. His is also a life seemingly outside tradition—he takes wives outside his clan (Gen. 26:34-35; 36:1-5) and cedes the rights of primogeniture willingly (Gen. 25:32-34). He is a man sure of who he is and of what he wants.

In contrast to Esau, Jacob is described not as one who knows, a man of knowledge, but rather as one who sits, who continues to remain where he is. The text describes him as יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים, dwelling in tents, and אִישׁ תָּם—a sound, wholesome man, a plain man; and, when focalized through the eyes of his mother, practically "perfect" in every way.[23] While Esau knows about life outside, Jacob's knowledge is limited to what is inside. He dwells in tents where he is close to home and safe. If there is truth to be told from the outside, Jacob does not name it, because it is not in his purview. He cannot name something he does not know. Jacob is תָּם—simple, innocent, childlike, unstained by the world outside his mother's tents. His immobile life is, perhaps, marked by the Fear of Isaac, marked by Isaac's fear.[24] While the narrative depicts him this way, however, his very name and the events that unfold belie this description. Indeed, Jacob's self-description does not include the word תָּם. Instead, he describes himself as חָלָק (Gen.

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[23] Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 74.

[24]The phrase "Fear of Isaac" occurs in Genesis 31:42, פַּחַד יִצְחָק.It appears alongside the "God of my father, the God of Abraham" in Jacob's altercation with Laban. Jacob uses the phrase again in 31:53, in the context of making an oath with Laban. Scholars are divided about whether the phrase refers to an epithet for God, e.g.,Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 278; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36,* Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 497. Conversely, the phrase may refer to some fear Isaac may have felt before God or to some other fear demonstrated in the larger narrative, e.g. the *Akedah*. The interpretive payoff of this ambiguity in relation to Jacob is that it demonstrates that Jacob, as Isaac's son, would have surely been raised under the faith of Isaac, even if he may not have claimed it as his own (e.g. Gen. 27:20b); moreover, as Isaac's son, psychologically speaking, he would have also known the things Isaac "feared" and may have even appropriated them subconsciously as his own.

27:11). The *peshat* of this adjective is physical—Jacob's body is smooth when juxtaposed with Esau's hairy body. When Rebekah persuades him to masquerade as Esau, Jacob protests that Isaac will know the difference between the two sons based on the smoothness of Jacob's skin. However, the deeper connotation of the root is one who is smooth of speech—to be smooth or slippery, to fabricate. When Jacob says that he is "smooth," he reveals a deep reality about his character. While the narrator describes him as innocent, this man of his mother's tents is smooth enough to dupe his brother not once but twice (Gen. 27:36). Ironically, it is his smoothness, rather than the hair his mother covers his body with, which enables him to convince his father that his name is Esau (Gen. 27:26-29).

Despite the prevarication that dominates the scene, a quiet poignancy settles there too. The patriarch is old, wrinkled about the skin, the *Akedah* never far from narrative memory. His eyes have grown dim, dark around the edges. It is the twilight of his life, and what he appears to desire is intimacy with his son; three times he calls for him to come closer, גְּשָׁה־נָּא (Gen. 27:21, 25, 26, 27).[25] In the preceding scene, Jacob's actual desire is unnamed. The idea is Rebekah's—Jacob merely acquiesces. His protestations are not on the moral ground of forgery of identity or theft of blessing. Rather, his response to Rebekah is enigmatic: "Perhaps my father will feel me and I become in his eyes like one who mocks" (Gen. 27:12; translation mine). The word Jacob uses—כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ—is from the root תָּעַע, meaning "mocker, a person who mocks,"[26] here the rare

[25] The volitional mood of the phrase גְּשָׁה־נָּא demonstrates the desire, wish, or command of the speaker. Here, a superior, a father, is speaking to an inferior, a son, and therefore the phrase is an imperative. The threefold repetition of Isaac's request captures the intensity of his desire.
[26] F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1073.

Pilpel participle. The word is not a *homologoumena*, but it is rare in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only here and in 2 Chr. 36:16; Jer. 10:15 and 51:18. Ramban 27:12 suggested that part of this "mockery" may have included Jacob changing his voice.[27] If such was the case, however, Isaac still discerned the difference: "The voice is Jacob's voice" (Gen. 27:22b). Zornberg's analysis of כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ cuts to the heart of Jacob's self-identity and relationship to God and others: "To jest with this… is to disrupt one's access to God-in-the-world. It is to be guilty of a kind of frivolity that disassociates one from others, from continuities and larger purposes. To abandon one's individuated selfhood, to trifle with the voices of others, is ultimately to undermine not only the differences, but the connections, between people."[28] If the first reason Jacob gives is enigmatic and obscure—that he may appear as a "mocker" or "trickster," one unserious in his relationship to his father—the second reason he gives is clear and pragmatic—he may receive a curse rather than a blessing (Gen. 27:12). Rather than receiving what is intended, he fears he may receive the opposite.

Indeed, throughout the narrative, Jacob's actions are prompted by fear—his own or someone else's. It is fear, rather than desire, that motivates his decisions.[29] Jacob does not name what he wants—only what he fears. Desire—or the absence of it—is masked by

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[27] Cited in Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 149.
[28] Ibid., 150.
[29] In the scene following Jacob's deception of Isaac, he is told to flee because of his mother's fear (Gen. 27:42-45); upon his dream/vision at Bethel, Jacob is described as "shaken" (Gen. 28:17) and asks for a "safe" return to his father's house (Gen. 28:20-22). In his dealings with Laban, he notes Laban's face was not to him as it had been previously (Gen. 31:1-9), prompting him to flee after the angel of God, the God of Bethel, appears to him in a dream (Gen. 31:10-13). Just prior to the scene at the Jabbok, Jacob is described as "exceedingly afraid" over the thought of meeting his brother again (Gen. 32:8). In his prayer, Jacob describes what he fears may happen to him (Gen. 32:10-13). His subsequent actions toward Esau—sending his family ahead, sending gifts, referring to himself as Esau's "servant"—are all demonstrations of his fear (Gen. 32:14-22). Even after their reconciliation, Jacob's delay/deferral/deception about traveling behind Esau to Seir but going to Shechem instead (Gen. 33:12-18), may be an indication that he still did not trust Esau's intentions.

fear. In the scene with his mother, he vocalizes his fear and is then muted, silent while Rebekah dresses him in Esau's clothing. For Shmuel Klitsner, Jacob's actions are not only immoral—they are a telling demonstration of his dissociation from the self. Klitsner states,

> The scene begins with Jacob subsuming his own identity into that of his mother and concludes with his assuming the identity of his brother… No wonder this simple dweller of tents is capable of responding, 'I am Esau your firstborn' (Gen. 27:19). He is, in his mind, a marionette uttering the words of a ventriloquist, as he is operating in complete disassociation from self.[30]

Yair Zakovitch notes that while Jacob is referred to as Rebekah's "young son," he is in fact 40 years old (Gen. 26:34). Zakovitch states, "The image of a forty-year-old man standing, arms outstretched, waiting for his mother to dress him invites ridicule and wonder. Submissive obedience may be a tolerated excuse for a young boy who carries out his mother's morally questionable directions, but certainly not for a grown man."[31] On the level of character, it is true that Rebekah pulls the puppet strings, with her son as a silent marionette. However, an examination of the narrative itself reveals a subtler ventriloquism—the trickster oracle (Gen. 25:23-26) and its trickster God have already "hailed" Jacob to move and to speak *Jacob(ly)*. He is, to borrow a phrase from Frank, an "inveterate doer" of all things *Jacob* because he has been "dressed" for the role of trickster.[32] The ideology of the story has "hailed" him to act the way that he does. Long before arriving at the Jabbok, Jacob has been dressed in trickster clothes and given a trickster name he did not ask for.

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[30] Shmuel Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis* (Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2009), 70.
[31] Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 30-31.
[32] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 50.

When Jacob arrives at the Jabbok, he carries with him more than the family and the wealth he has acquired along the way—he also carries all the expectations the narrative has placed upon him as *Jacob*. But *Jacob* is not the only name he carries with him. The names "Esau," "Isaac," and "Rebekah," brother, father, and mother, cannot be far from his consciousness either. The names—Jacob, Esau, Isaac—are the only things Jacob cannot send across the river. Everything and everyone else, he can disencumber, but these names must remain. And once again, Jacob is אַחֲרֵי—behind. Again he delays. Again he defers. Zornberg notes that it is Jacob's perpetual lateness, his perpetual delaying/deferring, which characterizes his name. She states, "What is at issue is indicated in the expletive effect of Jacob's name, as Esau so derisively uttered it: 'Was he not then named Jacob that he might outwit me these two times?' (Gen. 27:36)… What maddens Esau is Jacob's reluctance to confront, his distrust of the face of the other. He will wait offstage, preparing his lines until they are word perfect."[33] What is to be, Zornberg says, is to be as fully preconceived in the mind as possible. Jacob "choreographs" sheep and goats, sending messages of "endless stimulation" while Jacob himself continues to bide his time, leading from behind.[34] Surely the psychological baggage he carries with him is also part of his delay.

Klitsner points to the previous scenes of deception, particularly with Isaac, as the psychological baggage Jacob carries with him. He states,

> How many times must Jacob's unconscious have played over the repeated question of Isaac? "Who are you, my son?" Yes, but really, who are you? How many times must Jacob have returned to the numerous points at which he could have retreated, to the opportunities Isaac gave him for withdrawal? How many

[33] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 232.
[34] Ibid., 233.

> times over the ensuing decades of exile from his parents did he hear the echo of his own twice repeated responses, "I am Esau, your firstborn…It is I"? Are we to assume that the rhythmic insistence of the terms *his father, my son* (*your brother*—at the end) that so sting the reader, fall on the seemingly deaf ears of Jacob without lasting impression?[35]

When Jacob finally speaks his own name, then, it is both an acknowledgement of the truth and a confession of guilt. Gordon Wenham concurs that in divulging his name, Jacob also discloses his character,[36] as Jeremiah 9:4b states: "Do not trust because every brother surely *Jacobs* and every companion walks slanderously" (translation mine). In the words of Archie Phinney, "You inveterate doer of this kind of thing!"[37] As an "inveterate doer," Jacob's mechanism for handling conflict has involved evasion and escape, as Klitsner has noted. The truth of his actions, however, and the truth of his name are one and the same—*Jacob*. Both the name and the action(s) are crooked. He has acted *Jacobly* because he is Jacob. Before arriving at the Jabbok, the truth of his name has been suppressed by saying someone else's name and reserving his own; his movement in the world has involved a kind of *not-telling*. Klitsner notes the importance of the key word "to tell" (נָגַד), which occurs as a volitional in verse 29 with the particle נָא and once as a noun, גִּיד, in verse 32, denoting the thigh/sinew. In his conflict with Laban in Genesis 31, the Hebrew root also occurs in verses 21, 22, and 27, where the narrator emphasizes Jacob's *not-telling*. At the Jabbok, Jacob is confronted with his own *not-telling* and he is, for the first time, forced *to tell*. He must tell (*hagid*) the repressed trickery of the goat (*g'di*) that posed as venison and whose skin impersonated Esau's hirsute arms. The injury of the sinew (*gid*) compensates for the *g'di*. Above all, Klitsner says, the goat of

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[35] Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, 76-77.
[36] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 296.
[37] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 50.

deception finds rehabilitation in the form of the sinew, the telling.[38] The sinew is to be associated with the telling:

> What is the evasion of falsehood that has been repressed (*nashe*) and now needs to be spoken (*hagid*)? Of course, it concerns Jacob's name (*shemekha*). Jacob had "dislocated" his true identity when he assumed the false identity of "I am Esau." By telling his real name ("I am Jacob") in order to receive the blessing of his adversary, Jacob has finally become blessed. And on the level of literary "triple-entendre," we have now arrived at a profound identification of *gid hanashe* as both "dislocated sinew" and as "telling of the forgotten [repressed]," with its phonetic echo—*hagida na shemekha*, "pray tell me your name."[39]

While Klitsner views the Jabbok scene as Jacob's realization of a suppressed identity, literary critic Erich Auerbach claims that Jacob's struggles (here, his struggle at the Jabbok) reveal individuality: "It is only in the course of an eventful life that men are differentiated into full individuality. Such individuality is palpably consummated in the Jacob story from womb to grave, perhaps for the first time in Western literature."[40] While it is true that Jacob is a round character and more developed than Abraham and Isaac, his identity is nevertheless constructed by an oracle and its god, mandating his movement in the narrative. But when Jacob finally says his name at the Jabbok, he takes ownership of his suppressed identity. Only after doing so can his subject position change. Jacob's (re)naming can only take place after he has said his name. Jacob's becoming Israel hinges on his recognition that he is Jacob, on truly *receiving the name that he has been given*.

Changing Names

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel…" (Gen. 32:28a)

Part of the promissory blessing made to each of the patriarchs includes a "great name," an indicator of geopolitical dominance. The various iterations of the blessing

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[38] Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, 139.
[39] Ibid., 141.
[40] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 18.

indicates its unilateral nature.[41] Thus the giving of the name, including the giving of the name *Israel*, occurs not through Jacob's work or duplicity but is rather provided as gift.[42] Still, like the man who bears it, this name is fraught with ambiguity throughout the nation's history. On the one hand, *Israel* serves as a moniker for communal identity, defined and maintained through a shared myth of origins, histories and cultures, and by a sense of solidarity with a specific territory.[43] On the other hand, the name is difficult to assign to a particular historical moment; indeed, the name seems both to unite and to divide those who claimed it. The particular people who associate themselves with this name are also bound to a particular god, Yahweh. This god's possessive control is not unlike a Persian overlord, at once benevolent and domineering. Narratively, this maker of great promises also demonstrates great and fearful power; the nature of his relationship to Israel remains ambiguous throughout its literary history. Nevertheless, this "great name" is significant both for the patriarch narratively and psychologically and also politically for the nation he represents.

The etymology of יִשְׂרָאֵל relates to the verb שָׂרָה, "to struggle, to fight, to persist, to exert oneself, persevere." Wenham rightly notes that יִשְׂרָאֵל means "El (God) fights," which is not exactly the same as "you have struggled with God."[44] He cautions that popular etymologies in the Bible often play on the name rather than provide precise historical etymology. The Septuagint and the Vulgate related יִשְׂרָאֵל to the verb שָׂרַר ("to

[41]The third iteration to Abraham is the only possible exception, where circumcision is required as a condition for covenant (Gen. 17:9-14).
[42] Gen. 12:2; 17:5; 28:13-15.
[43] E. T. Mullen, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).
[44] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary, 296.

rule, be strong"), possibly because the idea of "God fighting" proved incompatible with one strand of Israelite theology. יִשְׂרָאֵל has also been linked with the adjective יָשָׁר ("just, straight, right"), related to the ancient poetic name Jeshurun (Num. 23:10; Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26).[45] A survey of these references in Deuteronomy, as well as one in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 44:2), suggest an attempt to clear Jacob's bad name by disassociating the man and the nation from deceit and cheating. Zakovitch contends that Deutero-Isaiah may have alluded to the story of the patriarch's birth. In choosing to portray Jacob as *yeshurun*, "honest, upright" already in his mother's womb, the prophet demonstrates Jacob did not win his status through deceit.[46] If Deutero-Isaiah's intention is to clear Jacob's name, the prophet Micah intends to drag it through the mud again. Micah contrasts the names Yeshurun and Jacob in order to censure the Israelites: "Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Has the LORD grown impatient? Are these his deeds? Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?" (Mic. 2:7 ESV). Micah disagrees with the name change in Genesis 32:29, arguing that the people are cheaters who are undeserving of the name Israel.[47] Similarly, Isaiah 48:1 addresses the nation with the name "House of Jacob" rather than Israel, because their swearing and deceitful behavior renders "Jacob" a more suitable name than Israel.[48] Instead of the connection to Yeshurun, Albright suggested it was related to Ethiopic and Arabic stems meaning "to heal," hence, "God

[45] It should be noted, however, that the theology cited by Wenham represents just one strand of thought in the Israelite mindset regarding Yahweh. Just as the children of Israel desire a king, in part to fight their battles for them (cf. 1 Sam. 8), so too Yahweh is depicted as a warrior god. In particular, prophets such as Isaiah use terminology such as "Yahweh of Hosts," indicating a god of warfare (Isa. 1:9, 3:1, 6:3; c.f. also Zech. 1:14-17, 8:1-23; Mic. 4:4; Nah. 2:14, 3:5; among many others).
[46] Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 109.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 110.

heals."[49] Finally, R. B. Coote relates it to the noun מִשְׂרָה ("government"), "El judges," which is similar to M. Noth's early suggestion, "May God rule."[50] However the etymology of יִשְׂרָאֵל is understood, the name is significant not only for the man but also for the nation.

Stephen Geller notes that most patriarchal narratives have a national dimension of significance, recognized by the rabbinic dictum: *ma'ase 'abot simman lebanim*, "the actions recounted of the patriarchs are indicative of what would later happen to their descendants."[51] Geller's interpretation of the name change is worth quoting in full:

> The relationship is typological, almost magical. The building of altars, the acquisition of parcels of land, the journeys through the length and breadth of Canaan, all these foreshadow, even effect Israel's later occupation. There is surely no other place in Genesis where the reader is more attuned to a resonance of past and future than Genesis 32. The situation is extreme: the eponymous ancestor of the nation is about to receive the national name—no casual matter. Edom may receive its name trivially from a pot of soup (Gen. 25:30); it is a trivial people. Israel is God's firstborn (Ex. 4:22), the first nation of the earth (1 Sam. 7:23), "supreme among the nations" (Deut. 26:19; 28:1). Its naming is almost a cosmic event.[52]

The event as Geller describes it is celebratory. Israel is the nation chosen by God to be his special people; under God's wing they will take refuge. The relationship is one of protection and blessing. Nevertheless, from the perspective of social science theory, scholars such as Rainer Kessler note how vague (and certainly not "fixed") the term *Israel* is throughout biblical history. In the narrative of the exodus event, *Israel* represents the whole people from the time of their sojourn in Egypt, marking the transition from

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[49] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary, 296.
[50] Ibid., 297.
[51] Stephen A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 19.
[52] Ibid.

Genesis to Exodus. While this portrayal applies the name *Israel* from the beginning to all the tribes including Judah, the usage becomes more differentiated as the royal period begins. During this period, when the text speaks of political enemies, it distinguishes between Judah as the southern kingdom and Israel as the northern kingdom. This differentiation begins with David—he is anointed first by "the men of Judah" to be "king over the house of Judah" (2 Sam. 2:4) and later he is anointed by "all the elders of Israel" to be "king over Israel" (2 Sam. 5:3). Yet at the same time and in the same textual context *Israel* can also refer to the whole people, including Judah. When the elders of the northern tribes remind David of God's promise that he will shepherd "my people Israel" (2 Sam. 5:2), this dual meaning pervades the Deuteronomistic depiction of the royal period. The usage shifts, however, at the end of the eighth century as a result of the Assyrian exile. Does the population of the former northern kingdom, where the Assyrians settled other peoples alongside those who did not pass into exile, belong to "Israel"? Do those who remained in the former southern kingdom belong to Israel? Or is the concept to be restricted to the members of the Babylonian Diaspora? Does it become detached from the land itself if those who remained in Babylon, but not all those who live in the territory of the earlier kingdoms, are "Israel"?[53]

Kessler notes that there are three components to consider when referring to Israel. First, the consciousness of ethnic solidarity was expressed primarily in the construction of a common genealogy. Second, the relationship to the land was integral and retained even by those in the Diaspora. And third, it is impossible to speak of Israel apart from its

[53] Rainer Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

relationship to Yahweh.[54] For Kessler, the question concerns when a social history of Israel begins. The biblical narrative depicts Israel's beginnings at the Jabbok scene, with the prehistory of the ancestral families. Historically speaking, however, should Israel's beginnings be traced to the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom, or even to the middle of the royal period? The distinction between Israel's prehistory and history underlies this discussion, but for Kessler the name *Israel* on the Merneptah stele indicates that a group identified as Israel emerged on the international scene in the thirteenth century. For Kessler, then, Israel's social history must begin in the transition from the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE) to the Iron Age (1200-1000 BCE).[55] Nevertheless, tension remains between the biblical text, which utilizes the folkloristic Jabbok scene to establish its origins, and the historical realities established by social science methods and evidence from material culture.

Narratively speaking, the Jabbok text also represents tension in the relationship between the nation and its god. While briefly acknowledging the multivalent nature of Israel's association with a "nemesis of the night," Walter Brueggemann views the Name primarily as a "promise-keeper of the day," viewing the Name as beneficent, and his relationship with the nation positively. Brueggemann claims, "Something happens in this transaction that is irreversible. Israel is something new in the world. Power has shifted between God and humankind. Israel is the one who has faced God, been touched by God, prevailed, gained a blessing, and been renamed."[56] For Brueggemann, the renaming event

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 268.

is a marker of hope—it demonstrates a Name who wants good things for the nation. David Carr's treatment of the Jacob Cycle is less theological and more political than Brueggemann's but nevertheless views the tradition(s) behind it positively. In reading the "fractures" in Genesis, Carr notes the political theology in the Jacob Cycle. Pointing to precursor materials that celebrated the "trickster traditions" of Jacob and his family, the Jacob Cycle found a home in Northern resistance movements to early Davidic-Solomonic power structures. Jacob's visits to the named cultic sites at Bethel, Mahanaim, Penuel, Sukkoth, Shechem, and Ephrath transition him from national hero to national ancestor, with the Jabbok episode linking Israel to a new ethnopolitical unity.[57] Carr also notes that the proto-Genesis composition, an admitted "hypothesized step" in the formation of Genesis, represents a "crucial loosening of the tie of Israel's pre-land traditions to a specific sociocultural present" of the readers. Those who perceived themselves as landless, nameless, cursed, and vulnerable could find in the proto-Genesis composition hope for their present situation.[58]

Nevertheless, when foregrounding the Jabbok encounter, where names are given and the Name is refused, the celebratory nature of the event shifts significantly. Reading the naming and re-naming from a post-exilic perspective changes the ethos of the event from one of celebration to one of subordination. Stephen Geller rightly notes that being named is a sign of subordination.[59] Israel is named but not allowed to know the Name.[60]

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[57] David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 298.
[58] Ibid., 308.
[59] Gen. 2:19-20, 23, e.g.
[60] Stephen A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Routlede, 1996), 23.

Thus Jacob/Israel is one who will always be subsumed under אֵל, who from the vantage point of Yehud, appears as a Persian overlord with power to subordinate the weak. While it is the Persian emperor who can ultimately allow or mandate that the archetypal Jacobs return to a land promised by God (or promised by the Persian emperor) but already settled by others (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:6; 18:17-19; 22:16-18; 26:3-5),[61] the power differential between them is always clear. Indeed, if the promise of Israel's god is to bestow upon it a "great name," thus securing its place as a "great nation" on the international scene, that promise is threatened if the eponymous ancestor does not make it through the night. Here, David Clines' reminder about the "theme of the Pentateuch" is apt. If the theme of the Pentateuch is about the partial fulfillment of land, blessing, and promise, then it also implies the partial non-fulfillment of the promise or blessing of the patriarchs.[62] Therefore the promise that *Israel* will actually become *Israel* or, once it has become Israel, will remain as such, is always already punctuated with a question mark.[63] While the name Israel carries political valence, the name is not only about the nation. First and foremost, Israel is a particular man hailed in a particular narrative.

Scholars who have examined the name change from the perspective of the man rather than the nation have done so in a moralizing way. Jacob is a crooked character, and

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[61] Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2005).

[62] David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). In the epilogue to the second edition of his book, Clines rightly expresses reservation over assigning a "theme" to the Pentateuch at all.

[63] Indeed, at the end of the Pentateuch, its hero looks out over the land, surveying it just before he dies (Deut. 32:48-52; 34). Upon entering the land, the books of Joshua and Judges represent threats both external and internal to the achievement of their goal (Josh. 13:1; Judg. 1, e.g.). At the end of the Deuteronomistic History, when land and name have been destroyed, the final king of Judah, King Jehoiachin, sits at the table of the Babylonian ruler, Evil-merodach (2 Kg. 25:29). Even as a ray of hope is predicted in the post-exilic period, the weeping writer of Lamentations depicts a very different scene, one where rape, brutality, and hunger affect every man, woman, and child (Lam. 1-5).

the name change is romanticized by exegetes as representing a moral change in his character. Fokkelman even likens the name change to baptism, calling it "the most important baptism of the Old Testament." He claims that "the evil and long-awkward name of Jacob is thrown away and exchanged for a beautiful, theophorous name."[64] Viewing the name *Jacob* pejoratively, he maintains that the change to יִשְׂרָאֵל was necessary to curb the pride and deceit of Jacob. Fokkelman avers, "That obstinate, proud, grim resistance to God is now what he displays on the banks of the Jabbok—and there it is also… knocked down. Literally…He adorns him with the name 'Israel' on the ground of (*kī!*) his recognition of Jacob's unique nature. The name 'God fights' may mean: God fights with you, because he is forced by your stubbornness and pride."[65] Fokkelman's moral exegesis of Jacob's character does not stand alone in scholars' treatment of this passage. Similarly, Henry Knight states: "The story suggests a change. The old Jacob—the one who was the trickster, the deceiver, the supplanter—might have stolen the chance to name the other, just like he once usurped his brother's birthright…In this episode, however, Jacob respected the limit. Jacob was satisfied not having the name of the other…"[66] Knight maintains that the "trickster" Jacob was satisfied simply to wrestle with his past, his trickery, his pain, deception, and shame.[67] In the midst of his moralizing exegesis, however, nowhere does Knight remind his readers that Jacob's satisfaction in

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[64] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 215-216.
[65] Ibid., 216-217.
[66] Henry F. Knight, "Meeting Jacob at the Jabbok: Wrestling with a Text: A Midrash on Genesis 32:22-32," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29, No. 3-4 (1992): 453.
[67] Ibid.

not knowing the Name was due not to his willingness to "respect the limit," but rather to the Name's refusal to be named.

While it is tempting to engage in theological romanticism regarding the name change, it must be noted that even after being (re)named, Israel also remains Jacob. The patriarch is referred to by both names throughout the remainder of the narrative and is even (re)named once more in Genesis 35:9-15. The presence of this doublet either acknowledges that the first name change at the Jabbok was insufficient, or that, quite simply, a different editorial tradition underlay each text. Either way, both this text and the remaining Jacob narrative indicate that the patriarch maintained this dual identity throughout his life. Indeed, that the old name is kept, saved, is significant not only psychologically, but also in terms of narrative memory. Klitsner connects Bethel, previously named Luz (cf. Judg. 1:22), to Jacob's double (re)naming in Genesis 35:9-15, asserting that the preservation of the prior name and identity are indispensable for further evolution of character.[68] Even in renaming him Israel, never must his old name be forgotten. Both names will be preserved, for they describe both the man and the nation. Vestiges of both are retained in Israel's narrative memory. Both contain the truth of Israel's story. And both must be named. Even in the (re)naming, however, it must not be forgotten that the patriarch is still interpellated. He speaks the name given to him by the story, only to be (re)interpellated once more. He has now been "hailed" as one who wrestles and prevails. He is unable to refuse the name given to him through an act of will

[68] Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, 128.

or prevarication of speech. For Jacques Derrida, the giving of a name can create a potentially binding contract between the one giving the name and the one named:

> One can have doubts about it from the moment when the name not only is nothing, in any case is not the "thing" that it names, not the "nameable" or the renowned, but also risks to bind, to enslave or to engage the other, to link the called, to call him/her to respond even before any decision or any deliberation, even before any freedom. An assigned passion, a prescribed alliance as much as a promise.[69]

When the Name (re)names Jacob, the two are linked in a hierarchical relationship where the named is subordinated to the Name. Like his father Isaac, Israel will live the rest of his life with the memory of his own *Akedah*, here a figurative binding. He will be bound not only by the old name, but by the new name as well; and bound to the one who has named him and to his origins. The same Name who told him to return to his father's house (Gen. 31:3), will also order his steps the rest of his days (e.g., Gen. 35:1-15). And even as the Name is present to him, Jacob later recalls that his days have been "few and evil" (Gen. 47:9). Moreover, this binding relationship between the two did not assuage the disappointment upon (re)turning home where interfamily strife and hardship marked his final days. Israel has been nominally and geographically interpellated by the Name—told who he is to be and where he is to go. His wrestling partner, however, escapes interpellation by refusing to be pinned down to one name and to one place.

Saving Names

"Why do you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:29)

When considering the Name encountered at the Jabbok, interpretive resistance occurs both textually and theologically. Textually speaking, the polynomial nature of the

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[69] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 84.

Name, called both אֱלֹהִים and אִישׁ, as well as אֵל in the Peniel label, complicates making statements of any certainty. Theologically, the narrator's construction of the character of the Name demonstrates deep ambivalence about unraveling the mystery of the divine. Something of the dangerous mystery must be kept. Something of the Name must be saved. Through a question that can be interpreted dismissively as a means of misdirection, or derisively as a means of stating the obvious, the Name remains enshrouded in mystery. The Name remains anonymous. He is a stranger to Jacob, unclear in his intentions both at the moment of battle and of blessing. The Name is thus Unnamable.

In his study of absent characters in fiction, Thomas Docherty surveys theories of naming in literature. The essentialist approach to characterization views the proper name as a summation of the character's essence; the name is believed to "contain" the entire significance or existence of a character in a self-integrated whole.[70] Modernist and postmodernist literature, however, problematizes the totalizing nature of this approach. Another issue is the existence of the anonymous character, a character without a name. Reinhartz notes that if a proper name is meant to convey the essence of a character and to construct identity, then its absence implies the converse—the "effacement, absence, veiling, or suppression of identity."[71] In the absence of a proper name, the role a character plays is the next best marker of identity, yet Reinhartz acknowledges that role does not in of itself constitute personal identity. While the role of an anonymous character may be known, knowledge of vocational identity does not imply intimate understanding of who

[70] Thomas Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 48.
[71] Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?: Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative*, 9.

that character is. Reinhartz adds: "Even the most vivid of our anonymous company are nonetheless blurred around the edges, as if the outlines of their identities were traced by dotted lines rather than encased in a solid frame."[72] For a character who both refuses to self-identify or confirm what Jacob may suspect, and whose face is also enshrouded in darkness, the lines drawn around him are indeed dotted.

Drawing on the writings of Samuel Beckett, Docherty raises the question of how to describe a character that cannot be pinned down to one name. Following Beckett, Docherty maintains that there are characters that are simply unnamable. These characters are those who make themselves anew at every moment, thus transcending all past or anterior selves[73] The unnamable cannot be known. The unnamable is therefore anonymous. The writings of Docherty and Reinhartz raise questions about the Name Jacob encounters at the Jabbok. Is the Name the Unnamable? Is the Name a kind of apophasis, an absence best (un)known through negation, a trace of (some/no)thing? Or is the Name a kind of hyper-presence, assuming the weight of every name Jacob has encountered thus far, a kind of "name above every name"? (cf. Phil. 2:9) Moreover, can it be said that the Name transcends even itself by (re)making itself, much like Beckett's unnamable character? If so, what is the purpose of this (re)making and (re)naming? Outside of the Jabbok encounter, Jacob's experiences with the numinous may prove a useful point of departure to consider these questions.

At the Jabbok specifically, the Name is polynomial. The narrator refers to Jacob's opponent as אִישׁ (Gen. 32:24) while Jacob believes he has seen אֱלֹהִים (Gen.

[72] Ibid., 12.
[73] Ibid., 68.

32:30). The Name also tells Jacob his name has been changed because he has striven with אֱלֹהִים and with אֲנָשִׁים and prevailed (Gen. 32:28), though it is unclear whether the Name refers to the present moment or previously in Jacob's struggles prior to the Jabbok encounter. Prior to the Jabbok, Jacob's experiences also represent the ambiguity and multiplicity inherent in divine manifestation. At Bethel, Jacob encounters a multitude of names, all of which appear to carry traces of divinity: מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 28:12); יְהוָה (Gen. 28:13a, 16, 21); יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וֵאלֹהֵי יִצְחָק (Gen. 28:13b); and אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 28:20, 21). The names at Bethel are sometimes self-referencing, at other times named either by the narrator or by Jacob. Here, it is unclear whether the biblical author is simply unsure how to reference traces of divinity; if multiple sources and therefore different names underlay the Bethel text; or if these distinctions are intended to represent Israel's consciousness of gradations of divinity within the heavenly realm.[74] Whatever the solution, the confusion remains. The polynomialism inherent in the Bethel text ambiguous any clear statements about who—or what—Jacob encounters. Jacob and his family's encounters outside Bethel and Peniel also demonstrate the textual resistance inherent in assigning just one name to the divine. When opening Leah's barren womb, the Name is יְהוָה (Gen. 29:31-35). When competing with her sister to bear more children than Rachel, Leah acknowledges the Name as אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 30:17-24). In the conflict with Laban, Jacob receives a word from יְהוָה (Gen. 31:3) yet also encounters in a dream מַלְאַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים (Gen. 31:11), who later declares himself to be הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל (Gen. 31:13). And at

[74]Evidence for this can be found in diverse places in the Hebrew Bible, for example in the vestiges of the first Creation story, where pre-exilic ideas about a heavenly council nevertheless found their way into post-exilic texts in the Primeval History: Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7. Vestiges of the heavenly council also appear in the book of Job: Job 1:6; 2:1.

Mahanaim, Jacob is met again by מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 32:1). In addition, Ronald Hendel provides a trenchant reminder that ambiguity exists within the name אֱלֹהִים itself—it can be translated as "God" or "gods." For Hendel, this lack of clarity at the Jabbok may represent "cultural amnesia" which involves the forgetting of an older, non-Yahwistic deity. Hendel asks, "Striven with God or with gods? For the nation of Israel to exist, the god who strives with Jacob must be compatible with the Israelite framework of memory. Hence, if not Yahweh, it must be Yahweh's angel, and not a night demon or a river god or any other non-Yahwistic deity."[75] Indeed, in the imagination of the pre-exilic prophet Hosea, Jacob wrestles with the Yahwistic "angel" (cf. Hos. 12:4).

Reinhartz notes that "character confusion in the heavenly realm" raises questions about the boundaries among the divine beings themselves; between divine and human beings; and between divine beings and God himself.[76] She notes that divine beings—angels—can function as personal guides, as agents of God, instruments of destruction, warriors, or harbingers of divine presence.[77] Moreover, the boundaries between angels and God are sometimes indistinct; while an angel may act in God's name, first and third person forms of address are interchangeable; and God frequently appears alongside an angel or is identical to it.[78] Historical critical scholars have attributed these nominal inconsistencies to source criticism—authorship and redaction over time, as Reinhartz acknowledges: "These areas of indeterminacy might be attributed to the whim—or perhaps the carelessness—of the narrator or to the vagaries of the redactional process.

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[75] Ronald Hendel, ed. *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44.
[76] Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name? Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative*, 155.
[77] Ibid., 156-160.
[78] Ibid., 161-162.

But a significant number of angel stories play on these confusions. Such stories frequently portray the difficulties faced by a human character in identifying correctly his or her angelic adversary or conversation partner."[79] Historical critical methodology is intended to unravel the mystery by explaining these inconsistencies in a diachronic way. However, Gerhard von Rad's early intuition that the looseness of the Jabbok text yielded an inner spaciousness may also apply to discussion of the Name.[80] Rather than viewing the polynomial nature of the Name as a problem to be solved, allowing the Name space in which to breathe may demonstrate that his ambiguity is actually a gift. The anonymity and therefore unnamability of the Name creates space for transcendence and elusiveness, markers of divine encounter.

Outside Jacob's encounters in Genesis, the Name exhibits similar reticence to disclose too much of his identity. Judges 13:17-23 is an intertext to the Jabbok encounter where the Name is also withheld:

> And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground. The angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these" (ESV).

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[79] Ibid., 162.
[80] von Rad, *Genesis—A Commentary*, 324.

The text in Judges plays on similar themes in the Jabbok encounter—the request and refusal of the Name; fear of divine aggressiveness; and seeing אֱלֹהִים. Here as with Jacob's various encounters, the Name is polynomial—named אֱלֹהִים by Manoah but referred to as מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה and also יְהוָה by the narrator. Here, however, the Name offers an answer to Manoah's question—he cannot know the Name because it is הוּא־פֶלְאִי, "too wonderful." The term פֶּלְיָא also carries the connotation of incomprehensibility, that which cannot be comprehended by the human mind, or that which is outside the realm of understanding. Here the refusal of the Name involves its ineffability; Manoah and his wife simply would not have comprehended it. Elsewhere, even when the Name *is revealed*, a measure of concealment, elusiveness, ineffability is retained, as Samuel Terrien affirms: "The God of biblical faith, even in the midst of a theophany, is at once *Deus revelatus atque absconditus*. He is known as unknown."[81] The elusive—or "too wonderful"—nature of the name suggests a spilling over, an (absent) excess which, ironically, leads to the abandonment of language. For Derrida, it is the Name of God which is the "bottomless collapse," an "endless desertification" of language itself.[82] Jacob's encounter with the Name, like Manoah's, demonstrates the fragility of language to describe it. Only a bottomless collapse remains, a kenosis of discourse, where the Name exceeds the capabilities of language to contain it. The Jabbok text conveys the transcendence of the Name, as one unpronounceable—G-d—but which nevertheless has paginated its presence. Independent of other signifiers, the Name is Derrida's

[81] Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 119.
[82] Derrida, *On the Name*, 58.

Transcendental Signified, who has left behind traces of presence, but only traces. The presence or trace left behind is, in Terrien's words, an elusive one, one capable of naming but not of being named. It is this (absent) excess, so maddening, so elusive, which is the gift, or in the words of the text, the blessing, the Name inscribes on the page.

Also outside Jacob's experiences in Genesis stands the tradition of the ineffability of the Name in Moses's encounter at the burning bush (Ex. 3). As is frequently the case in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the Priestly tradition concerned with holiness and categorization, theophany is accompanied by some kind of spatial limitation (cf. Ex. 19:7-23; 20:15-18; 33:17-23; 34:29-35, to name a few).[83] At the burning bush, Yahweh limits full disclosure of personhood through a common Priestly requirement—the holy must not "mix" with the common: "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5 TNK). Moreover, the revelation of the divine Name may also function in a limiting or self-distancing manner. At the very least, its meaning is highly ambiguous. In his discussion of the interpretation of Yahweh, K. van der Toorn notes that the name Yahweh may be read as either a promise ("I will certainly be here") or an allusion to the incomparability of Yahweh ("I am who I am," i.e. without peer). Van der Toorn refers to the Israelite explanation as a "piece of theology rather than a reliable etymology."[84] Further complicating the scene—it is the messenger/angel of the LORD who appears at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2); Yahweh

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[83] In a more general sense, prophets, priests, and kings also act as representatives between God and the people. They are, in their bodies, the spatial limitations prescribed by a God whose holiness requires distance. Certainly, the requirements for holiness on the part of the divine are not the only reasons given within the biblical corpus for this distance. Most notably, the people's request for a king is viewed by God as a kind of divine rejection (1 Sam. 8:4-8).

[84] Karel van der Toorn, "Yahweh," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 1711-1730.

who sees that Moses turns aside to look (Ex. 3:4a); and God who calls to him out of the bush (Ex. 3:4b), and who identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6, 15, 16). Later, the deity tells Moses that he had not made himself known to the patriarchs by the name Yahweh (Ex. 6:2-3), contradicting the revelation to Abram in Genesis 15:7. Scholars such as Morgenstern have pointed to this complexity, offering the expected source critical response.[85] Van der Toorn also provides additional historical possibilities for the etymology and meaning of the name. Yahweh may be an abbreviated name of a defied ancestor: YHWH-El ("May El be present"), linked to Mari texts: "Yahwi-Illu," or the reconstructed cult name El YHWH ("El who reveals himself"). He links HWH to a storm god and maintains that El has a solar appearance; theophany texts present Yahweh as a solar deity. Moreover, official gods such as YHWH of Zion (Ps. 99:2) and of Hebron (2 Sam. 15:7) point to a situation of poly-Yahwism.[86]

Whatever the historical background for the divine name, narratively speaking, Yahweh's self-revelation is a purposeful summons linked to a specific call on Moses's life—to lead the people out of enslavement. Moses becomes not merely an intermediary; he is also an embodied reminder of the patriarchs (including Jacob) they had long forgotten after 400 years in Egypt. Moses links the people back to their past, to the here-and-now of their current situation, and into hope of future liberation. Appropriately, Wout Jac. Van Bekkum provides a reminder that the derivation of the divine name, from

[85] G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975), 46-47.
[86] van der Toorn, "Yahweh," 1711-1730.

היה is in the imperfect, which can be translated as a present, past or future tense.[87] In *Exodus Rabba* the tense of the verb appears linked to the atemporality of the divine. Rabbi Isaac said: "God said to Moses: Tell them that I am now what I always was and always will be; for this reason the word אהיה is written three times."[88] Similarly, Rabbinic explanation implies God's help and involvement during times of exile and oppression (Ex. 3:7), as Van Bekkum affirms: "'I am,' therefore means: I am in virtue of my deeds; it is I who am with my creatures in their hour of trouble and need, it is I who am with my people in times of suffering."[89] In surveying rabbinic interpretations of the divine name, van Bekkum adds:

> This and similar expositions seem to imply that the divine name in the form of the tetragrammaton possesses some kind of a protective value for both community and individual, an aspect which…became essential in Jewish magic and mystic lore, strengthened by the fact that the tetragrammaton in the sense of "being," either "being there/existing" or "being with," establishes the revelation of a name, or rather a title without any additional relevant information with regard to the divine essence. The divine name "as it is" asserts the transcendental and hidden nature of this deity…[90]

It is the hidden nature of this deity—an ineffable Name— שם המפורש—which is a pervasive theme in rabbinic interpretation as well as Kabbalistic thought. In classical Kabbalah God is without name: אין סוף.[91] As the Infinite, God is understood as "He is in Himself," correlating to Abraham Abulafia's view that the actual name of God does not occur in the Pentateuch; the tetragrammaton and the expression *Ehyeh* ("I am," "I will

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[87] Wout Jac. van Bekkum, "What's in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition," in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed. Geurt H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 7.
[88] *Midrash Exodus Rabba* 3.2, ed. Avigdor Shinan (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1984), 119-121.
[89] van Bekkum, "What's in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition," 8.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 14.

be") are only allusions to or reflections of the real or true name of God.[92] Indeed, Yahweh's "self-revelation" at the burning bush may well be interpreted as occlusion rather than revelation—a kind of divine "mind your own business."

Not unlike the desire of interpreters to unravel the mystery of the Name, Jacob's question at the Jabbok is simultaneously a curious one and also perfectly reasonable. Given the severity of the fight, it seems Jacob might have been better served speaking in exclamations rather than interrogations—please do not harm me!—rather than inquiring about the Name. If the Name was in fact knowable, what would be the benefit in knowing it? Scholars have tended to respond to this question either with cynicism or romanticism. Knight and Brueggemann are paradigmatic of these responses. For Knight, Jacob's question refers to the crookedness of his nature: "Perhaps Jacob, then, inquired more deeply about his own motives in the encounter: Why did he want to know the intruder's name? Did he want to control the *ish*, which he would be able to do if he learned the outcome? Did he want to master the encounter and the one whom he encountered?"[93] Knight's comments are not unreasonable in light of Jacob's character; moreover, knowledge of the Name might have in fact led to the uncertainty of life rather than the certainty of death. Perhaps in knowing the Name, Jacob could have in fact killed the Name. For Derrida, to pin down the name exactly is to limit, to kill, to limit to a signifying trace. To assign a name is for the arrow to hit and not cause a limp but to kill completely. To withhold the name is indeed to save the Name.

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[92] Ibid.
[93]Knight, "Meeting Jacob at the Jabbok: Wrestling with a Text: A Midrash on Genesis 32:22-32," 454.

On the other side of the interpretive spectrum, Brueggemann suggests that Jacob's desire to know his opponent's name expresses desire for intimacy: "[Jacob] reverses roles and dares to ask the name of the stranger, even as he has been asked his name (v. 27). He wants to know God's name, the mystery of heaven and earth. Like the couple in the garden (Gen. 2-3), Jacob/Israel wants to overcome all the distance."[94] The stranger stops short of giving what Brueggemann calls the "ultimate gift"—the revelation of his name.[95] God remains God, Brueggemann says, his "hiddenness intact."[96] Even in the Garden, which Brueggemann references, יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים views the couple's knowledge of "good and evil" (Gen. 3:22-23) as dangerous.[97] Distance between that which is divine and that which is human must be maintained, as numerous encounters throughout the Hebrew Bible imply.[98] In Derridian terms, however, intimacy with the Name is achieved not through knowledge but through abandonment of knowledge, not in knowing the Name but in saving it. Derrida states, "It is necessary to leave all, to leave every 'something' through love of God, and no doubt to leave God himself, to abandon him, that is, at once to leave him and (but) let him (be beyond being-something). Save his name [*sauf son nom*]—which must be kept silent there where it itself goes [*il se rend lui-même*] to arrive there, that is, to arrive at its own effacement."[99] Real intimacy, or real desire, is awakened in letting go of God, in releasing one's grip, which is what the Name implores at the Jabbok: "Let me go, for the day has broken" (Gen. 32:26a; cf. Jn. 20:17).[100] What is

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[94] Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 269.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] The Hebrew phrase טוֹב וָרָע is a merism which refers to knowledge of "everything."
[98] E.g., Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Ex. 3:5; 19:21-25; 33:20-23.
[99]Derrida, *On the Name*, 78-79.
[100] While I am referring to the phrase philosophically, historical critical scholars viewed the request as indicative of an ancient superstition that said night spirits/demons had to be released before dawn or risk losing their magical power, e.g. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997),

achieved in this letting go, this release, is *la petite mort*, a penetrating but necessarily fleeting intimacy. For Derrida, the desert is the other name, if not the proper place, of desire.[101] In the desert, desire necessarily leads to desertification. There, desire augments in the midst of absence; desire and desiccation cohere in the desert where the Name refuses to be named. Knight's and Brueggemann's respective interpretations of Jacob's motivations notwithstanding, another possibility (impossibility really) exists for the Name's refusal to be named—namely, that Jacob already knows the answer to the question he has posed.

Fokkelman contends that the assailant's refusal to disclose the Name does not mask his identity but rather reveals it. Fokkelman states, "The 'man' parries Jacob's question with a counter-question, 'Why do you ask my name?' He then refuses to reveal his identity straight away; but at the same time his refusal points to his secret and draws attention to it!...But Jacob, do you not ask for the sake of asking? (Think and you will know the answer!)"[102] The answer to Jacob's question, then, is like his assailant hidden in plain sight. The secret is that Jacob already knows the secret. The many names that Jacob has encountered are all (un)contained in the Name (un)revealed at the Jabbok. Examining the scene through the lens of narrative theory and cognitive science momentarily shifts the discussion from theological uncertainty regarding the Name. As Catherine Emmott has shown, a character's cognitive status may be linked to how much or how little of his/her name the narrative reveals. Characters who are at the forefront of narrative

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347ff; Hermann Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987), 84; and Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 318ff.

[101] Derrida, *On the Name*, 79.

[102] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 217.

attention may be identified merely by a pronoun. Conversely, a character who is less cognitively present may require a name or some other full noun phrase to introduce him/her.[103] Application of Emmott's theory of cognitive status would then render full disclosure of the name of the Name unnecessary. As a character, the Name is at the forefront not only of the reader's imagination, but is also focalized by the other primary character, Jacob. The use of a pronoun in Genesis 32:26a, 27a, and the withholding of the Name generally at the Jabbok, may suggest a character of such prominence that no further description is necessary. A lack of naming may, narratively speaking, serve to reinforce the centrality of a character.[104] Theologically, Hebrew thought views the character of G-d as certainly the most central of all. As the previous (brief) discussion on Exodus 3 has shown, the ineffability of G-d is woven throughout Jewish theology, from rabbinic traditions to Kabbalah.

What matters most, then, is that the secret is not shared, but kept. Or, in Derrida's terminology, saved:

> They name God, speak of him, speak *him,* speak *to him, let him speak in them*, let themselves be carried by him, make (themselves) a reference to just what the name supposes to name beyond itself, the nameable beyond the name, the unnamable namable. As if it was necessary both to save the name and to save everything except the name, s*ave the name* [*sauf le nom*], as if it was necessary to lose the name in order to save what bears the name, or that toward which one goes through the name. But to lose the name is not to attack it, to destroy it, or found it. On the contrary, to lose the name is quite simply to respect it: as name.[105]

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[103] Catherine Emmott, "Constructing Social Space: Sociocognitive Factors in the Interpretation of Character Relations," in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences,* ed. David Herman, (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2003), 297.
[104] Ibid., 299.
[105] Derrida, *On the Name*, 58.

What the Name calls for is a kind of *Gelassenheit*, a letting go, even a forgetting. In releasing the Name before dawn, the Name is allowed to retain its mystery, (un)make itself anew once more. For the Name, there is not nominal reciprocity at the Jabbok, a mutual revelation of the "I AM," as there is with Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6), though here too one could read similarities rather than contrast: "I AM who I AM" may also imply occlusion rather than revelation, as the previous discussion has asserted.

But at the Jabbok, The Name is not I AM. The Name is rather the Unname, the Unnamable, the Name which cannot be spoken, G-d, the I AM (NOT).The Name is the (un)made, constantly (un)making and elusive, never enclosed by a frame but traced, and leaving traces, like the dotted lines described by Reinhartz. The Name is the Apophatic, an absence best (un)known through negation, a trace of (no)thing, a container for every name but (un)contained by (no) name. Derrida observes,

> In the most apophatic moment, when one says: 'God is not,' 'God is neither this nor that, neither that nor its contrary'… It is a matter of holding the promise of saying the truth at any price, of testifying, of rendering oneself to the truth of the name, to the thing itself such as it must be named by the name, that is, *beyond the name*.[106]

It is this elusiveness, this Unname, which the Name inscribes on the page as gift, not a signature but a *countersignature*, a *post-scriptum*. It is a word after a word that is really no word at all. And so in the absence of the Name, in the absence of a word, Jacob must name something else, not P/person but place.

For both Bruce Vawter and Kevin Walton, Jacob's inability to know the Name results in another kind of naming. Unable to name a P/person, Jacob names a place,

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[106] Ibid., 68.

Peniel. Vawter asserts, "Jacob is brought to the realization that the God whom he has *seen face to face* is not to be named, and so he names Peniel instead" (italics original).[107] Similarly, Walton maintains: "If Jacob is unable to give a name to God, he is at least able to name the place where he has experienced God."[108] For Jacob, this results in going where he cannot see—the darkness of the Jabbok—to hear what he cannot hear—the Name, as Silesius says: "Go there where you cannot; see where you do not see; Hear where nothing rings or sounds, so are you where God speaks" (I:199).[109] Here the proper name El is attached to a place where El's presence is felt. As Ramsey notes, "If the act of naming signifies anything about the name-giver, it is the quality of discernment. When Jacob, e.g., gives the name to Bethel (Gen. 28:19; 35:7; 35:15) or Peniel (Gen. 32:31) or the altar of El-Elohe-Israel (Gen. 33:20), he exhibits awareness of God's activity and presence…"[110] Jacob acknowledges that at Peniel, presence can be felt and some outline of a face can be traced. It is to that Face—the inside and outside of the פָּנִים—that I now turn.

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[107] Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 351.
[108] Kevin Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown: The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative* (Cumbria, CA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 87.
[109] Derrida, *On the Name*, 44.
[110] Ramsey, "Is the Giving of a Name an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" 34.

The Face

"The written page is no mirror. Writing means confronting an unknown face."[1]

"For if we cannot see His face it is because, of all the faces we scrutinize, His is the one that cannot be shown or contemplated."[2]

Pre-Facing Peniel

When Jacob declares that he has looked upon the face of Elohim and lived (Gen. 32:31), he names the place Peniel, Face of God. Upon meeting his brother the following day, Jacob declares that to see Esau's face is like seeing the face of Elohim (Gen. 33:10). This climactic scene and its post-face is just one in the long stretch of patriarchal narrative (Gen. 25-50) where the Hebrew writer(s) subtly employs the imagery of face. The Jabbok encounter is not a stand-alone episode but is pre(face)d by Jacob's interactions with all the faces in the narrative. Throughout the Jacob Cycle, faces are concealed, revealed, confused, and even fused. Behind the story-world also exists the cultural and theological anxiety surrounding facing God; as well as the difficulty in drawing a face on, or characterizing, the divine character, who appears not as one face but as many faces. Like the פָּנִים itself, which only appears as a dual, so too the faces of these characters are multi(face)ted. At the Jabbok, Jacob's vision of Elohim's face compels him, in Levinasian terms, to the Face—and to the faces—who bid him not to kill.[3] Moreover, it is not until Jacob glimpses the mysterious man at the liminal, nocturnal space of the Jabbok River, itself visited by midrashic, faceless specters, that Jacob must

[1] Edmond Jábes, *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 2.
[2] Ibid., 40.
[3] Here, the capitalized Face—and also the Face of all Faces—will refer to Jacob's wrestling partner.

face his own identity. He is *Jacob*—a trickster, one who has manipulated other characters in the story for his own benefit. It is at the Jabbok where Jacob must respond to his own right to be in the face of every other face he has encountered, or in Bakhtinian terms, to recognize how others have "authored" him and how he has "authored" others.[4]

In this chapter, I offer both an exegesis of the story and an ethical engagement with its characters. I utilize a philosophical/ethical/psychological framework that exposes Jacob's many failures as a moral agent. The application of this framework allows questions and interpretive possibilities to emerge that move beyond the exegetical to the ethical and existential. My analysis also reveals Jacob's opponent as a character who is, like the patriarch he wrestles, a trickster—one who is vindictive and aggressive, as the chapter on The Wound implies—and who also has difficulty (or refuses to say) who he is and what he wants, as the chapter on The Name has attested. This exploration of the story's poetics naturally leads to questions of rhetoric—how does such a critical self-portrait of the patriarch and, at times, his opponent, serve a community of storytellers? Who is telling this story and why are they telling it? The socio-political implications—the explanations behind these portraits of Jacob and Elohim/ish—will receive further attention in the final chapter, The Crossing, which deals with the realities of a community struggling with its identity, its relationship/ownership of the land, its relationship to a God who wrestles in the dirt and who also engages in "dirty" wrestling, and its future after exile.

Putting a Face on God

[4] M.M Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

Of the exegetical elements in this passage, the identity of Jacob's assailant has received the most attention by scholars who attempt to understand it. In Levinasian terms, just who is the Face that summons a response? As Danna Fewell and David M. Gunn attest, drawing a characterization of God in the Hebrew Bible is a notoriously arduous task:

> Coming to some understanding of the character of YHWH is one of the great challenges of the Hebrew Bible, not only of its narrative. Of course, we can make it simpler by treating component stories as wholly discrete so that we see not one character but many. On the other hand, as we have seen, the canonical shape of the Bible may incline us to keep looking for a single character, even if complex, mysterious, enigmatic, and quite often frustratingly elusive.[5]

In addition, Stuart Lasine offers several cautions when attempting to characterize the divine character.[6] If the injunction of Yahweh to Moses is true—"you cannot see my face, for man may not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20 TNK)—then posing such a question about the face Jacob "sees" appears fruitless. Yet the corpus of the Hebrew Bible belies this injunction. Ian Wilson has noted that the phrase "face to face" occurs five times in the Hebrew Bible, and each is related to a specific encounter between God and one or more humans—Jacob (Gen. 32:31), Moses (Ex. 33:11 and Deut. 34:10), Gideon (Jud. 6:22), and the people of Israel (Ezek. 20:35).[7] Moreover, Hagar's vision of El/the angel

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[5] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible,* Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89.

[6] In Stuart Lasine, *Weighing Hearts: Character, Judgment, and the Ethics of Reading the Bible* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), he offers the following cautions throughout the book: What if what narratologists call the coherence or incoherence of a character is actually due to redaction? How much universality can be claimed regarding the thoughts, attitudes, and motivations of biblical characters in relation to the (post)modern (hu)man? What, for the ancient Hebrews, constituted a "self," and how much of an inner life (*homo clausus*) did these individuals possess? Should characters' speech be taken at face value, or their motivation(s) be considered? If so, how much can be claimed about motivation when very few characters in the Hebrew Bible (including God) have a thought life? What should be the role of psychology in characterization? Finally, how are readers implicated in the "weighing" of biblical hearts? Lasine raises valid questions that must serve as a caution in the characterization process.

[7] Ian Douglas Wilson, "Face to Face with God: Another Look," *Restoration Quarterly* 51, No 2. (2009): 107.

of the LORD—and his vision of her (Gen. 16:7-13)—is also an intertext to the face to face encounter at the Jabbok that is dealt with in the analysis that follows. Mark Wessner has uncovered four elements involved in each encounter. First, the *panim el panim* encounters are divinely initiated. Second, each encounter involves profound intimacy between God and the human. Third, these encounters are born out of intentional solitude on the part of the human. And fourth, they provide supernatural verification for the individual involved.[8] While Wilson draws upon Wessner's study, he maintains that the result of such encounters is not limited to intimacy between the human and the Divine. Rather, within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible, the divine face appears to play two contrasting roles—one who blesses and one who instills fear in the seer.

In the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24-26), the divine face is portrayed as a source of blessing and life and thus associated with "favor" (חָנַן) and "peace" (שָׁלוֹם). After meeting Esau following the Peniel encounter, Jacob affirms that seeing his brother's face is like seeing the face of God (Gen. 33:10). Here Jacob's family reunion entails the blessing of a fresh start. Thus Jacob's *panim el panim* encounter is about blessing and revivification.[9] Mesopotamian literature parallels the positive encounters of the face to face in the Hebrew Bible,[10] yet in ancient Israel, statements made by Jacob (Gen. 32:31), Gideon (Jud. 6:22), Manoah (Jud. 13:22), and Hagar (Gen. 16:13) seem to indicate that

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[8] Mark D. Wessner, "Toward a Literary Understanding of 'Face to Face' in Genesis 32:23-32," *Restoration Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2000): 170.
[9] Wilson, "Face to Face with God: Another Look," 107. Royal inscriptions of the Old-Babylonian king Samsuiluna (1749-1712 BCE) states that the gods Zababa and Ishtar raised their "faces of life" toward the king, empowering him to build the wall of Kish. Later inscriptions of Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) and Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE) also speak of shining, empowering divine faces.
[10] Ibid.

the Israelites saw in the divine face a source of death and not blessing.[11] In the encounter at the Face of God, however, Jacob faces the Face of God and glimpses *both* death and blessing. Throughout the Jacob Cycle, Jacob's treatment of the faces all too easily forgotten—the women and children—appears analogous. Like Elohim, he too may impart blessing, or death.

Facial Inter-texts

As W. Lee Humphreys has noted, as many times in the story-world of Genesis that God has engaged humans directly, the encounter at the Face of God is the first encounter where it is clearly stated in terms of seeing. He does note, however, that such may have also been the case with Hagar.[12] Therefore a brief engagement with Hagar—and with the one she is said to have seen—will prove illuminative for the encounter at the Face of God.

After Hagar runs away from Sarai, the narrator states that Hagar is found by an angel of the LORD (Gen. 16:7), yet Hagar later exclaims that she has seen El (Gen. 16:13).[13] Hagar's encounter with this divine character demonstrates, once again, his multi(face)ted portrayal in the Hebrew Bible. On the one hand, the angel of the LORD is the only character who actually speaks to Hagar, recognizing her as a speaking, feeling subject. To both Abram and Sarai, she is שִׁפְחָה ("slave-girl") (Gen. 16:2, 5- 6). Aside from the narrator, the angel of the LORD is also the only character who *names her*—a

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[11] Ibid., 109.
[12] W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 195.
[13] In my first chapter on "The Name," I provided an extended discussion on the multiplicity, and therefore the slipperiness, of the name "God." The shift from the narrator's statement that Hagar encounters a מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה to Hagar's own assertion that she has seen אֵל is typical for the Hebrew Bible.

recognition of her social location. She is the גֵּר—the stranger. While Hagar (and Ishmael) stands uncomfortably outside the covenantal promises made to Abram, she is also not beyond divine reach. The angel of the LORD *shows up*, a compassionate recognition that he has heard her silent cries (cf. Ex. 2:23-25). He asks her a question that is both social and also existential: "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" (Gen. 16:8 NRSV)[14] While the question can be read geographically, it can also have multiple meanings. While the Hebrew Bible, particularly Genesis, does not present the divine character as omniscient; the question posed to Hagar appears to be less about educating the angel of the LORD about her geographical location than about *Hagar naming what her life has been about*. The angel of the LORD is not inquiring about whether she has been in Egypt or in Canaan or anywhere else. Rather, the angel of the LORD actively engages her in a discussion about her own life. It is an acknowledgement of her pain, where she has been "taken" (לָקַח) and "given" (נָתַן) to Abram "to remain" (לְאִשָּׁה) with him as wife (Gen. 16:3). In all of this, Hagar is passive—passed from Sarai's hand to Abram's bed—and voiceless. Abram "entered" (וַיָּבֹא) Hagar and she conceives; but contra Rachel and Leah, no cry of exultation is uttered. The conception of a child is not thought to bring her closer to her husband, as with Leah. In the conception of a child, she experiences neither love (Rachel), nor is the decision to conceive about exercising her own autonomy (Leah). Rather, once Hagar discovers she has conceived, her mistress is lowered in her eyes (וַתֵּקַל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ) (Gen. 16:4). The semantic range for קָלַל can include viewing someone (or something) as "slight" or "trifling," but it can

[14] In Job, YHWH poses a similar question to the Satan—"Where have you come from?" (Job 2:2). In the second creation story, YHWH Elohim asks the Adam, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9).

also refer to "cursing." The meaning of the phrase—exactly how the weight of Hagar's feelings shift toward Sarai—may depend on whether Ishmael increases Hagar's status or whether he is an additional "weight" to be placed on her shoulders.

In the doublet to this story, Ishmael is placed on Hagar's shoulders (Gen. 21:14). He is both the literal and symbolic weight she is forced to carry from a home that is not her own to the wilderness, where the narrative will leave her. While God is with the boy (Gen. 21:20), Ishmael is nevertheless a visual reminder of Hagar's "affliction" (Gen. 16:6, 9, 11). Hagar has remained בְּיָדֵךְ—in the hands of—that is, under the power of—Sarai. Ishmael is a symbol of the power differential between the two women—the one, powerful, rich, free, incorporated into the promissory blessings of YHWH through her husband; the other—a stranger in a strange land, slave, and an outsider to the promissory blessings made to Abram. On the other hand, Hagar does something Sarai cannot do at this point in the narrative—bear a child. For a woman in the Ancient Near East, conceiving a (male) child meant a cultural promotion; a woman's worth was tied to her ability to produce an heir for her husband. Hagar does what Sarai cannot, and subsequently, Sarai is "lowered" in Hagar's eyes. For perhaps the first time, Hagar gains a measure of value and self-worth.

In the second iteration of the story, Elohim hears the cry of the child and the angel of Elohim opens Hagar's eyes to see the well of water in front of her (Gen. 21:17, 19).On the surface, this is a God who sees pain and suffering, and responds to it. She may be discarded, mistreated, by Abram and Sarai, but the divine character appears to display compassion where his servants lack it. Nevertheless, Elohim also endorses their expulsion (Gen. 21:12-13).

The question of what kind of divine character Hagar encounters hinges, however, not only on his acknowledgment of her pain. In the angel of the LORD, Hagar also experiences a "face" of God who tells her: "return to your mistress and humble yourself under her hand" (שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתֵּךְ וְ הִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיהָ) (Gen. 16:9; translation mine). Here, the use of הִתְעַנִּי, the Hithpael perfect of עָנָה, implies that upon Hagar's return, the relationship with Sarai will again involve "affliction." The angel of YHWH calls her to return to the certainty of slavery and the likelihood of abuse. Moreover, the promises made by the divine character—whether he is called the angel of the LORD (Gen. 16) or Elohim (Gen. 21)—are also ambiguous. Phyllis Trible notes that both promises are "fraught with ambivalence."[15] The promise of numerous descendants lacks the covenantal context that is crucial to the founding fathers. Second, the promise of a birth of a child appears ambivalent as well. The child will be a "wild ass of a man." Thus the divine promise of Ishmael means life at the boundary of consolation and desolation. Two words characterize him—hand and face; his hand will be against everyone, just as Abram tells Sarai that Hagar is "in your hand" (Gen. 16:6), as well as the angel of the LORD's orders to Hagar, "Return to your mistress and suffer affliction under her hand" (Gen. 16: 9), so too will Ishmael's face be "against the face of all his brothers" (Gen. 16:12).

R. Christopher Heard notes the ambiguities involved in translating this phrase. At issue is whether Ishmael's relationship with others will be combative or cooperative. The previous clause, "his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him" (Gen. 16:12), upon first glance, seems to imply an adversarial existence. Heard states, "The

[15] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16.

common decision to read the saying with an adversarial sense may be prompted, in varying degrees, by the reasonable assumption that an Israelite narrator is likely to be negatively disposed toward Ishmaelites."[16] Nevertheless, the case is not closed here, as Heard notes ambiguities in both clauses, יָדוֹ בַכֹּל וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ and וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן.[17] The word "face" builds upon his mother's action, who claimed, "from before the face of Sarai my mistress I am fleeing" (Gen. 16:8). Trible states that in Ishmael, Hagar's story continues. Yet it is God's justice toward Hagar and Ishmael—or the lack of it—that has proven most troubling for interpreters.

Fewell's midrashic, Levinasian reading of the text addresses questions of theodicy, or the Face of God in the midst of suffering. In her retelling of the Hagar story, she applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to the character of the angel of YHWH, particularly in Hagar's question to the angel: "How could you possibly be the god of Abram and the god of the slave woman too?"[18] Contra Fewell, Hemchand Gossai exonerates the angel of YHWH by noting that the water is provided, even without Hagar

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[16] R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 70.

[17] In Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, 68-73, the author offers a lengthy description of the issues involved in translating these two clauses. The first phrase, יָדוֹ בַכֹּל וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ, ultimately hinges on whether or not the *b* in this verbless clause should be translated as cooperative or adversarial. Translators typically supply some form of "to be" when translating Hebrew verbless clauses. Heard notes that this might suggest an adversarial sense for this clause, since "to be" followed by "hand" followed by a *b* prefixed to a noun referring to a person, group, or inhabited region reflects an adversarial sense everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. However, Heard maintains that the issue is not simply supplying a missing Hebrew verb (*haya*) but representing in translation the common Hebrew syntactical strategy for coordinating two elements in a sentence without any verb. The second clause, וְעַל־ פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן, can also be translated in multiple ways. Here too the issue is whether the prepositional compound עַל־פְּנֵי carries an adversative or spatial sense. Commentators such as Alter, 1996:71; Dillmann: 73; Gossai: 16, 18; Gunkel: 188; Hamilton, 1990:449, 454; Skinner: 287-88; Spurrell: 167; Vawter: 217; Westermann: 234; NEB; NIV; NJB; and NRSV all read the clause in an adversative manner: "in defiance of," "in confrontation with," etc. Heard states, however, that in 128 out of 199 cases, פְּנֵי in עַל־פְּנֵי is attached to a noun with a geographical, topographical, or structural denotation. In these cases, the phrase is rendered spatially. For Heard, the meaning of the clause in Gen. 16:12 must also be understood spatially and thus translated: "he will dwell near all his kin."

[18] Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 44.

calling (contrast Moses in the wilderness). Even as one voiceless, she is provided for. Gossai notes that for all oppressed people this story provides a basis for hope and life—that YHWH hears the silent cries of all people, whether the silent cry of Hannah (1 Sam. 1-2) or the cry of millions around the world. Hagar demonstrates that deliverance does not presuppose a certain religious orientation. Abram and Sarai are not reprimanded by God, but neither is Hagar abandoned; the hostile environment of Sarai's household is countered by the hospitable setting of the wilderness. It is this wilderness experience that signals a new beginning for Hagar, where YHWH does what Abram and Sarai fail to do—namely, enter into conversation with Hagar.[19]

For Fewell, seeing and being seen mean that these two have seen each other's faces and must now live up to each other's expectations. Hagar will do what he has asked and he must do what he has promised; encountering the face of the Other is ethically obligating. The promise that her son will be a "wild ass of a man" may indicate freedom. Ishmael's hand will be against everyone but he will not be under anyone else's hand. "Hand," a euphemism for power, retrieves and counters the theme of power and oppression symbolized by Sarai's "hand." Despite a seemingly violent existence, Ishmael will not have to endure the humiliation "under a hand" that Hagar has endured.[20] Upon her return to affliction the narrator says nothing but merely provides the formulaic report of birth (Gen. 16:15-16). The narrator's ending, Trible notes, continues to undermine Hagar, restoring her name but silencing her voice, stressing not her motherhood but

[19] Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 15.
[20] Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children*, 44-46.

Abram's fatherhood. Patriarchy, Trible says, is well in control.[21] The conclusion to a scene otherwise focused on women resumes Abram's story. Ultimately, Fewell's reading, which combines the story in Genesis 16 as well as its doublet in Genesis 21, requires the human to work alongside the divine. The "God of seeing" has betrayed Hagar and does not insist on the "right thing" being done for her and her son. Rather, Fewell notes, the ending of Genesis 21 is double-edged. On the one hand, God is present and protects, yet on the other hand, the notion of divine presence and protection permits the reader (as well as Abraham) not to worry about their welfare. Abraham provides nothing for his foreign wife and mixed child, thus sanctioning his (and God's) lack of generosity with the implicit response, "Don't worry. Leave it to God. The Hagars and Ishmaels of the world will be alright."[22]

Ultimately, this facial inter-text demonstrates the two-faced nature of the divine character as one who hears and is compassionate, elevating the oppressed to agency and subjectivity; but also as one who ultimately appears to sanction the well-being of the men (patriarchs) he chooses. Moreover, this inter-text suggests a kind of complementary causation. In spite of the morally questionable things (in this case) the patriarch(s) do, God is behind it all, bringing about his desired plan or purpose. The actions of God appear to communicate that the ends justify the means. Human agency and divine will commingle, as in the story of Jacob. In particular, the (s)election of Jacob indicates the (dis)election of Esau, as well as the narrative expendability of the women and children. In

[21] Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative,* 20; Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 19.
[22] Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children*, 52.

other words, some faces are just more important than others, as is clearly the case in Jacob's willingness to jeopardize the safety of his wives and children.

Faces On The Other Side Of The River

In his examination of the Jabbok encounter, Serge Frolov critiques historical critical, structuralist, and socio-political models which have neglected to mention the faces of women and children in Jabbok encounter. Scholars have long noted that the placement of the wives and their children reflect Jacob's preference for Rachel and Joseph. Frolov's reading highlights Jacob's actions as immoral and fear-based, alleging that when he crosses his family over the Jabbok, he uses them as a "human shield."[23] According to Frolov, the subsequent struggle at the Jabbok demonstrates a kind of narrative punishment for Jacob's mistreatment of his family. Frolov claims two things demonstrate the punitive nature of the encounter. First, the stories about the ancestors of Israel (Gen. 12-35) tie together the promise of progeny and land; the attack, then, functions as the divine response to the patriarch's reluctance to defend his household. Second, his symbolic demotion in status is the immediate outcome of the encounter; he comes last of all in the caravan, demonstrating that because he neglected his duty, he is the most expendable member of the group.[24] Ultimately, Frolov asserts: "Viewed in a non-patriarchal perspective, the story of Jacob's return to Canaan becomes anti-patriarchal. Tacitly expressing the ancestor's cowardice, treachery and lack of faith, it graphically demonstrates that gender-based distribution of roles—that is, of power and

[23] Serge Frolov, "The Other Side of the Jabbok: Genesis 32 as a Fiasco of Patriarchy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, no. 91 (2000): 56.
[24] Ibid., 57-58.

expendability—not only degrades females but also corrupts males."[25] In the end, Jacob fails the test of patriarchy.

Frolov purports to examine the other side of the river, yet his reading merely gestures to the faces of the women and children involved. The patriarch—and patriarchy—remains his focus. Jacob's family is a tool used by Frolov to show that the narrator and/or God have censured patriarchy by wounding it at its procreative core. Rather than characterizing the faces "on the opposite side of the river," their faces are literarily disfigured in Frolov's analysis. They remain in what Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas have both called "the sphere of the It."[26] By remaining in the third-person, the sphere of the It, they can be "disposed of" in the story-world by Jacob. They can also be disposed of by the narrator, who in particular excludes the face of Dinah. Finally, they have been disposed of by interpreters who have not only ignored the ethical dimension of Jacob's actions with respect to his family, but have, like the patriarch himself, considered these women and children to be narratively expendable. By focalizing the faces of these female characters and their children, I will demonstrate that at the Jabbok, the faces of Jacob and his opponent are not the only ones that should be considered. Indeed, rather than attempting to determine the identity of one face—the face of Jacob's opponent—imaginative space should be made to consider the multiplicity, the multiple faces involved, in the פָּנִים.

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[25] Ibid., 58.
[26] Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 63.

Given Rebekah's disdain for Esau's wives (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46-28:6), it is imperative Jacob select a wife from among his kin.[27] In the Hebrew Bible, foreign women are frequently a source of contention for the "good Israelite men" who marry them because these women shift loyalty from Yahweh to foreign deities.[28] Ultimately, prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea (e.g., Jer. 3, Ezek. 16, Hos. 1-3), all blame destruction and exile on Israel and Judah's propensity for idol-adultery. During the period of the reconstruction, the expulsion of foreign women and their children prevent the "holy seed" from being polluted.[29] Narratively, then, Rebekah's annoyance with Esau's foreign wives is not the angst of a mother-in-law; instead, her ire reflects xenophobia of all the Hagars, all the strange women, in the midst of the "sons of Israel" (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל). Thus Jacob's (s)election of an Israelite wife is crucial to solve Rebekah's angst; at a deeper level, however, the eponymous ancestor of Israel must be remembered as one whose choice of wife was consonant with the ideology—the fears, anxieties, and convictions—of Yehud.[30] Fewell and Gunn maintain that Rebekah manipulates the ill-sighted Isaac's irritation with Esau's wives; they become the impetus for Jacob's send-off. Fewell and Gunn state,

> Of course, Rebekah has hit a sore spot with Isaac… He hardly longs to have more Hittite women join his household. Rebekah's lament is a threat to his own

[27] In Bruce Vawter, *Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 297, Vawter notes that the Horites (and Hivites) are simply one of the names for the Canaanites in Genesis. While the Israelites became acquainted with the Hurrians at the time of their "conquest" of Canaan, it is fairly certain there were none in patriarchal times. Therefore, the wives of Esau, called Hittites, are most likely the Philistines of Genesis 26, popular anachronisms with respect to the indigenous population.
[28] Cf. Deut. 7:1-6; 1 Kgs. 11:1-8; Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:23-27.
[29] The prophetic imagination depicts disagreement concerning who exactly was the "holy seed," the returnees or the remainees. Cf. Jer. 24:1-10; Is. 6:13.
[30] Such a reading of course depends on a post-exilic date for the redaction of Genesis.

> peace…Isaac may have the authority, but Rebekah has orchestrated the events. Jacob leaves, twice blessed, because of his mother's foresight and initiative.[31]

He escapes Esau's anger (Gen. 27:41) because Rebekah convinces the passive Isaac that Jacob's leaving is in the family's best interests (Gen. 27:46). As Fewell and Gunn point out, it is in Rebekah's best interests that God's plans come to fruition. As a man who represents the future, Jacob's safety—and later his safe return—are paramount to the continuance of Jacob's line.[32]

Upon his arrival in the land of the "sons of the East" (Gen. 29:1), Jacob approaches a well, a narrative signal that a betrothal is imminent. At first glance, Jacob and Rachel's meeting appears to be nothing more than a type scene (Gen. 24:1-67; Ex. 2:15-22). However, it is striking for the level of emotion it portrays— Jacob kissed Rachel and "lifted up his voice and wept" (וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלוֹ וַיֵּבְךְּ). The narrator describes Rachel vividly: "and Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת־תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה) (translation mine). Moreover, Jacob is said to love Rachel, a rare expression in the Hebrew Bible, and it is this love for her that makes the seven years agreed upon—a narrative signal for completion or perfection—seem "in his eyes like a few days" (בְּעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים). Even after being duped by Laban, Jacob agrees to work another seven years for Rachel. The narrator notes that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (Gen. 29:30); and Yahweh saw that Leah was "hated" (שְׂנוּאָה). Fewell and Gunn focalize the family dynamics through the eyes of the women:

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[31] Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 75-76.
[32] Ibid., 74.

> Rachel has beauty of form and *face*. By implication Leah is not so stunning. Leah, on the other hand, has "tender" eyes, affective, responsive eyes. In contrast, there seems to be nothing noteworthy about Rachel's eyes. Leah looks; Rachel is looked at. One woman, on account of the way men look at her, inspires love, but the other woman, on account of the way she looks at others, may actually be more capable of returning love.[33]

It is a love, however, that Leah is never said to receive in return, even though she is, as Fewell and Gunn note, "fertile to a fault."[34] While Rebekah was also barren, Yahweh allowed her to conceive because Isaac prayed on her behalf; Yahweh is not said to take note of her condition prior to Isaac's intercession. Here, however, no one prays on behalf of Leah. In each naming of her son, she gives voices to the bereft nature of her existence. Overall, however, she is a silent participant in her own life. It is, perhaps, her quiet passivity that compels Yahweh to hear not an outward cry (e.g. Elohim in Ex. 2:23-24) but a pain that dare not whisper its name. The result is an active response by Yahweh—he does not merely allow her to conceive, as he does with Rebekah. Here, Yahweh "opens" (וַיִּפְתַּח) her womb. While the narrator describes Leah as having "weak eyes" (Gen. 29:17) and as unloved by Jacob, her face is not invisible to Yahweh; he "sees/notices" (וַיַּרְא) her pain.

Following the birth of her first son, Leah describes her life as one of "affliction" or "poverty" (עָנְיִ) and expresses a previously unvoiced hope—for the love of her husband. In the book of Job, Elihu tells Job that God "delivers the afflicted by their affliction" (Job 36:15). Moreover, he also warns Job not to turn toward iniquity in the midst of his affliction; God is a teacher like no other (Job 36:21-22). R. Martin-Achard states that עָנְיִ is a general expression for suffering in various forms: affliction, suffering, debasement,

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[33] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 78.
[34] Ibid.

or oppression. It may indicate individual suffering, such as Leah's or Hagar's; it may also indicate also the suffering of the children of Israel and the city of Jerusalem after the catastrophe of 587 BCE. Martin-Archard notes that in the majority of cases, the suffering of the people or the believer is depicted in relation to Yahweh: God cares about the suffering of his people and frees them from it.[35] Leah, with her tender eyes, is indeed "seen" by Yahweh, yet if freedom from her affliction means freedom from a family where she will always be unloved, she is never truly free.

When she conceives Simeon, her second son, she expresses similar gratitude to Yahweh—and for the first time, it is disclosed that Jacob's lack of love for her is noted not only by the narrator. She knows that she is "hated" (שְׂנוּאָה). It is part of her self-description—she is the unloved one, or the hated one. The naming of her third son, Levi, demonstrates an augmentation of Leah's hope—that bearing three sons for Jacob will "attach" (יִלָּוֶה) him to her. The hope for this change in relationship, and the bearing of a fourth son, Judah, leads her to praise Yahweh, who has, in her estimation, allowed this to unfold. No description is given of Jacob's feelings about the birth of his sons, nor does the narrator comment about any change of feeling for Leah. Fewell and Gunn affirm, "But instead of finding a place as wife and lover, her role as mother is reinscribed: she conceives and bears more sons."[36] Leah is never "attached" to her husband; she is instead perpetually afflicted, impoverished, humbled and humiliated by her status as the unloved wife. As Avivah Zornberg notes: "Her tears generate her many children. For a formidable energy builds up in her, in her deprivation; she takes Rachel's place under the marriage

[35] Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* ,Vol.2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 934.
[36] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 78.

canopy; and in the darkness, in which forms and structures become fluid… Leah *becomes* Rachel."[37] Just as Jacob masquerades as Esau, so too in the fluidity of the night, where faces fuse, Leah gives Jacob what Rachel cannot. Fed on countless caresses and countless hungers, Leah nevertheless tastes the bread of affliction (Deut. 16:3).

As the etiological narrative of the twelve tribes of Israel continues to unfold, the naming of each son conveys the hopes, aspirations, and anxieties of both Rachel and Leah.[38] A familiar commingling of human agency and divine intervention allows both women to conceive multiple times, even in the wake of infertility and Jacob's passivity (Gen. 30:2). While both Rachel and Leah take the initiative to give their maidservants to Jacob, they nevertheless attribute their success to Elohim (Gen. 30:6, 17-24). Throughout successive nights of competitive conceptions, Jacob is voiceless, save for his exasperated statement that God is the one Rachel should blame for her inability to conceive (Gen. 30:2). These scenes feature Jacob as a silent marionette controlled by his wives and by the reproductive whims of Elohim. Fewell and Gunn note that it is Laban's trick toward Jacob which entraps the women in a system that forever pits them as enemies:

> Bound together in their marriage to Jacob, the women are like two prisoners chained together. Neither is able to escape the other. Used by their father to procure Jacob's labor, they are allowed no right to speak, no right to choose their

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[37]Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 211.

[38] For Leah, Reuben exemplifies Yahweh's compassion for her affliction and the hope that her husband will love her; Simeon further demonstrates that Yahweh has heard that she is unloved; Levi, the hope that Jacob will attach himself to her; Judah, her praise to Yahweh for her success in conception; Gad represents the luck Leah feels in competition with Rachel; Asher's birth garners her communal respect; Issachar, her reward for giving her maid to Jacob; and Zebulun, a "choice gift" that will lead, she hopes, to her husband's exaltation of her. Rachel's children represent a spectrum of hopes and dreams as well: Dan represents Rachel's vindication over Leah; Naphtali is also named for the contest she waged with her sister; and Joseph, a final son who is "added" to her.

> mate or their future. They both live, wedded to Jacob, and therefore to each other, in 'unwholly' matrimony.[39]

While the wives' desire for children is voiced, Jacob remains largely silent about how he feels about his burgeoning family.

After Joseph is born, however, Jacob decides to journey home with his family en masse, as family tensions run high (Gen. 31:1-3). Laban's "face" was not to him as it had been before (Gen. 31:5). In her study of sight and insight in Genesis, Talia Sutskover notes that in the Jacob narrative, the phrase "saw the face" (רָאָה פָּנִים) holds special import. In Genesis 31:5, Jacob says, "I saw the face of your father" (רֹאֶה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן), yet "the God of my father has been with me." Sutskover notes, "This propinquity between Jacob's sight of Laban's face and the divine command to go back to Canaan (Gen. 31:2, 3) may hint at a divine intervention, that God himself influenced Laban's expression, and thereby signaled to Jacob to take steps and leave."[40] Whether God is the unseen impetus for the change in Laban's face or not, Jacob clearly constructs the story he tells his wives around divine intervention. After telling Rachel and Leah about a complicated dream—piled high with talk of Elohim (Gen. 31:11, 13)—the women side with Jacob over their father. As W. Lee Humphreys notes, Jacob constructs the situation in a way which all but forces his wives and children to come with him. According to Humphreys, Jacob's story is designed for the women to take sides, essentially cutting off all ties with their father—to leave Laban, their kinfolk, and come to a land that their husband will show them. Humphreys asserts, "Jacob constructs his story within the story. It is a story that sets no middle ground.… Without overtly calling for it, he leaves them

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[39] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 78.
[40] Talia Sutskover, *Sight and Insight in Genesis: A Semantic Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 165.

no choice but to choose. And he weights the options by placing God fully on his side and thereby against Laban…"[41] Furthermore, Humphreys says, God is woven into what transpires between Jacob and Laban, justifying his riches.[42] Rachel and Leah answer as one: "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you" (Gen. 31:14-16 TNK). For Rachel and Leah, home and security are no longer with Laban—it is with Jacob. On him they place their hopes for a secure and lasting future. Moreover, it is a future dependent upon Jacob's self-actualization, as Fewell and Gunn affirm: "Indeed at the heart of Jacob's story is his struggle to divorce himself from his flesh (red) and his bone (white), that is, his kin, and to claim his own identity."[43] Jacob attempts to take the family with him without telling Laban (Gen. 31:17-18). In what he has called an itinerary or travel narrative, Thomas Brodie notes that Jacob "sets his face" towards the mountain (Gen. 31:21).[44] This geographical about-face, glimpsed through the contours of Jacob's face, is unsurprising given Jacob's penchant for running away. This time, however, Jacob does not run alone. He takes a caravan of faces along with him for the dangerous journey. Nevertheless, something of their "affliction" may prepare them for the difficulty of the journey ahead. As Zornberg notes, the word עֳנִי in Hebrew means both pain and strength. It is in the very

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[41] Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal*, 183.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 77.
[44] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 320. Brodie also draws a comparison with Luke's Jesus, who is said to "set his face" toward Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). Where in Luke, Brodie notes, the narrative turn is sharp; in Genesis the setting of the face is "late and enigmatic." Following Brodie's analysis, the overarching narrative presentation of Jacob is of one who is perpetually late, who follows "from behind." His gradual movement, or setting of the face, is narratively comprehensible due to his characterization. While Jacob's movement may be late, it is certainly not "enigmatic."

nature of holiness, Zornberg avers, to translate pain into strength.[45] It is this strength born from affliction, perhaps, which enables Leah, Rachel, and the children, to go away from their father's house to the land that their (husband) will show them, uncertain whether blessing or death will follow (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

It is unclear whether the women and children are anything more than property to Jacob;[46] Laban accusatively calls them "captives of the sword" (Gen. 31:26). In the ensuing conversation, Laban refers to them as belonging to him—"the daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine" (Gen. 31:43 TNK). Cultural norms would have viewed the women, children, and flocks as property. However, Laban's desire to bid his family farewell, as well as the pact that he makes with Jacob not to "afflict" (תְּעַנֶּה) them or add other wives (Gen. 31:27-28, 50; 32:1), implies fatherly affection and protection. It certainly recognizes the impoverished (emotional) state of at least one of Jacob's wives. Brodie affirms: "Laban's brief speech manages to use images that touch a wide range of the human heart's experiences and feelings: the agony of the women who are driven as prisoners of war, the celebration of music and song, the sweet sorrow of kissing goodbye…"[47] The scene is poignant: the covenant is cut, and a multiplicity of stones represent a multiplicity of

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[45] Ibid., 215.

[46] In Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible,* 51, the authors include a reminder that the economy with which biblical characters are drawn has long proven frustrating to readers who are accustomed to narratives with elaborate and explicit description. Biblical characters are seldom drawn with much detail, and their thoughts are seldom revealed. The reasons for their actions are rarely reported. Here, Leah and Rachel both express the reason for desiring children. Moreover, even a rudimentary understanding of the Ancient Near East demonstrates another reason—women were nothing without a male heir. Jacob's feelings and motivations for acquiescing to the reproductive whims of his wives remain unreported. Similarly, apart from his initial love-at-first-sight response to Rachel, the way he feels about his family is unknown.

[47] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, 324.

faces. Nevertheless, in the next narrative sequence, Jacob's endangerment of these faces demonstrates that Laban's anxieties were well-founded.

In the sequences prior to and immediately following the Jabbok encounter, the women and children either function as Jacob's expendables or his excuses. The obsequious language Jacob uses (לַאדֹנִי) (Gen. 32:5), as well as the "presents" (מִנְחָה) (Gen. 32:14) he sends, demonstrates his anxiety. Moreover, after hearing that Esau is approaching with 400 men, Jacob is "exceedingly afraid" (וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד) (Gen. 32:8). Jacob's fear is well-grounded, since 400 men is the size of a militia heading for battle (1 Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 30:10).[48] For Brodie, Jacob's fear of death is central to the two-panel scene which outlines his relationships both with Laban and also with Esau. "Shades of fear hover over Jacob's life," Brodie states. "Real harm does not happen, but it comes close and has to be prevented, first by dream (31:24, 29; cf. 31:7), then by covenant (31:52);"[49] and in the case of Esau, through pragmatic and pious actions. As a result, Jacob divides his possessions into two camps, reasoning if Esau "smites" (הִכָּהוּ) one, the other may escape. The use of the Hiphil form of נָכָה suggests a violent attack, clearly in keeping with Jacob's assumption that Esau will "come in and smite me, mother and children" (יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים) (Gen. 32:12). This phrasing occurs in only one other biblical verse, the law that forbids taking both mother and offspring from a bird's nest (Deut. 22:6-7), connoting "unparalleled brutality."[50] Yet it is mother and children that he "takes across" (וַיַּעֲבֵרֵם) ahead of him (Gen. 32:24). It is his own protection he prays for

[48] Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 96.
[49] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, 322.
[50] Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 98.

(Gen. 32:12) and his own favor that he seeks: "He said that I may cover his face with the gift to go toward his face; and after I will appear to his face, perhaps he will uplift his face" (כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה הַהֹלֶכֶת לְפָנָי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָנָיו אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָנָי) (Gen. 32:21; translation mine). Jacob's actions violate the "covenant" (בְּרִית) cut between Laban and himself (Gen. 31:44), of which Yahweh and Elohim are witness. The cutting of the covenant, the covenantal language, and the sharing of the meal indicates that this was intended to be a formal, binding agreement between, in this case, two parties who have every reason to distrust one another. Jacob's actions demonstrate that Laban's fear that his daughters may be mistreated was apt—they are divinely given (Gen. 33:5-6) property and apparently expendable. Indeed, Fewell and Gunn ask:

> Does anyone prevail in a system that pits brother against brother, sister against sister, a system blithely sanctioned alternately by God's silence and God's arbitrary participation? The God of good and evil, who both blesses and cripples Jacob, also blesses and curses these women, on the one hand granting them renown as the two women who "together built up the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11), but on the other forever marring their hopes of life and love with fragmentation, alienation, even death.[51]

In order for Jacob to be an "I," he must be faced with a "Thou." Yet within the patriarchal system, this man and his divine patron are not met with a "here I am" on the part of these women. The system, of which Yahweh and Jacob are a part, silences them, and their faces remain barely visible.

After the encounter at the Jabbok, Jacob tells Esau that the women and children have been given to him as a result of Elohim's favor—חָנַן אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 33:5). When Esau inquires about the reason for "the camp" (הַמַּחֲנֶה) he has met, Jacob again uses the

[51] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 80.

language of favor: "And he said, to find favor in the eyes of my lord" (וַיֹּאמֶר לְמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי) (Gen. 33:8).When Esau protests that Jacob should keep what is his (Gen. 33:9), it is unclear whether he meant the series of gifts Jacob previously sent (Gen. 32:14-22); or whether Jacob intended to give his entire family or a portion of them to Esau as "present" (מִנְחָה). In so doing, Jacob depicts himself as abased before the face of Esau, who acts like the divine, receiving his offering. Jacob's arrangement of his family (Gen. 33:1-2)—with secondary wives and their children first, the unloved Leah and her children next, and the loved Rachel and Joseph last—does suggest an anxiety deep enough to consider such a plan, but also a hope that such a plan will prove unnecessary. Even if Jacob did not intend to give them as gift, he may have expected to use them as a visual reminder of the faces to whom Esau is linked.

Whatever the reasoning, Esau initially rejects Jacob's "present." Jacob continues to press him using the language of favor: "And Jacob said please, I pray, if I have found favor in your eyes, then you take from my hand" (וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אַל־נָא אִם־נָא מָצָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְ לָקַחְתָּ מִיָּדִי) (Gen. 33:10). To see Esau's face, Jacob says, is like seeing the face of God. Thus Jacob presses Esau again, reasoning: "because God has favored me and because there is to me everything" (כִּי־חַנַנִי אֱלֹהִים וְ כִי יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל) (Gen. 33:11). After urging him, Esau accepts. While Elohim ultimately delivers Jacob from Esau, effectively answering Jacob's prayer prior to the Jabbok struggle (Gen. 32:12), Jacob's actions demonstrate that the women and children—his possessions—are easily discarded. Regardless of his "love" for Rachel (Gen. 29:18-20), she is still a face forgotten in the face of Jacob's fear and cowardice. Indeed, Levinas casts a poignant reminder: "Is

dialogue possible without *Fürsorge*?"[52] As a response to the essential misery of the Other, *Fürsorge* also gives genuine access to the Other. Jacob's "love" for Rachel is a love of narrative emotion, effusive in its expression but devoid of care for her being. For Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, even a nominal description of "love" or concern is absent.

The women and children are objects of Jacob's use once more following the Jabbok encounter. Still uncertain of Esau's change of heart, Jacob uses them as an excuse for why the two families cannot travel together: "And [Esau] said, 'Let us start on our journey, and we will proceed at your pace.' But he said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die'" (Gen. 33:12-13 TNK). Jacob convinces Esau to journey ahead, while he travels at the pace of the children and the cattle (Gen. 33:14). Jacob never arrives at Seir but instead travels to Succoth and ultimately, "safely" (שָׁלֵם) to Shechem. Narratively, from this moment the women and children are largely defaced, save for mention of the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:1-7); Rachel's burial notice (Gen. 35:16-21); and the list of Jacob's descendants who journey with him to Egypt during famine (Gen. 46:5-27). Leah's death is not recorded, except to say that she is buried alongside Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 49:31). The faces of the women and children, never major players in the narrative anyway, recede into the background. Narratively, their faces are forgotten. They are literarily disfigured by the lack of subjectivity accorded to them by the narrator. Not only in the Jacob cycle, but in the ancestral narratives as a whole, the women and children are narrative adornment, largely

[52] Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," 73.

cast in similar facial molds. No thought is given to their feelings about journeying across the river alone; and neither Jacob nor the narrative as a whole inquires.

Facing Peniel/Penuel, The Face of God

After sending his wives and children across the ford of the Jabbok, two faces remain—Jacob's and his opponent's. Before even arriving at Peniel, however, it seems that his opponent's face must necessarily fade into the night. When it comes to seeing the face of God in the Hebrew Bible, the seer will typically glimpse it "through a mirror darkly."[53] The cultural and theological anxiety surrounding encounters with the divine are well attested in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 33:20, 23; Judg. 13:22), and spatial limitations preventing full disclosure were often mandated by the divine figure himself (Ex. 3:5-6, 19:10-13, 33:20, 23). At other times, an individual stood, at times literally, at times figuratively, between the people and God (e.g. prophets, priests or kings in Ex. 20:18-21, 34:29-35; Num. 11, 14; 1 Sam. 8, to name a few). Second, even when an individual is said to have experienced some manifestation of God's presence, the multi(face)ted nature of the divine character precludes making definitive assessments about the nature of this character. For instance, is the angel of the LORD intended to be a figure wholly separate from, or strikingly analogous to, El or Elohim? At the Jabbok, is the אִישׁ Jacob encounters (Gen. 32:24) the same figure he later identifies as אֱלֹהִים (Gen. 32:30)? The eighth-century prophet Hosea (re)imagines that the encounter occurred between Jacob and an angel (Hos. 12:4). How similar or dissimilar are these manifestations or multiple faces of the divine character? At times, the (multi)plicity of faces portray opposing characteristics. On the one hand, the divine character appears to care about those who are

[53] Cf. Yahwistic texts such as Gen. 2-3, 4, 18 for exceptions.

oppressed and who cry out to him (e.g., Gen. 4:10, 15:3-5, 18:22-33, 19:18-22, 21:17-21; Ex. 2:23-25); on the other hand, his aid appears provisional and (s)elective (e.g., Gen. 16:9, 19:26, 21:12-13). Moreover, even among those he (s)elects, the divine character appears more than willing to consider violent course correction (e.g., Gen. 6:11-22, 7:22-23, 11:7-9, 19:1-26, 32:24-31; Ex. 4:24; and Num. 11, 14, 16).

In Levinasian terms, the divine figure is an "other," like the human. As such, the encounter the divine, as with any other, is "a relationship with what always slips away."[54] It is mystery, Levinas asserts, that constitutes alterity. Levinas states, "The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery."[55] While the narrator claims Jacob has seen Elohim "face to face," spatial, temporal, and nominal parameters keep full disclosure at a distance. This character is not only invisible to the senses but is, more importantly, non-thematizable in thought. The struggle of pushing away and pulling toward, characteristic of wrestling; the night, which effectively conceals faces; and the refusal to yield his name—all conceal the face Jacob is said to "see" (Gen. 32:31). While this "God" may be in danger of being physically pinned down, he refuses to allow himself to be metaphysically pinned down (Gen. 32:29).

For Levinas, alterity makes the other *Other*: "The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not."[56] Moreover, it is the Other's otherness which renders the *impossibility* of the face-to-face *possible* and allows for a (genuine) I-Thou relationship. The genuineness of this relationship, however, is dependent upon *mutuality* of ontology and dialogue. Levinas states:

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[54] Emmanuel Levinas, "Time and the Other" in,*The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 49.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 48.

> It is impossible to remain a spectator of the Thou, for the very existence of the Thou depends on the "word" it addresses to me. And, it must be added, only a being who is responsible for another being can enter into dialogue with it. Responsibility, in the etymological sense of the term, not the mere exchange of words, is what is meant by dialogue, and it is only in the former case that there is meeting.[57]

The face to face encounter at Peniel is the first time in the narrative that Jacob is compelled to say "I am Jacob." It is, perhaps, the utterance of a difficult or painful "I am," as Jacob's "I am" is not merely nominative—or (de)nominative. Jacob's "I am" is also an expression of guilt—he is a "grasper." As Levinas has said, identity recoils before its affirmation; it is not guilty, but accused and responsible for its very presence. Jacob is forced to face the essential poverty or nudity of his own face, perhaps for the first time. It is his opponent who poses the question which elicits Jacob's response; it is this dialogue which places the two in an I-Thou relationship. Jacob is an "I" who is addressed by a "Thou," Ish/Elohim. However, the existence of Ish/Elohim is also dependent upon Jacob. Jacob's opponent is a "Thou" only when faced by the face of another, an "I." Both Jacob and Elohim/Ish speak each other into being at Peniel. While Levinas affirmed the synonymous nature of alterity and mystery,[58] this mystery (or transcendence) is also where the ethical begins. The ethical begins at the point where the "I" becomes conscious of the Thou as beyond itself.[59]

The Thou does, indeed, stare Jacob in the face and offer him transcendence. Elohim/Ish is an "indeclinable nominative,"[60] a name which names but refuses to be named, a Face which appears but only in darkness. Yet there appears to be something of

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[57] Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," 66-67.
[58] Levinas, "Time and the Other," 49.
[59] Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," 72.
[60] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader,* ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 81.

transcendence in Jacob, too. For if focalization and position is reversed—if Jacob is the "Thou" and Elohim/Ish the "I," then Elohim/Ish appears to admit weakness: "Let me go, for the day is breaking" (Gen. 32:26). Jacob appears to possess power over his opponent, the (possible) ability to release or to kill. When their positions are inverted, it is Elohim/Ish who faces Jacob's face and implores: "Thou shalt not kill."[61] Levinas states:

> There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill.[62]

A moment of pity exists in this *Zwischen*, where Jacob is even responsible for the face of God; where even the face of God is rendered exposed, vulnerable, to Jacob's *Auffassen*. Even in his name—יַעֲקֹב—Jacob's mode of being in the world is violent. He "knows" through usurpation, or grasping. For Levinas, *Auffassen* (understanding) has always been a *Fassen* (gripping). A prima facie reading demonstrates that Jacob's understanding or knowledge of the Face before him comes through a violent seizure, a wrestling match, in which Elohim/Ish must beg for release (Gen. 32:26). However, Avivah Zornberg notes that in Hebrew, "grasping" is not an odious word. It does not necessarily connote violence but rather fascination.[63] It is therefore Jacob's fascination with or "hunger" for, in Levinasian terms, he knows not what, which catalyzes his actions.

However, it appears that Jacob's prayer is actually the catalyst for the face to face:

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[61] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 89.
[62] Ibid., 86.
[63] Bill Moyers et al., *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 286.

> Then Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, "Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you!" I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. Yet You have said, "I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count" (Gen. 32:9-12 TNK).

Among other things, prayer may also function as a means for "understanding" and therefore "gripping" the divine. There is, after all, something of "wrestling" involved in the posture of prayer.[64] Jacob's prayer, here and also at Bethel (Gen. 28:20-22), is an attempt, perhaps not to wrestle, but to wrest, a blessing out of God. It is blessing, after all, which Jacob continually seeks. It is his prayer, itself an act of gripping a face, which catalyzes their meeting. It is therefore Jacob who throws the first (symbolic) blow, not the Face. Even the Face is rendered vulnerable to Jacob's *Auffassen*, even as he resists (Gen. 32:26) and ultimately escapes totalization, while simultaneously blessing and wounding Jacob. What, then, *is exposed* at Peniel, the Face of God?

In the words of Levinas, what is exposed at the Face of God is "signification without context."[65] It is the essential nudity or poverty of two faces, devoid of other signifiers, which is exposed. For Levinas, all that is within one's passport, so to speak—

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[64] In J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*:, *Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum & Company, 1975), 204, Fokkelman notes that an "honest prayer" may contain the "seed" of its answer. For Fokkelman, Jacob's prayer is a "pure" representation of the triangle between Esau, Jacob, and God. His prayer is a way of coming to terms with the tense situation. Fokkelman views Jacob's prayer as a means of humbling himself before Yahweh, thus making important strides towards humanization. Reconciliation becomes the more real and worthy "solution" of a human being. Throughout his exegesis, Fokkelman castigates Jacob for what he views as a two-faced approach to his fears. He wants to reconcile himself to Esau, yet he does so in cowardly and ultimately ineffectual ways. Only in approaching God "face to face," Fokkelman contends, is Jacob finally able to approach him correctly. Fokkelman concludes, "The text had strongly emphasized that it had been Jacob's own intention to meet Esau face to face. But we also noticed that Jacob himself had not yet fulfilled the prerequisite of looking his brother directly in the eye. The selfishness of his *minhā* approach, his inner division, the desire to hide in the rear were still with him. Now the Penuel scene transports him to another state of mind, another mentality which enables him to approach Esau in the only correct way" (220-221).

[65] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 86.

profession, family relationships, accomplishments, manner of dress and speech—are null and void in the nudity of the face. Face is meaning all by itself. It is not a content. It is uncontainable. It leads beyond.[66] It is multiplicity, simultaneously containing yet uncontained by (even transcending) all that both have brought with them to the Face of God—their identities, their interactions with others in the narrative, and their interactions with one another. The Face of God transcends Peniel, the Face of God. Even as the Face of God contains Peniel, it is not limited to this geographical locale. This character has left traces of himself in the echo of Isaac's prayer (Gen. 25:21); in the slick darkness of Rebecca's womb (Gen. 25:21-26); in the manipulative, trickster antics of Jacob towards Esau and Laban (Gen. 25:30-34, 27:1-40, 30:25-43); seemingly propelled by the trickster oracle at the beginning of the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:23); and in the moveable property Jacob acquires (Gen. 33:11). Even as the Face of God contains the iterations the divine character(s) brought to Peniel such as El, Elohim, the angel of the LORD, he too is not contained by them. The faces—of both Jacob and Jacob's opponent—are oneness that contains multiplicity. It is this complexity that underscores the mystery of the faces that meet at the Jabbok.

In his monograph on beauty and the enigma, Francis Landy notes the chthonic blurriness between mystery and death. Landy states, "Mystery is beautiful when it is not terrible. Beauty is never far from death, either, for we long to humanize what we most fear."[67] A vacillation occurs between that which is *ish*, man, and Elohim, that which cannot possibly be man. The Face of the Other—whose beauty can only be seen from far

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[66] Ibid., 86-87.
[67] Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 44.

away, Landy contends—is also a Face which bids Jacob not to kill, even as that Face also holds the possibility of killing Jacob. That Face contains all the expressions and emotions of the faceless specters Jacob has carried with him—love, longing, and loss; fear and pain; betrayal and duplicity; piety, protection, and provision.[68] The Face is at once otherworldly and this-worldly; at once monstrous, able to kill, and plaintively beautiful, begging not to be killed. Mystery and multiplicity cohere in the Face.

Philologically speaking, פָּנִים is itself a multiplicity. According to A. S. van der Woude, this noun is only dual in form. Van der Woude delineates six usages of פָּנִים in the Hebrew Bible: "face" in the proper sense; "appearance," etc. in an expanded usage; "glance" (with the eyes); "person, someone"; "anterior, surface," etc. in a figurative meaning; and various prepositional uses.[69] The originally biradical stem *pan* is attested in all branches of the Semitic language. As a verb, the stem occurs in the Hebrew *pnh*, "to turn"; in the Aramaic *pny*, "to turn, return"; the Akkadian *panû*, "to turn, take the lead"; in the Arabic *faniya*, "to pass away"; and in the Ethiopian *fannawa,* "to go away."[70] Philology and philosophy cohere at Peniel, the Face of God. The face, which is a synecdoche for the person's whole being,[71] is also that which is always already turning and returning, passing by, going away. At once the "mirror of the soul" (Sir. 13:25) yet also producing a darkened image (1 Cor. 13:12), the face is always already eluding, escaping, evading the "grasp" of the Other, even at the meeting of face to face. The פָּנִים is like the הֶבֶל—that which is "merest breath," that which appears only to disappear

[68] This occurs through Jacob's defacing of the very real faces in front of him: e.g., Esau, Isaac, Rachel, Leah, and Laban.
[69] Jenni and Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament,* vol. 2, 997.
[70] Ibid., 995.
[71] Ibid., 1001.

again. While whole person meets whole person, the meeting does not contain the person, for according to Levinas, *(hu)man is meeting.*[72] The (per)son is that which goes *per*—through—that meeting. Yet it is for the purpose of meeting that face meets face, as Levinas affirms that the face and discourse are connected.[73] And it is discourse which occurs at Peniel; indeed, it is discourse which is the purpose of Peniel. It is there where Jacob must respond to his right to be. A word is spoken out into the void, rendering null and void everything save face meeting face; rendering null and void everything save the Face containing and transcending every other face; and rendering null and void everything save the address and its required response. The Face renders what is impossible—seeing the Face of God and living (Ex. 33:20)—possible through the Face which begins all discourse. Jacob can respond to his right to be only in facing that Face. Thomas Brodie has said that the wound "contains" the greater world of blessing.[74] Likewise, here the Face "contains" all the faces in Jacob's (narrative) field, even his own. Only in responding to the word spoken into the void can Jacob address the poses he has put on, remove the masks/other faces he has worn and deceived, and face the multiplicity of the פָּנִים.

Even if his opponent refuses to be pinned down, Jacob is not too afraid to face him and to say what he wants—blessing and safety. In grasping both Esau's birthright (Gen. 25:31-33) and his blessing (Gen. 27:18-19), Jacob (and later Rebekah) demonstrates that it is familial, material, and spiritual primacy that he desires. He desires the economic/material gain that accompanied reception of the birthright (Deut. 21:17);

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[72] Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," 66.
[73] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 87.
[74] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, 332.

and he desires the relational intimacy given by the blessing of a father who is said only to love Esau. Upon meeting Esau after the Jabbok encounter, Jacob announces that he has been given everything: "Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty" (Gen. 33:11 TNK). Jacob has always desired blessing, which he reiterates at Peniel: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:26). At Bethel, however, another dimension of Jacob's desire surfaces: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21 NRSV). Jacob desires to return in peace (וְשַׁבְתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם). From the Hollow verb שׁוּב, Jacob's "return" may imply merely a geographical return to the home of his father; but the semantic range of שׁוּב also allows for a "return" which reorients behavior.[75] It is unclear, then, whether Jacob desires a (re)turn, a reorientation of the face, to something he has never known—a life of peace between him and Esau—or whether he simply wants to go back home. In his prayer to Yahweh, who he refers to as the "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac" (Gen. 32:9), Jacob also reiterates the desire he demonstrated at Bethel—that God "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי). The use of this Hiphil imperative suggests a causative nuance to Jacob's plea—"cause me to be delivered"—מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו—"from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau"

[75] In Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1313-14, J. A. Soggin references W. Holladay's monograph (op. cit. 511). Holladay offers this central meaning for שׁוּב: "having moved in a particular direction, to move thereupon in the opposite direction, the implication being (unless there is evidence to the contrary) that one will arrive again at the initial point of departure" (op. cit. 53); as E. K. Dietrich (*Die Umkeher [Bekehrung und Busse] im AT und im Judentum [1936]*) has noted, the meaning embraces return to the point of departure, which is significant for the theological meaning of "return (to God)." While שׁוּב is the word used in the Bethel text (Gen. 28:20-21), theologically speaking, Jacob is not actually "returning." He is, instead, "facing," in keeping with the sense of פָּנִים whose etymological resonances, according to F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 819, include not a (re)turning but rather a "turning," a movement inside and out.

(Gen. 32:12). Now, Jacob's perpetual lateness—continually following "from behind"—cannot save him. He must meet his brother פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים. No longer will his duplicity, grasping, or following heel-to-toe "deliver" him from Esau; only this "God of Abraham and God of Isaac" can cause him to be delivered. His desire is also an expression of his lack. His hunger is for something that he cannot procure for himself; it exceeds his grasp. And yet there is in Jacob's mind's eye… a face. For J. P. Fokkelman, it is the "face"—פָּנִים—which he effusively labels "the most radiant key-word in the story of Jacob."[76] Fokkelman avers that Jacob's "intentions" are found in the verse preceding the struggle, where Jacob's language is decidedly facial: "For he said to himself, 'Let me cover up his face (*pānāw*) with the present that goes before my face (*pānāy*). Afterwards I shall see his face (*pānāw*). Perhaps he will lift up my face (*pānāy*).' The present passed on before his face (*pānāw*)" (Gen. 32:21).[77] However, Fokkelman views Jacob's intentions at reconciliation as ultimately fruitless:

> For Jacob wants to see Esau's face after he himself has covered it up (the Hebraic metaphor for atonement)… Esau is meant to be overwhelmed by the present. How, then, is he to lift up Jacob's face (forgive)? If his face is covered up, can Jacob come and see eye to eye with him? Of course not. Such a reconciliation was impossible to begin with.[78]

Indeed, the impossibility of genuine reconciliation between them may be affirmed by Jacob's unwillingness to travel home with his brother after they meet (Gen. 33:15-20). Moreover, as Gunn and Fewell claim, biblical characters speak to specific occasions like real-life people do; they are also frequently prejudiced and self-serving. Public situations do not necessarily reveal the private person, and threatening situations can also color a

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[76] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 206.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 208.

character's speech.[79] Here, the narrator's voice appears to dissuade a face-value reading of Jacob's words. Both Esau and the reader, Gunn and Fewell contend, are led by Jacob's speech to believe he will follow Esau to his home: "What we discover from this discrepancy between speech and action is that Jacob, for all his desire to placate Esau, is still the deceiver, concerned for his security, but hardly his integrity."[80] As Levinas has claimed, each new meeting reconstitutes being.[81] Even following the Jabbok encounter, Jacob's "being" is reinscribed, not as Israel, but as Jacob, deceiver. Esau's face, however, is merely one of the faces for which Jacob must acknowledge responsibility. Levinas's lengthy description is worth quoting in full:

> But, in its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business. It is as if that invisible death, ignored by the Other, whom already it concerns by the nakedness of its face, were already "regarding" me prior to confronting me, and becoming the death that stares me in the face. The other man's death calls me into question, as if, by my possible future indifference, I had become the accomplice of the death to which the other, who cannot see it, is exposed; and as if, even before vowing myself to him, I had to answer for this death of the other, and to accompany the Other in his moral solitude. The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.[82]

Jacob's treatment of each of these faces is foregrounded at the Jabbok. In the face of Elohim/ish, Jacob must answer for them all.

The Face Of All Faces

Here, the Face that summons Jacob is the Face that represents all the human faces in the story. The face that summons Jacob is first Esau's face. As a twin, Esau's face

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[79] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 69.
[80] Ibid., 72.
[81] Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," 65.
[82] Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," 83.

presents Jacob with a not-so-alien alterity. It is a face he recognizes. If the face that summons Jacob is a face that says, "Thou shalt not kill," here in the darkness of night Jacob is faced with the very real possibility that he has, in fact, killed Esau in a way. In his study of ethics in the book of Genesis, Burton L. Visotzky avers,

> The real blessing Jacob has robbed from Esau is his father. . . Esau cries for his own loss of innocence. . . He cries for the loss of his father, who appears to be an all-too-willing party to this deception…He cries as he realizes that whatever blessing he may wrest from his father, it is time to leave home, it is no longer his.[83]

When Jacob deceives Isaac, the real victim is Esau. The face that summons Jacob second is Isaac's face. It is a face he has deceived, a face of pure nudity and vulnerability that he has exposed and violated. It is a face he has bid adieu because his own existence has caused too much pain to stay; and if he stayed it would have caused additional pain, with one brother fulfilling the threat of killing the other. The face that summons Jacob third is the face of Leah, unloved and held captive to a patriarchal system which she cannot escape but occasionally subverts (Gen. 30:9, 16). The face that summons Jacob fourth is the face of Rachel, who summons him: "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen. 30:2). As Fewell and Gunn maintain, "Here lies the poignant trap of patriarchal motherhood: women face social death without children and physical death to bear children. The risks and the sorrows, the ambiguities and the ironies, are all but passed over in the rush to tell a man's story."[84] Despite this reality, Jacob's answer is a dismissive rebuff: "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30:2). Despite the narrator's comment that Jacob "loves" Rachel, even prior to placing her in a caravan of the faceless, he appears unsympathetic to her plight. And while God has heard their

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[83] Burton L. Visotzky, *The Genesis of Ethics* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996), 148.
[84] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, 79.

cries, he too is implicated, like Jacob whom he supports, in the women's struggles. Fewell and Gunn affirm:

> While Jacob 'struggles with beings both divine and human and yet prevails' (Gen. 32:28), Rachel and Leah merely struggle with each other. While Jacob confronts God face to face, Rachel and Leah can only confront each other. Which is the more profound struggle? Rachel says, 'Struggles of God I have struggled with my sister and I have prevailed' (30:8). Indeed God has been there, opening and closing wombs, taking the side of the oppressed, but at the same time sanctioning their oppression. Just as Jacob declares to Esau, 'Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God' (33:10), so too after his turbulent encounter with 'the face of God' (32:30), we must wonder, is there much difference between struggling with God and struggling with one's sister?[85]

Furthermore, Visotzky raises questions about the sincerity of Jacob's love for Rachel in the first place. He points to a subtle inclusion of economics alongside the acquisition of Rachel as wife. Visotzky states: "The scene is even more subtle in its reportage, for Jacob does not only notice Rachel's beauty, he also notices Laban's flocks. It is a small but telling point…This time Jacob, fleeing Canaan, counts Laban's wealth in flocks."[86] The face that summons Jacob fifth is the face of Laban, with whom he has been trapped in a codependent relationship of deception. As Visotzky adds, "Little does [Jacob] suspect, when greeted by Uncle Laban's kiss and hug, that he himself is being frisked and cased. As the rabbis said it many centuries ago, 'When Laban kisses you, count your teeth afterward.'"[87] The face that summons him last of all is the Face of Elohim, a mysterious and dark countenance that has looked—and sounded—much like his own throughout the narrative. In looking into the face of Elohim, Jacob looks into his own face, as Zornberg has affirmed:

> …Jacob must expose himself to fear, to face-to-face encounter with what he most dreads. He must confront the nameless horror of the man who grips him, binds

[85] Ibid., 79-80.
[86] Visotzky, *The Genesis of Ethics*, 163.
[87] Ibid., 163-164.

> him arm and leg, if he is to acquire the partial freedom of a limping hero, who has learned his new name—and incidentally, the mirror identity of the face of his dread."[88]

In looking into the face of Elohim, Jacob looks into the Face of All Faces. He is responsible for them all. Every face, whether loved for its "shapely beauty" or despised for its "weak eyes" wears the same expression, "Thou shalt not kill." He is responsible for their lives and their deaths before he can claim his own existence, his own being. It is their lives, their faces, that he has worn, stolen, killed. He is responsible for their deaths, for all the ways in which each of them has silently bid him not to kill. And here, Jacob is himself faced with the possibility of death.

"Prior to death there is always a last chance; this is what heroes seize, not death," writes Levinas.[89] But Jacob is no hero. He looks into the Face of All Faces and demands more than a last chance—he demands the blessing that has already been promised to him by the Other who has been behind him all along (Gen. 32:27). It is this blessing of "everything" that he will ultimately receive, as he later implores Esau, "Pray, take my blessing that has been brought to you, *for God has favored me* and *I have everything*" (Gen. 33:11 Alter) (emphasis mine). God has, in fact, "favored" Jacob all along. Here in the darkness, with death staring him in the face, Jacob receives not death but, once again, the blessing he demands.

Rather than bestowing an unambiguous blessing upon Jacob and taking his leave, the Face lingers a while longer, leans in closer and requires a response. In Derridian terms, perhaps Jacob's self-revelation was a kind of surrender: "To surrender to the other, and this is the impossible, would amount to giving oneself over in going toward the other,

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[88] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 240.
[89] Levinas, "Time and the Other," 73.

to coming toward the other but without crossing the threshold, and to respect, to loving even the invisibility that keeps the other inaccessible."[90] Scholars have variously spoken of a kind of "conversion" that Jacob undergoes in this encounter. It is surely not a conversion in the religious sense that leads to a moral change but rather another kind of conversion, a turning of face toward face.[91] A conVERsion is a turning toward the Other, just as in the Hebrew "face" (*panim*) denotes a similar kind of movement, an inside motion.[92] It is this turning of face toward face in the midst of movement against (wrestling) and movement toward that allows for the real blessing Jacob receives—a new name, "Israel," God-striver and one who has striven with all the faces in the narrative, including his own. The blessing is not in knowing the name of the Face standing before him, for the Face rightly resists such signification: "Why should you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:30 Alter). To pin down the name exactly, like assigning one Face to the Face Jacob wrestled, is to limit, reduce to a signifying trace. Here, in the dark, to save the name is to save the Face. It is, after all, Jacob's face that the Face of all Faces is most concerned with. For Levinas, the Face of the Infinite is in fact a trace of all the Faces. The possibility of this interaction engenders desire:

> In the access to the face there is certainly also an access to the idea of God…For my part, I think that the relation to the Infinite is not knowledge, but a Desire." A desire cannot be satisfied; a desire nourishes itself by its own hungers and is augmented by consummation; and desire is like a thought that thinks more than it thinks, or more than what it thinks.[92]

For Jacob, who has everything, this is the blessing of the face to face: to see into the Face of All Faces and to desire the one thing he lacks—a face of his own. It is in the name

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[90] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 74.
[91] For one could argue quite strongly that Jacob does not change much morally.
[92] F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 819.
[92] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 92.

change—and paradoxically, in the wound—that he is individuated from the faces he has sacrificed and worn. It is in the Face to Face encounter that he is individuated and able to face Esau with a face of his own, recognizing in his estranged brother the Face of All Faces: "Accept from me this gift; for to see your Face is like seeing the Face of God, and you have received me favorably" (Gen. 33:10 TNK). The Face of All Faces has given a gift to one who has not deserved it—by showing, once again, "favor." The Face of All Faces is, after all, obligated—*such an act is necessary.* Nevertheless, for all the poetic possibilities offered at the Face of God, the realities of facing life with God on the other side of the Jabbok loom large. Jacob's language and behavior towards Esau are ambiguous, even following the Jabbok encounter; so too is the relationship between the nation and its god, who continues to hold the potential to kill or to offer blessing.

Nanette Stahl notes that in the context of Israelite history, the Peniel/Penuel encounter surely points to the ambiguity of this necessity, at times sensing that God is on Israel's side, truly orchestrating blessing, and at others fully aware of the trauma of the exile. Thus Israel's narrative memory as one who strives with God, strives with humankind, and prevails is the hope of blessing; it is the hope of God's obligation. For Stahl and Fishbane, the legal addendum (Gen. 32:33) is a perennial reminder that Jacob/Israel has been made vulnerable in its most intimate of places; it is a staunch reminder and reflection of the ambiguity of Israel's relationship to God in the wake of exile. Stahl writes,

> If the night is a symbol of danger and possible death, the rising sun that greets [Jacob] as he crosses the river (32:32) celebrates his transformation into Israel, eponymous father of God's chosen nation. […] Yet the legal addendum does not confirm that transformation; rather it reverses the process, and calls into question that which had seemingly already been promised. Contradiction and opposition

> [wrestling] are thus present in both the narrative of the struggle and its legal etiological conclusion.[93]

It is a representation of the hope for God's favor but an acknowledgement of the ambiguity of that favor in light of Israel's literary history. And, it should be added, it is an acknowledgement of this ambiguity in light of the larger post-exilic reality the story represents.

[93] Nanette Stahl, *Law and Liminality in the Bible,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 202 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 85-86.

The Wound

"You oppose me to myself. How could I ever win this fight?"
"Defeat is the price agreed upon."[1]

The patriarch Jacob is often depicted as a man of victory—he wrestles with God and with men and prevails. Yet the Jabbok encounter does not conclude with an image of robust victory. Instead, a wounded Jacob is left limping. Near the end of his life, Israel's eponymous ancestor describes his days as "few" and "evil" (Gen. 47:9). Moreover, the narrative does not deliver a burial notice for Jacob typical of the patriarchs.[2] He does not die "old and contented," nor is he buried at a "ripe old age."[3] The self-reflection of the aged patriarch, as well as his narrative epitaph, depicts Jacob not as a man of victory but as a man of defeat. Jacob's is a life of deep suffering, and after the struggle is said and done, Jacob's wound remains.

In this chapter, I utilize the poststructuralist insights of Jacques Lacan to examine three different wounds in the Jabbok story: the wounds of the characters Jacob and Elohim/ish, and the wounds of the community telling the story. First, I argue that Jacob is wounded *before* arriving at the Jabbok. In attempting to grasp at objects—birthrights,

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[1] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, Vol. 1 (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 19.
[2] Abraham's burial notice is described in the following way: "And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; and there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife" (Gen. 25:8-10 TNK). Similarly, Isaac's burial is described this way: "Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob" (Gen. 35:28-29 TNK). Jacob's burial notice, however, is terse by comparison, failing to describe his life as "old and contented" or that he died at a "ripe old age." Instead, the narrative describes Jacob's death in this way: "When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 49:33 TNK).
[3] While both Jacob and the narrative do, on the one hand, depict his final days in this way, admittedly, a counter reading also exists. That Jacob lives to be 147 years old (Gen. 47:28), dies surrounded by a superabundance of male heirs, and is buried with his ancestors (Gen. 49:29-32) is also an inescapable narrative reality. By the standards of the Ancient Near East, his is surely not just a good death but an idyllic death.

blessings, moveable property, wives and children—and the identity of Esau—Jacob is "cut" or disassociated from himself. He is constrained by the desires of the visible others in the story world, as well as by the discourse of the Other—here the storytellers—who impose their desires upon him. Jacob is wounded, full of holes, before being wounded at the Jabbok. Second, I argue that just as Jacob is full of holes, so too is Elohim/ish. God displays a profound relationality at the Jabbok, grasping at Jacob to fill an invisible lack for he knows not what. The assailant's invisibility correlates to the impassibility, the impossibility, the invisible nature of his own deferred desire. Here God is not only wounded—God is the Wound.[4] Finally, I draw upon the socio-narratological insights of Arthur W. Frank to suggest that the wounds in the story are not only individual, but also communal. For Frank, a wound serves as the source of suffering stories.[5] Suffering stories in general—and this particular story of suffering—are told not only by individuals but by a community of wounded storytellers. Thus Jacob's wound is polyvalent—it is about the wounds sustained by a man, before and after the Jabbok encounter—and also a testimony by the Israelites of their deep *agon*, their deep suffering at the hands of one who is said to have inscribed them on the palms of his hands (Isa. 49:16). Jacob's wound is the source of Israel's story, embodied in his individual body and also memorialized through communal (non)practice (Gen. 32:32).

Like the Jabbok text itself, Jacob's wound continues to testify, creating possibility for what Emmanuel Levinas and Arthur Frank have called a "half-opening."[6] This half-

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[4] In this chapter, the Wound will refer to Jacob's wrestling partner, who is named by the narrator as אִישׁ and by Jacob as אֱלֹהִים. The character himself, however, resists such signification, choosing instead to be known not by a name but rather by an action—as one who wounds his wrestling partner.

[5] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 183.

[6] Frank draws on Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 158. Levinas queries: "Is not

opening does not attempt to suture the wounds of the man or the nation by (re)interpreting the Jabbok encounter as victorious. Instead, in drawing on Lacan and Frank, I allow Jacob's wound to remain open. It is a Lacanian excess that continues to testify to the defeat of a man and the suffering of a nation.

Jacob's Wound

In his psychoanalytical analysis of the Jacob Cycle, Shmuel Klitsner describes Jacob's story as a "struggle for wholeness."[7] Klitsner's phrasing is aptly chosen, as Jacob and Esau "struggle together, kick and shove one another, crush one another," even in the womb, an iterative and violent action suggested by the Hithpolel stem (יִתְרֹצְצוּ) (Gen. 25:22). For Klitsner, wholeness and human autonomy are synonymous. He maintains that Jacob's struggle for human autonomy can be traced "by reading between the lines, by noting trauma, resistance, cognitive dissonance, and repression, and by discerning compulsive repetition, slips of the tongue, dreams as expressions of the unconscious, and the therapeutic effect of transference."[8] When viewed through this psychoanalytical lens, and specifically Lacanian thought, Jacob appears wounded even prior to the Jabbok encounter. Jacob's wound precludes him from taking hold of his own life *as Jacob*. Instead, he is a man "split in two," as his behavior and "slips of the tongue" suggest. It is this disintegration that the Wound uncovers at the Jabbok. In taking him to what Lacan

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the evil of suffering—extreme passivity, impotence, abandonment and solitude—also the unassumable and thus the possibility of a half-opening, and more, precisely, the possibility that wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh happen there is the original call for aid, for curative help, for help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation?" In Frank's reading of Levinas, nameless suffering is not given meaning, but neither does that suffering remain useless. Frank says that while Levinas rightly avers that suffering remains useless, nameless, and untouched, suffering is also, in its call to others, not useless. For everyone rendered "other" by suffering, perhaps in that act of witness some nameless suffering is opened. It is, for both Levinas and Frank, the *possibility* of a "half-opening."

[7] Shmuel Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis* (Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2009), 38.

[8] Ibid.

has called the "ecstatic limits of 'thou art that,'"[9] in saying his name, "I am Jacob" (Gen. 32:27), Jacob experiences an ironic reversal of his wounds, even as he is wounded once more.

Prior to the Jabbok struggle, Jacob both acquiesces to and colludes in behavior(s) that squelch his subjectivity. His actions are characteristic of his name—he attempts to "grasp" at objects—birthrights, blessings, moveable property, wives and children. None of these objects can quench desire, yet each of them represent the *objet petit a*, which is represented by a diversity of partial objects in different partial drives. As Dylan Evans clarifies, "The *objet petit a* is not the object towards which desire tends, but the cause of desire. Desire is not in relation to an object, but a relation to a lack."[10] Nevertheless, even here Jacob's unconscious fears and desires manifest themselves. Each narrative step taken by Jacob deepens his wound, even as it transitions him, ironically, towards *devenir*, coming into being. Focalizing the unconscious demonstrates the polyvalence of Jacob's wound.

Lacan's explication of the unconscious is worth quoting in full:

> The unconscious is *discours de l'Autre* (the discourse of the Other), in which the *de* is to be understood in the sense of the Latin *de* (objective determination): *de Alio in oratione* (completed by: *tua res agitor*). But we must also add that man's desire is the *désir de l'Autre* (the desire of the Other) in which the *de* provides what grammarians call the subjective determination, namely, that it is *qua* Other that he desires (which is what provides the true compass of human passion). That is why the question *of* the Other, which comes back to the subject from the place which he expects an oracular reply in some such form as "*che vuoi*?," "what do you want?," is the one that best leads him to the path of his own desire…[11]

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[9] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 7.
[10] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 38. Lacan's concept of the *objet a* will be dealt with in further detail in the analysis that follows.
[11] Lacan, *Écrits*, 312.

Discourse and desire cohere in Lacan's understanding of the unconscious. It is the discourse of the Other which wounds the subject, causing an unavoidable alienation. For Lacan, the Other is the symbolic order—the language a subject is born into and must learn to speak in order to articulate desire. The subject is trapped in these spoken and unspoken discourses. S/he is shaped not only by his/her nascent desires but especially through the imposed desires and demands of others. Caught in discourse yet severed from his/her own desire, the subject unfolds, be-comes, in the locus of the Other. This causes an unavoidable alienation, and for Lacan, "alienation is destiny."[12] The weight of language's inscription upon the subject is inescapable. On the other hand, the demand(s) and discourse(s) of the Other sends the subject on a winding quest to discover desire, lack, and subjectivity. It is this lack—what Lacan called the *manque à être* ("want-to-be")[13]—which sets the Jacob Cycle in motion and undergirds the narrative as a whole.

The Jacob Cycle opens with lack, וַיֶּעְתַּר, the pleading of Isaac on behalf of his barren wife. Rebekah, a barren ancestress, takes her place among matriarchs and other women whose wombs must be opened by Yahweh.[14] Jacob's story, like his body, is intertwined with Rebekah's at the deepest level. His body is entwined with her umbilical cord, and his life attempts to fulfill her lack. Klitsner views Rebekah's as a "consuming" love that severs Jacob from his own identity. He states, "Perhaps it is precisely the unconditional, and all-embracing character of her love that leaves Jacob with what we shall discern as a persistent sense of lack of entitlement. It is a love that is based on Rebekah's vision…. It is not a love that is dependent upon or reflective of Jacob's

[12] Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (New York: Routledge Critical Thinkers, 2005), 72.
[13] Lacan, *Écrits*, 230.
[14] Sarah, Gen. 21:1-2; Rachel, Gen. 30:22-4; Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:19-20; Ruth/Naomi, Ruth 4:13-14.

fulfillment of his autonomous self."[15] The consuming character of Rebekah's love precludes Jacob from self-actualization. Klitsner adds, "It is therefore a love that leaves him hungry and desperate for another kind of love, for the blessing of a father who seems to love only Esau."[16] For Lacan, every human subject is a wounded subject. Klitsner's use of "hunger" is an apt Lacanian description not only of Jacob's lack, but also of the lack of each character in the story. In Rebekah's case, not even the birth of Jacob and Esau can satiate. Not even the birth of another human being, a beloved child, can fill unconscious desire without remainder. Here, not even Jacob, the son Rebekah is said to love, can completely fill her lack. So too Jacob's lack, like the wound that he will later receive, remains; and it is Esau's face that reveals Jacob's lack.

From the beginning of the Jacob Cycle, Esau is a mirror for all that Jacob lacks. Jacob's lack propels the narrative forward, sending Jacob on a quest that is both actual and existential. Struggling against one another, Jacob and Esau are fraternal rivals and competitors for material resources from birth. In the words of Lacan, they are locked within a struggle where one cannot do without the other; yet at the same time, the relationship is conflictual.[17] All subjects are both specular "I's," private selves, as well as social "I's," social selves.[18] A Lacanian reading problematizes the construction of a private self, whether a character or a person in real life. Subjectivity is always elusive. Characters may not be stable amalgams of consciousness but instead multiple signifiers crowding around a proper name. Yet Jacob, like every other "other," is also a social self who is constructed by a narrator and contained in the story world. He is also

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[15] Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, 51-52.
[16] Ibid., 52.
[17] Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 24.
[18] Ibid.

representative of the community producing the story, whose demands and desires are foregrounded. The community preexists the characters, and the characters are the discourse of that community. Therefore the "social I" of the characters is polyvalent, existing on several levels.

Within the story world, however, Jacob and Esau are linked by more than an umbilical cord. As Sean Homer notes, "To exist is to be recognized an-other…The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves. We are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other."[19] Jacob becomes the guarantor of Esau's existence through providing for a need that can be satisfied—his physical hunger (Gen. 25:30). Both the narrator and Esau describe Esau's condition as "faint," "weary" (עָיֵף) (Gen.25:29, 30). Moreover, the use of the Hiphil imperative, "cause me to eat greedily" (הַלְעִיטֵנִי), suggests Esau's is a rapacious hunger which must be assuaged immediately. Esau views himself as close to death—הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת (Gen. 25:32). Nevertheless, Esau's "hunger" is a lack or need that can be satiated. For a moment, Jacob holds the key (or the stew) that Esau lacks. Jacob's hunger, however, cannot be quenched through a bowl of "red red stuff" (הָאָדֹם הָאָדֹם הַזֶּה הָאָדֹם הָאָדֹם הַזֶּה).

Esau's existence threatens fulfillment of Jacob's desire to be the desire of his father. As the firstborn, Esau was promised the birthright (בְּכֹרָה). The birthright granted him material blessing, as well as familial and spiritual authority.[20] Reuben Ahroni notes

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[19] Ibid., 26.

[20] In Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 184-185, Sarna notes that along with the first fruits of the soil and the first male of herd and flock, the firstborn son was viewed as sacred to God. The firstborn son was the guarantor of the family's line. He preserved their ancestral heritage and was second only to the head of the family, whose successor he would become. The status of the firstborn, then, was two-sided: he was bound to the responsibilities and

that Israelite society accorded special status to the firstborn, man and beast alike.[21] The firstborn was considered the sacred, exclusive possession of God; as such he was accorded spiritual and material privilege. Jacob's blessing of Reuben (Gen. 49:3) and God's reference to Israel as firstborn son (Ex. 4:22) both indicate a unique and intimate relationship.[22] The firstborn also benefitted monetarily: "Instead, he must accept the first-born, the son of the unloved one, and allot to him a double portion of all he possesses; since he is the first fruit of his vigor, the birthright is his due" (Deut. 21:17 TNK). Nahum Sarna comments that this law in Deuteronomy indicates an earlier situation where the father could disregard primogeniture if he chose.[23] Nevertheless, Sarna views the narrator's lack of comment upon Jacob and Esau's barter as sanction for Jacob's behavior. Sarna states,

> There is no doubt that the way Jacob acquired his brother's birthright could not have been considered either unusual or objectionable in the context of his times. As a matter of fact, there is every reason to believe that Jacob's dealings with Esau and his father represent a stage of morality in which the successful application of shrewd opportunism was highly respected.[24]

Whether Sarna's scholarly intuition is correct or not, the oracle preceding the brothers' birth indicates that Esau's subservience to Jacob was a foregone conclusion (Gen. 25:23).

Beyond discussion of Jacob's morality, the larger issue involves what the birthright represents for Jacob as character and for the community whose interests this story serves. For a community of wounded storytellers, the tangible transaction of food

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obligations of the family, yet he was also accorded the rights and privileges associated with his status. This status was formalized by the father's testimony blessing.

[21] Ex. 13:2; 22:28-29; Numb. 8:14-18; Deut. 15:19.

[22] Reuben Ahroni, "Why Did Esau Spurn the Birthright?: A Study in Biblical Interpretation," *Judaism* 29, no. 3 (1980): 325.

[23] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*,185.

[24] Ibid., 188.

for birthright demonstrates a deeper desire—for land, blessing, and relationship. These promises are (re)iterated to Abraham no less than three times (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-5; 17:1-8); to Isaac in the one chapter of Genesis devoted solely to him (Gen. 26:23-24); and to Jacob in the midst of distress (Gen. 28:13-15). This repetition demonstrates a profound need for this wounded community to continue to remember and to lay claim to Yahweh's involvement with them. Allowing the character Jacob/Israel to find his place in the promissory blessing(s) made to his father and grandfather allows the nation that bears his name to find reassurance in the midst of their suffering. If the promises of God are made to Abraham, Isaac, and Esau, Jacob's blessing is indirect and his name—and therefore the name of the nation itself—is of no lasting import. However, to be a direct heir of God's promissory blessing is to be deeply rooted in the land, sacredly connected to God, and remembered forever. To be a direct heir of God's promissory blessing is to be directly involved in all that God is doing. Jacob's grasping of the birthright demonstrates a community's unconscious desire to lay claim to a predetermined yet deferred fate (Gen. 25:23). The repetition of these promissory blessings is, for the community, a *durcharbeiten*, a "working through" of their fears and trauma. As a character, however, Jacob is rendered vulnerable to the one who threatens his desire, Esau, as well as to the one able to respond to it, the Wound.

When Jacob barters soup for birthright and later proclaims himself *to be Esau*, he is "cut" or "wounded" and disassociated from himself. Jacob's self-(mis)identification as Esau is, in Lacanian thought, an example of the radical heteronomy that gapes within every human subject.[25] Indeed, Lacan asked, "Who, then, is this other to whom I am

[25] Lacan, *Écrits*, 172.

more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is still he who agitates me?"[26] For Lacan, the presence of this other mediated between the subject and the double of the subject, a kind of "counterpart."[27] In the Jacob Cycle, Esau is a counterpart, a proximate other, whose existence in the world of the Other—the world of discourse—always already threatens Jacob's subjectivity. This "cut" or "wound" in the story world also symbolizes what Lacan called a "cut in the discourse," the representative bar placed between signifier and signified.[28] Jacob's wound—both prior to and after the Jabbok encounter—suggests a cut in the discourse of national (divine) blessing by throwing it into question and threatening its fulfillment. While Elohim/ish threatens its fulfillment at the Jabbok encounter, for much of the Jacob Cycle, Esau poses the threat. Narratively, this threat revolves around Esau's sacral connection to his father. Here, it is the boys' (m)other who responds to that threat. Narratively, the characters Rebekah, Jacob, and Yahweh function as tricksters. However, as a figure representative of a community and its interests, Rebekah is a symbolic other representative of the Other. The central desire for both the other(s) and the Other is to lay claim to land, blessing, and relationship. Within the patriarchal narratives, Rebekah is not the only figure who expresses anxiety that a (dis)elect character may receive the promise (Gen. 15:2-3). In Abram's case, it is Yahweh who provides assurance that this will not occur. In the Jacob Cycle, intervention comes through human autonomy.

The deception of Isaac is Rebekah's idea—it is her vision. Rebekah's words to Jacob are in the imperative: "please let go" (לְכִי־נָא); and a second-person causative

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 299.

translated as an imperative: "and you bring in" (וְהָבֵאתָ) (Gen. 27:10). Her discourse demands. While Jacob makes some protestation (Gen. 27:11-12), in the end, he follows her instructions and remains silent as she dresses him. As Lacan observed, the Other has its own ideas about a person's needs.[29] For Jacob, it is Rebekah's speech—the imperatives she makes to her son—that functions as the Other. Her discourse is that Other which makes its demands on him. Yet for Lacan there seems to be a point of refusal, too: "In the final analysis, by refusing to satisfy the mother's demand, is not the child demanding that the mother should have a desire outside him, because the way towards the desire that he lacks is to be found there?"[30] Despite his protestation, Jacob does not refuse his mother. He does not refuse the Other but instead remains trapped in that discourse. For Lacan, demand alienates even as it engenders desire: "Desire is produced in the beyond of the demand, in that, in articulating the life of the subject according to its conditions. Demand cuts off the need from that life. But desire is also hollowed within the demand, in that, as an unconditional demand of presence and absence, demand evokes the want-to-be…"[31] While the discourse of the (m)Other does engender desire, Jacob's desire recedes into the background. It is instead Jacob's "aggressivity" that is foregrounded in his protestations.

For Lacan, aggressivity was an image of corporal dislocation for the subject, measured, among other things, partly in unfinished sentences, verbal hesitations, inflections, and slips of the tongue.[32] Lacan also said that unconscious desires manifested themselves in "gaps" or "ruptures" which structured the unconscious. Here, Lacan

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[29] Ibid., 263.
[30] Ibid., 264.
[31] Ibid., 265.
[32] Ibid., 10.

remained close to Freud, who believed the unconscious manifested itself in those moments where defense mechanisms are at their weakest—through dreams; in slips of the tongue when individuals say things they do not intend but that nevertheless reveal a great deal about them; through jokes; or through the symptoms of mental distress or illness. For Lacan, the unconscious manifested itself precisely in these "impediments" or "failures" where the speaking subject fails in his/her use of language.[33] Following the usurpation of the בְּכֹרָה, Klitsner views a "slip of the tongue" during Jacob's theft of the בְּרָכָה as indicative of his repressed moral conflict. Rabbi Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg first noticed the puzzling use of the term "perhaps" (אוּלַי) rather than "lest" (פֶּן) in Genesis 27:12. Mecklenberg stated:

> "Perhaps my father will feel me": The word " פֶּן—lest" implies that the speaker does not wish the matter to come to pass—it has a negative undertone, cf.: "lest he put forth his hand and take too of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:22) or "lest we be scattered about on the face of the earth" (Gen. 11:4)…Had Jacob wished to express the hope that his father *not* feel him, he should have said—"lest—פֶּן —my father feel me." From here it would seem that Jacob did not favor the attempt to deceive his father and that he preferred to let the matter proceed without intervention…Jacob hoped that his mother would cancel the attempt as a result of his plea. Thus, he said, "perhaps"—"אוּלַי ." The word *perhaps* (אוּלַי) is used when the speaker *desires* the matter to come to pass.[34]

Perhaps Mecklenberg's explanation is intended to exonerate the patriarch from the duplicity of his actions, casting him in a better light. For Klitsner, however, application of psychoanalytic thought yields a different reading. Klitsner states,

> Jacob's use of the inappropriate word betrays an unconscious discomfort that is revealed in such a hidden way to the reader precisely because it remains hidden to Jacob himself. For Jacob, it is a slip of the tongue that goes unnoticed by Rebecca,

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[33] Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 67-68.
[34] Nehama Leibowitz, "Your Brother Came With Deceit," in *Studies in Bereshit* (Jerusalem: WZO, 1973), 264-265.

> and by himself. For the biblical narrative, it is an intentionally artful "slip of the pen," gratefully noticed by the reader.[35]

Freudian and Lacanian thought would claim that through an unconscious slip of the tongue, Jacob speaks truth without realizing it. Yet despite the repressed moral conflict proposed by Klitsner, Jacob dupes his father, twice repeating, "I am Esau" (Gen. 27:19, 24). When Jacob veils his identity, he nevertheless reveals a fundamental Lacanian truth: any verbal self-disclosure can only be a disclosure of self-division.[36] As the Bible and Culture Collective affirm, "The I (*je*), even when it is God's *I*, must necessarily lag behind its speech; its speech precedes it only to misrepresent it."[37] Jacob's speech effectively transfers the symbolic capital of the story world to himself. Outside the story world, however, birthright and blessing are merely signifiers. Lacan viewed a signifier as that which represents the subject for another signifier. Lacan noted, "This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only for something else."[38] These signifiers of birthright and blessing fall short in representing desire. Lacan viewed the subject's relation to the signifier as a relation that is embodied in an enunciation (*énonciation*) whose being trembles with the vacillation that comes back to its own statement (*enoncé*).[39] The trembling statement, "I am Esau," which procures the blessing, functions merely as a placeholder for desire. Jacob's desire is not verbalized here—the discourse could not contain it anyway, as Lacan noted that there is a limit to how far desire can be articulated

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[35] Klitsner, *Wrestling Jacob: Deception, Identity, and Freudian Slips in Genesis*, 71.
[36] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," in *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 201.
[37] Ibid., 202.
[38] Lacan, *Écrits*, 316.
[39] Ibid., 300.

in speech.[40] His desire is never actually named—only hinted at, later at Bethel. For Lacan, desire is bound up with the desire of the (m)Other, but in this loop also lies the desire (on the part of the subject) to know.[41] For now, however, the discourse of the (m)Other, coupled with the insufficiency of the signifiers, alienates Jacob as subject.

Rebekah's demand alienates Jacob both psychically and geographically. Jacob's subsequent expulsion (וַיֵּצֵא) simultaneously disassociates him from his identity, even as it puts him on a path towards recovering it. In his dream at Bethel, Klitsner notes another manifestation of Jacob's unconscious fear and desire. The repetition of the promissory blessing in Genesis 28:13-15 startles Jacob from his sleep, causing him to proclaim Yahweh's presence there (Gen. 28:16-17). When the morning dawns, however, Jacob offers a conditional vow—if God remains with him, protects him on the journey, gives him bread to eat, clothing to wear, and allows him to return safely to his father's house—Yahweh will be his God (Gen. 28:20-22). When the sublime of the night gives way to the mundane of the morning, Jacob's daytime consciousness takes over. Klitsner draws a distinction between the awakening (יָקִץ) and the arising (שָׁכַם), viewing them as two stages in the internalization of the dream. He notes,

> As will happen when one awakens suddenly in the night from a particularly vivid and portentous dream, one is struck with the power and novelty of the dream's insight…But in the morning the same dream will have faded and what remains will have been translated into the context of one's reality, one's daytime consciousness. The lofty language of this epiphany will give way to the pragmatic attempt to integrate the dream into the categories of the here and now.[42]

Through a Lacanian lens, Jacob's dream at Bethel and subsequent vow demonstrate a desire to find his place among the patriarchs, to return home, and to know the protective

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[40] Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 37.
[41] Lacan, *Écrits*, 301.
[42] Ibid., 83.

hand of God. The dream is an epiphany or theophany, representing Jacob's hopes and fears. It is Jacob's hope to experience blessing, entitlement, *as Jacob*. In the morning, however, the dream gives way to anxious realities. In this wilderness space, Jacob is geographically/physically alienated. He is also existentially alienated, cast off from all that he knows. It is precisely this alienation, however, that moves him towards subjectivity,[43] as alienation is tied inextricably to desire.

Lacan maintained that the pain of separation fuels an individual's desire. Desire is not a need, because a need can be satisfied. Desire refers to something beyond basic human needs that cannot be satisfied. In grasping at object(s) and/or position, Jacob attempts to assuage an intangible, nameless desire with tangible objects. This is ultimately fruitless. Desire cannot be satisfied at all, and certainly not by grasping at things. Moreover, while the desire of the Other exceeds or escapes the subject, Lacan believed that something was always recoverable—the *objet a*, the object or cause of desire.[44] Homer describes Lacan's *objet a* poignantly:

> The *objet a* is not, therefore, an object we have lost, because then we would be able to find it and satisfy our desire. It is rather the constant sense we have, as subjects, that something is lacking or missing from our lives. We are always searching for fulfillment, for knowledge, for possessions, for love, and whenever we achieve these goals there is always something more we desire; we cannot quite pinpoint it but we know it is there.[45]

For Lacan, the *objet a* is closely connected to the Real. While Lacan's description of the Real shifted over time, for Lacan the Real is no(thing). It is not a material object in the world or human body, or even "reality" itself. Rather, the Real exists at the limit of the socio-symbolic universe and is constantly in tension with it, a support for social reality

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[43] Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 71.
[44] Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 128-129.
[45] Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 87.

even as it undermines it.[46] Moreover, the Real resists symbolization, the "traumatic kernel at the core of subjectivity." It is associated with the death drive and *jouissance* as the "ultimate, unspeakable limit of human existence."[47] Above all, however, Lacan associated the Real with trauma, derivative of the Greek word for wound (τραῦμα). The Real is a "cut" or "wound." The Real is not necessarily a physical "event" but is instead a psychical event. A psychic trauma arises from the confrontation between an external stimulus and the subject's inability to understand and master these excitations. A psychological scar remains on the subject's unconscious that will resurface later in life.[48] Lacan stated, "This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real."[49] This discontinuity becomes a trauma, implying "blockage" or "fixation" in the process of signification, where a subject is fixed in an earlier phase of development. The memory continues to return, repeating the suffering continually. Moreover, the Real eludes language because that suffering cannot be put into words; there always remains a "residue" that cannot be transformed through language. This excess, this "X," as Lacan called it, is the Real. Lacan rendered an encounter with the Real as impossible,[50] therefore individuals are condemned to mourn the real for the rest of their lives.[51] And, it should be added, this fate renders individuals vulnerable to that which they mourn, to that which they desire.

Jacob's wound(s) ultimately render him vulnerable to the Wound, whom he beseeches at Bethel: "And I am brought back in peace to the house of my father" (וְשַׁבְתִּי

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[46] Ibid., 81.
[47] Ibid., 94.
[48] Ibid., 83.
[49] Lacan, *Écrits*, 299.
[50] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 207.
[51] Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 90.

בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי) (Gen. 28:21a). He prays when he most vulnerable—at night, on the run and exiled from all he knows. The encounter at the Jabbok is predicated upon this prayer that expresses, perhaps for the first time, a bit of the Real Jacob which eludes Jacob's grasp. To pray for return "in peace," "in safety," "in wholeness" (בְּשָׁלוֹם) is to pray for *tikkun olam*, the reparation of (Jacob's) world. It is a prayer which encompasses a hoped-for reversal of all the alienation(s) Jacob has known—geographical/physical, interpersonal, and existential. Jacob is made vulnerable to the one he prays to—here referred to as the Wound but referenced by W. Lee Humphreys as a "searching God,"[52] and, it should be added, a desiring God. It is this nebulous character which wounds Jacob Otherwise at the Jabbok. However, Jacob is not only vulnerable to the Wound. In coming to Jacob at the Jabbok, the Wound is also vulnerable. Both the Wound's desire and Jacob's Desire are foregrounded in the Jabbok encounter, where danger and intimacy cohere in Jacob's wound. The psychically wounded hero encounters his psychically wounded god. The physical wound Jacob will sustain as a result of the encounter is the outward mark of that agonistic struggle with the Wound.

The Wound

Lacan understood desire as something that was experienced not only by humans but by the divine as well. The desire of God is not unlike the desire of the human. God's desire, like Jacob's, is not the desire of an object, but of another's desire. As with Jacob, here too God's desire is the mark of an emptiness, a lack.[53] What is most peculiar about the biblical God—here the assailant Jacob meets at the Jabbok—is the hole in his being,

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[52] W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 2.
[53] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 206.

his lack, what Lacan called his "want-to-be" (*manqué-à-être*).[54] The assailant at the Jabbok is, in Lacanian terms, every bit as wounded as Jacob. His divinity or semi-divinity (*Elohim* and *ish*) does not diminish his desire. In fact, that he appears both human and divine may point to a kind of double dividedness, perhaps augmenting his desire. As the Bible and Culture Collective put it: "From the beginning of Genesis right up to the non-ending of Revelation ('Surely I am coming soon'—Rev. 22:20), the Jewish and Christian God is caught up in the unending circuit of desire, the realm of substitutions and deferrals."[55] The being Jacob encounters at the Jabbok is, at once one who is, but, at a deeper level, one who also lacks being. His subjection to desire, akin to Jacob's, *marks him as one full of holes*. So full of holes is he that he can never be *whole*. Jacob's assailant, then, is not merely one who has wounds. As an emblem of human desire elevated to a transcendental position, he is the Wound itself. As two wounded beings who meet one night at the Jabbok River, Lacanian thought raises questions about the possibility of an actual *encounter* between them.

Viewed through a Lacanian lens, several elements militate against referring to their encounter as anything more than a diaphanous disturbance. First, Lacanian thought locates God—the Wound—in the *real*. Here the very notion of God takes on a decidedly apophatic undertone. For Lacan, the real—or God—is "on the side of the ineffable," something to be encountered in the real, which is inaccessible.[56] For Lacan, the gods belong to the field of the real, and here the Hebrew god—the Wound—is no exception. As the Bible and Culture Collective affirms, "For Lacan the real is unmasterable because

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[54] Ibid.
[55] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 207.
[56] Ibid.

it cannot be caught in the word. The function of Lacanian psychoanalysis, then, is an oddly 'miss-tical' one—that of staging 'an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us.'"[57] The real is therefore impossible, because it is impassible.[58] Second, at the Jabbok, the real is impossible, not only because Jacob's assailant, as one semi-divine, bears in himself his own impassibility but also because a hole punctuates their discourse. The language of the Wound is, in itself, *wounding*—"Why do you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:29). The discourse is deferred, and, as Lacan would say, as a hole, the real can never be a whole.[59] The Wound speaks, but as Derrida would say, he does so in order not to say anything at all.[60] The Wound speaks, yet that speech, as part of the real, does not constitute a genuine encounter in or with the real, as such an encounter is not possible. Moreover, as one wounded, the Wound has divested himself of a traditional Jewish/Christian notion of wholeness-holiness, which has also kept him un-real. If there can only be "bits-of-real," for Lacan, then there can also only be "bits-of-God,"[61] just as there are only "bits" of Jacob. Both are empty, wounded, expressing a desire for they know not what.

In some way, both Jacob and the Wound appear to choose one another to fill the nameless wound they feel. What happens between them, is, to borrow a phrase from Francis Landy, an "intimate disturbance."[62] Jacob is chosen, for God knows what reason, seemingly even before he is born (Gen. 25:23). The experience at the Jabbok is at once intimate and jarring, preceded by an expression of desire on Jacob's part—a prayer that

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 208.
[60] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death (*Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 59.
[61] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 208-209.
[62] Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 44.

the promises made to him at Bethel will be brought to fruition (Gen. 32:9-12). Jacob's prayer at Bethel, while one of bargaining, was also one that asked for the presence of God (Gen. 28:20), which God had already promised to him on the previous night (Gen. 28:15). It is this series of prayers and promises between them, then, that precipitates the arrival of the Wound at the Jabbok. He comes to make good on his promise—he will *be with Jacob*. For the Wound, Jacob is the *objet petit a*, the leftover of his desire. He grasps at Jacob in much the same way that Jacob grasps at things.

The expression of mutual desire culminates an experience that is at once intimate and jarring. Jacob and the Wound wrestle, legs coiling and wrapping around one another, arms flailing and finding their way to their faces obscured by darkness. It is nightfall—when lovers meet. It is secluded—where lovers hide: "And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the dawn" (Gen. 32:25; translation mine). The exchange of knowledge, even as mystery remains between them—these are the realities of intimate encounter. The danger of desire is expressed, most surprisingly, in their *mutual vulnerability*. The Wound seeks and finds Jacob alone by the river and comes to spend the night with him, an expression of desire—"Jacob have I loved."[63] Whatever else may be said about Jacob's opponent, at the Jabbok he demonstrates a profound relationality, illuminating his desire for and vulnerability to the man he chooses to pursue, wound, and bless. Yet their wounds, and the isolating darkness in which they find themselves, wraps the scene in a decidedly apophatic gauze. The diaphanous nature of the scene, however, does not negate the duality of violence and eroticism that undergirds the scene.

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[63] Mal. 1:3; Ro. 9:13.

The scene appears on the one hand, loving and even erotic; and on the other hand, as dangerous and violent. Avivah Zornberg captures these dual sentiments well. She calls the encounter "both erotic and antagonistic," signaling the "love-hate ambiguities of the wrestler's grip."[64] Similarly, Theodore Jennings has labeled his opponent Jacob's most "intimate adversary,"[65] while Frederick Buechner refers to him as "beloved enemy."[66] The confusion regarding their relationship is further compounded by the linguistic and phonetic instability of the text.

As early as Moses ben Nahman, exegetes have noted the linguistic and phonetic similarities between "wrestle" (אָבַק) and "embrace" (חָבַק). In the Masoretic Text, the verb used to describe the encounter between Jacob and the divine being is וַיֵּאָבֵק yet Nahman raised the possibility that the letter א may have been a ח. Nahman relied on Targum Onkelos, which said in translation of the phrase, *vayei'aveik, ve'ishtadeil*, ("and if a man *yephateh*") (Ex. 22:15), as if *yeshadeil*, "if he embraces and kisses in the manner of seduction." Nahman's suggestion of a possible exchange of Hebrew consonants highlights what is already present in the text—a struggle that is both dangerous and intimate. Wenham rightly notes that while אָבַק is said to be a by-form of חָבַק there is nothing "friendly" about the encounter.[67] The seminal poststructuralist reading of Roland Barthes (dealt with in further detail in the final chapter, "The Crossing"), which draws upon the actantial analysis of Greimas, further underscores the dividedness—and therefore the violence of the Wound in the story. For Greimas, an object is conveyed by a

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[64] Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 250.
[65] Theodore W. Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005), 257-258.
[66] Frederick Buechner, "The Magnificent Defeat," in *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 7.
[67] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 295.

giver to a receiver. A subject carries out the action assisted by a helper, who is constrained by an opponent.[68] Barthes's own reading, when brought into conversation with Greimas's schema, reveals that the Wound is both "helper" and "opponent." The Wound is therefore divided within himself as to what his relationship to Jacob ought to be. He is, in Lacan's terminology, alienated, a "split subject."[69] His divinity or semi-divinity does not rescue him from the fundamental reality of his condition—he is, like his actions, a mystery even to himself. Such a reality accords in part with the Hebrew mindset, which sees everyone, including the divine, as a mixture of good inclinations and bad inclinations. In both the Hebrew mind, and in Lacanian thought, the "splitting" of the subject is recognized. As one who both enables Jacob to cross yet also blocks that crossing through violence, the Wound appears alienated, even from himself. As the Bible and Culture Collective state, "The Judeo-Christian God is a hidden God—and he is hidden first of all from himself."[70] Regardless of the ambiguous nature of an encounter that is both violent and erotic, several scholars have proposed readings which foreground its intimate nature. These readings highlight the queerness of the encounter, the bottomless nature of desire, and the polyvalence of "release" (Gen. 32:26).

Thomas Brodie has compared the Jabbok encounter to betrothal type scenes in the Hebrew Bible. Rather than resonance, Brodie's reading demonstrates "radical reversal." The meeting is not with a woman (as in meeting Rachel, Gen. 29:1-30) but rather with God; and the result is not betrothal but blessing. Yet in Jacob's original journey from home (Gen. 26:34-29:30), blessing and betrothal were intertwined. In the night struggle

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[68] Roland Barthes, "Wrestling with the Angel: A Textual Analysis of Gen. 32:22-32," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 246-260.
[69] Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 9.
[70] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 202.

at the Jabbok, Brodie notes several details that either mirror or reverse the idea of betrothal: the strange or foreign location; the scene-setting reference to wives and children; instead of a well, a river; togetherness through the night; the reference to the thigh (cf. Gen. 31:25, 31-32; also Gen. 24:2, 9); and the final reference, typical of betrothal scenes, to eating (Gen. 32:32).[71] Brodie concludes that the night struggle is not a betrothal—it is a radical changing of what betrothal means:

> Yet the concept of betrothal is important. Jacob's night of struggling, of confronting death, may indeed involve letting go of all that he holds dear. In that sense all his normal ties, his usual bonds of betrothal, are reversed, broken. Yet in that breaking there is another form of betrothal—an intimacy with God that gives blessing and enables him to emerge into the sunlight, ready for what is coming.[72]

Brodie's analysis suggests an encounter where Jacob is drawn closer to his opponent in an intimate way. For both Jennings and Susannah Cornwall, the scene reflects intimacy intensified—an erotically charged encounter that is profoundly "queer."

Cornwall's queer reading of the Jabbok encounter illuminates the strangeness of the wrestling event. She draws on the definition of "queer" proposed by David M. Halperin: "[Queer is] by definition, *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant… 'Queer'… demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative—a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men."[73] Cornwall rightly notes that Halperin's definition finds resonance in the concept of God in apophatic theology—the impossibility of saying what God (or queer) is—and instead saying what

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[71]Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 321.
[72] Ibid.
[73] David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

God (or queer) is not.[74] Indeed, at the Jabbok the Wound resists signification—he will not say what or who he is. Jacob must intuit that on his own. While the Wound refuses self-disclosure, he does exhibit a deep desire to be with Jacob. He comes to him in order to spend the night with him. In coming to Jacob in this way, the Wound makes himself vulnerable to that which he desires—Jacob. Both are made vulnerable in the dark and dangerous intimacy of the encounter.

For Jennings, the encounter's erotic nature allows for provocative interpretations of the well-known story: "It is the homoerotic features of the story that make it provocative of insight for the life of faith. Without these elements the encounter between Jacob and YHWH seems capable of producing only an exegetical yawn."[75] Jennings avers that the wrestling involved in the Jabbok encounter has often been interpreted in a spiritually edifying way—wrestling with God in prayer—and as a result the erotic suggestiveness of the encounter has been suppressed.[76] In foregrounding its erotic nature and working backward intertextually, Jennings highlights an intriguing feature of the Jabbok encounter—an interpretive movement from violent assault to everlasting love in the prophetic writings. Jeremiah 31:2-3 states: "Thus says the LORD: 'The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you'" (ESV). The prophetic writings reinterpret the violent nature of the assault as rest requested by Israel/Jacob and rest given by Yahweh. The nature of the encounter, according to Jeremiah, was peaceful, faithful, and

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[74] Susannah Cornwall, "Wild Rice and Queer Dissent: Wrestling with God in Gen. 32:22-32," *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 18 (2010): 63.
[75] Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*, 252.
[76] Ibid., 250.

characterized by covenantal love. Similarly, the eighth-century prophet Hosea reimagines the event not as one of "striking" (נָגַע) but instead of "persisting" (שָׂרָה). One of the two partners—it is unclear which one—"wept" (בָּכָה) and "sought favor" (וַיִּתְחַנֵּן) (Hos. 12:4). Finally, the doublet in Genesis 35, Jennings notes, eliminates the wounding of Jacob entirely, replacing it with another wound—the death of Rachel.[77] When speaking of "the wound," then, signifier and signified slip and slide under one another throughout the Jacob Cycle and the prophetic (re)iterations of the story, playing what Lacan has called "linguistitricks."[78] The wound at the Jabbok, however, serves to unite Jacob to his wrestling partner forever. Jennings remarks,

> This wound is the wound inflicted by the violence of a passion for God, for a God whose own passion is figured first as an assault in the night and later as a love that endures "forever…" This love, even when tested to the limit by Israel's unfaithfulness and YHWH's jealous rage, is reinstated through Israel's suffering and YHWH's compassion, with the consequence that YHWH promises never again to allow rage to overwhelm his love for Israel. It is the woundedness of Israel that may serve to incite YHWH to repent of his fury and to wed himself forever and unconditionally to Israel.[79]

Jennings's interpretation highlights not only the dually violent and erotic nature of the encounter. Of even greater import is the way in which his reading illuminates the relational nature of the one he labels Jacob's most "intimate adversary."

Another erotic aspect of the encounter entails the expressed desire for "release" (Gen. 32:26). Modern interpreters such as Hermann Gunkel, Gerhard von Rad, and Claus

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[77] Ibid., 253.
[78] In Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 68-70, Homer notes that in addition to the other two ways in which the unconscious is structured—through gaps and ruptures, as well as through the discourse of others—Lacan also saw the unconscious as a signifying process. This process involves coding and uncoding. The unconscious emerges in the symbolic order through the gap between signifier and signified. This occurs, Homer notes, through the "sliding of the signified beneath the signifier and the failure of meaning to be fixed." Thus the unconscious plays "linguistitricks," playing attempting to trip the subject up.
[79] Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of the Ancient World*, 257-258.

Westermann offer a traditional response to the request for release—it is indicative of the story's folkloristic origins. The opponent's desire to depart before dawn is a regular feature of folktales, suggesting that Jacob encounters a Canaanite river god.[80] Otto Eissfeldt observed that the story identified the opponent as El, the supreme Canaanite creator god.[81] In other dangerous encounters with the divine (Ex. 4:24-26; Num. 22:22-35; Josh. 5:13-16), the unrecognized opponent is the LORD or the angel of the LORD. Often in Genesis the LORD is equated with El. For Gordon Wenham, the reference to dawn indicates the struggle lasted for a long time and also explains why Jacob was unaware of his foe's identity. Viewed in another way, Lacanian thought posits that the phallus can only play its role when veiled.[82] Still, had he known his opponent was divine, Wenham insists, he would not have engaged him in a fight.[83] The Midrash, however, states that Jacob's opponent demanded release in order to keep his appointment to sing in the heavenly choir. A similar request was made by Jupiter: "Why do you hold me? It is time. I want to get out of the city before daybreak" (Plautus, Amphitryon 532-533).[84] Following Rashbam, Hiskuni, and Abrabanel, the commentator Jacob paraphrases: "Let me go, for it is time for you to give up."[85] Wenham, however, views the demand for release as a means to hide his identity, also hinting that no person can see God and live (Ex. 33:20).[86] While scholars have tended to offer the above explanations for "release," when coupled with the other intimate components of the encounter, the image may also appear erotically charged.

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[80] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 295.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Lacan, *Écrits,* 288.
[83] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 295.
[84] Ibid., 296.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

Alicia Ostriker describes the encounter in terms that seem erotic:

> The low moans that they issue appear…not to ripple into the atmosphere but to fall at their feet. They themselves fall to the ground as they grapple. Their sweat mingles, they slip and muddily slide against each other, the skin of each one comes to appreciate the slippery volumes of the other. One chest feels the pounding of the other."[87]

Nevertheless, Ostriker resists labeling the encounter expressly sexual because there is no orgasm or release.[88] For Cornwall, however, this lack of (sexual) release only highlights the queerness of the encounter. Cornwall comments: "Ostriker is perceptive: there is never total resolution, total climax, total finishedness for those who wrestle with God. God seems to remain always elusive… Wrestling with God is, in this sense… profoundly queer: it is open-ended, always travelling, ever-moving, continually inviting questions and not giving neatly packaged answers."[89] Jacob's inability fully to know the Wound, leaves his identity, like his wound, felt but not seen. The invisibility of the wound correlates to Lacan's notion of the phallus. The phallic signifier sets desire in motion, yet it is also the signifier of lack. The function of the phallus is to be permanently absent, permanently unavailable.[90] As the signifier of Jacob's lack, the wound is likewise felt but not visible, just like his assailant. Therefore, the demand for release is not solely about a desire to hide identity. Nor does it merely illuminate the intimacy of the encounter or the folkloristic origins of the story. Rather, the demand for release suggests that Jacob must relinquish his grasp, allow himself to be wounded, in order to receive the blessing. For Jacob, real blessing cannot come through duplicity or running away but rather in

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[87] Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Vision and Revisions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 98-99.
[88] Ibid., 99.
[89] Cornwall, "Wild Rice and Queer Dissent: Wrestling with God in Gen. 32:22-32," 64.
[90] The Bible and Culture Collective, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," 204.

relinquishing his grip on his own life. Jacob is a fighter who must allow himself to be defeated, to be wounded by the Wound. Jacob must relinquish his proclivity to grasp at tangible objects that cannot satiate intangible desire. What is required is to keep his body vulnerable and his desire open, to live with the open-endedness that is wrestling with God. Defeat is the price Jacob must pay for the blessing. Defeat is the price agreed upon.

This interpretation has been suggested by artists and theologians alike, who have posited that in order for Jacob to be victorious, he must first be defeated. The alabaster statue created by Jacob Epstein called *Jacob and the Angel* focuses not on the struggle itself but rather on the aftermath of the struggle. The colossal nude Jacob seems to relax in the embrace of the colossal nude divinity, as in the aftermath of a passionate embrace. For Jennings, Jacob appears to "go limp" in the arms of a "savage yet tender lover."[91] For theologian Frederick Buechner, Jacob must allow himself to be defeated in order to take hold of the blessing:

> The sense we have, which Jacob must have had, that the whole battle was from the beginning fated to end this way, that the stranger had simply held back until now, letting Jacob exert all his strength and almost win so that when he was defeated, he would know that he was truly defeated; so that he would know that not all the shrewdness, will, brute force that he could muster were enough to get this. Jacob will not release his grip, only now it is a grip not of violence but of need, like the grip of a drowning man.[92]

For Buechner, Jacob sees in his opponent's face something more terrible than the face of death—the face of love. Jacob learns that blessing comes not through strength of cunning or force of will but rather as gift. Buechner labels the encounter at the Jabbok a

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[91] Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*, 254.
[92] Buechner, "The Magnificent Defeat," 6.

"magnificent defeat," noting that before giving everything, God demands Jacob's life.[93] Sexually speaking, there is no "release," yet narratively, the release is paired not only with blessing but also with sustained uncertainty. Jacob is not given the name of his opponent. Something of this queer mystery is retained, opening play space for continued desire. Like a wound which never heals, so too the story remains open, reiterated by a community of wounded storytellers.

Wounded Storytellers

Hugh O'Donnell that there is always in every wrestling match a "trace that never goes away."[94] For Jacob, that trace is the excess, the leftover of the wound, or the limp: "The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip" (Gen. 32:31 NRSV). Scholars who have assessed Jacob's wound have often attempted to suture it, to close it, to proclaim him a man who has been made whole. Zornberg notes that the midrashic literature viewed imagery of the sunlight as indicative of the healing Jacob experiences in the encounter.[95] Something of the curative aspect of the encounter may also be suggested in an arcane etymology of the name Israel. Overwhelmingly, scholars have associated Israel with struggling or fighting.[96] However, Albright suggested the name was related to Ethiopic and Arabic stems meaning "to heal," hence the word means

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[93] Ibid., 8.
[94] Bill Moyers et al., *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 296.
[95] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis,* 241.
[96] In Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 296-297, Wenham notes that the etymology of Israel offered by the text relates to שָׂרָה ("struggle, fight"). Other scholars such as Geller (JANESCU 14 [1982]: 53) follows the Greek translators (LXX, Aquila, Symmachus) and the Vulgate, and relates Israel's etymology to שָׂרַר ("to rule, be strong"). Similarly, E. Jacob (*Theology of the Old Testament* [New York: Harper and Row, 1958], 203) links Israel to יָשַׁר ("just, right"), comparing the other ancient poetic name Jeshurun (Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 26).

"God heals."[97] Interpreters who view Jacob's wound positively, however, tend to minimize his pain, focusing instead on the blessing he receives. For example, Brodie states,

> Even the wound comes ultimately from the person who blesses. Thus the wound is contained, as it were, in a greater world of blessing. The opponent in the struggle is divine-human, but containing, integrating, the negative. By going through the night with this person, Jacob also achieves an integration. When the struggle is over, he may indeed be limping, but he is blessed, and the sun is shining on him.[98]

While it is true that the one who wounds and the one who blesses are the same, Brodie's analysis minimizes the suffering associated with the wound. The "greater world of blessing" "contains" the wound, while the wound is all but erased. Similarly, Zornberg avers that "to be whole, apparently, means to have been in great danger and to have been saved. Jacob's integrity has been significantly assailed on many levels, but losses have been recouped, injuries healed, the erosion of memory successfully fought."[99] According to Edward Hirsch, Jacob's *agon* serves a (re)-creative purpose. The process is poetic. Citing Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Der Angel," where a divine being comes at night to "test you with a fiercer grip" and "seize you as if they were creating you," such a transition can happen only if they would "break you out of your mold."[100] It is this "breaking out of the mold" which Hirsch views as necessary for the creation of something new, here, Jacob to Israel. This (re)creation, like the poetic process, is an ugly one. Hirsch concludes: "The scandal of poetic originality is that the birth of something new is always unsightly; the work comes from a dark, relentless, internal, at times even

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[97] William F. Albright, "The names 'Israel' and 'Judah' with an excursus on the etymology of TôDâh and Tôrâh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46, no. 3-4 (1927): 159.
[98] Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary*, 332.
[99] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 218.
[100] David Rosenberg, ed., *Genesis, As It Is Written: Contemporary Writers On Our First Stories* (San Francisco: HarperSanFransico, 1996), 185.

demented struggle. . . Steel is required—and courage—when the very self is estranged, especially since one hopes to emerge with a new name, a consoling gift."[101]

Other scholars view both Jacob's wound and limp as morally transformative in Jacob's life. Henry F. Knight, for example, views the limp as psychic and spiritual, as well as physical:

> For a tradition that speaks of the way of right living as *halakhah*, to be permanently hindered in one's walking could never mean just a simple physical wounding. The linguistic echoes penetrate far deeper. Right living, or "*halakhah*," is literally derived from the verb "to walk." The lingering limp of Jacob could not have been just in his legs. It would have reached every fiber of his identity as he stood before God, now as the "Godwrestler" …Similarly, the wound he bore thereafter, his limp, was bound to what he faced that night. Jacob would wrestle with that legacy, along with everything else, the rest of his life… With Jacob's mixed legacy, his shame, like his fear, became neither a maudlin nor a paralyzing burden. Rather, like a limp, it was a wound that Jacob incorporated into his life and his walk with God and with others. Jacob was able to move on, but not without the signs of the struggle.[102]

The "right living" suggested by Knight has been reiterated by scholars who have suggested Jacob's character changes as a result of the encounter. The limp—or the wound—renders a moral change in the formerly-crooked man. Those scholars who argue for such a change approach the character of Jacob from one of two angles—either psychoanalytically or theologically. Jacob is either a man who transitions from disintegration and fragmentation to integration and wholeness; or from sinner to repentant saint. For Jesse Long, the chiastic structure of the Jacob Cycle suggests that the "grasping Jacob" transitions to a more "giving Jacob."[103] However, the payoff of Long's

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[101] Ibid., 187.
[102]Henry F. Knight, "Meeting Jacob at the Jabbok: Wrestling with a Text: A Midrash on Genesis 32:22-32," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29, no. 3-4 (1992): 454.
[103] In Jesse Long, "Wrestling with God to Win: A Literary Reading of the Story of Jacob at Jabbok in Honor of Don Williams," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no.1 (2012): 56-57, Long outlines the chiastic structure of the Jacob Cycle in the following way. A. Rebekah struggles in pregnancy, receiving an oracle

chiasm hinges on a face-value reading of both Jacob's prayer to God preceding the encounter and his interaction with Esau the next day. In his prayer prior to the encounter, Jacob says "I am small" (קָטֹנְתִּי) (Gen. 32:10), a statement Long views as Jacob's demonstration of humility. Long asserts that the Jacob who prays at the Jabbok is different from the Jacob who bargained with God previously at Bethel.[104] The next day, Esau meets Jacob and inquires about all this "encampment" which belongs to Jacob. Jacob responds: "And he said to find favor in the eyes of my lord" (וַיֹּאמֶר לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי) (Gen. 33:8; translation mine). He states further that he wants his brother to accept "my offering" (מִנְחָתִי) (Gen. 33:10), "because God has shown me favor and because there is to me everything" (כִּי חַנַּנִי אֱלֹהִים וְ כִי יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל) (Gen. 33:11; translation mine).

For Long, Jacob's prostration both before God and before Esau demonstrates his character change and fulfills the prophetic word spoken to Rebekah at the boys' birth. Long concludes: "On the surface, the story does not work out as anticipated. In a reversal, bowing before his brother Esau, Jacob personifies the meaning of the oracle, the principle that the older one serves the younger. In this way, he earns the right to carry the name of his people 'Israel,' when he takes on the form of a servant."[105] When Long interprets

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suggesting that the two brothers will experience conflict. This conflict occurs first over the birthright. B. Isaac deceives the men of Gerar. C. Jacob takes Esau's blessing by deception and leaves for Paddan-aram. D. Jacob leaves home toward Haran and God appears to him at Bethel. E. Jacob meets Rachel, encounters Laban, and works for Rachel. F. Laban tricks Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel, and Leah bears sons. G. Rachel is barren; Leah is fertile. The two sisters wrestle over bearing for Jacob. H. God remembers Rachel, and Joseph is born. G^1. Wrestling with Laban, Jacob has fertile sheep. F^1. At the command of YHWH, Jacob returns to the land of his fathers. Laban overtakes Jacob but is tricked by Rachel. E^1. Jacob and Laban make a covenant. D^1. In his return to Canaan, God appears to Jacob in an evening encounter at the Jabbok. C^1. Jacob meets Esau and offers him (and even implicitly returns) his blessing. B^1. Simeon and Levi deceive the men of Shechem. A^1. The struggle between the brothers is resolved and Jacob returns to Bethel. Rachel dies in childbirth. Here Long gestures to the chiastic structure in Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 42-58, which he adopts.

[104] Ibid., 59.

[105] Ibid., 60.

these two scenes, he interprets the character of Jacob through a hermeneutic of grace, which enables him to say, "Jacob has wrestled with God and prevailed with the awareness before Him that 'I am small.'"[106] Long's plain sense reading does not take into account the complexities of characterization within narratives. Does not Jacob's (humble) prayer prior to the Jabbok encounter indicate that he stands to gain if God is on his side? Moreover, does not the giving of "presents," as well as the language of abasement before his brother, stem from fear of reprisal? Perhaps these are both indications that Jacob truly has changed. Perhaps, however, there is more to Jacob's response than Long's reading allows. Moreover, Long's interpretation assumes too easy a transition from the self-seeking Jacob to the humbled Jacob. Little else in Jacob's biography suggests that Jacob's relationship with God or with his brother changes much following the Jabbok encounter. In their next exchange of dialogue, Esau suggests that they journey together to Succoth. Once again, Jacob delays, lingering back, he says, for the sake of his family and flock. Ultimately, however, Jacob chooses not to follow his brother but instead to build an altar at Shechem (Gen. 33:12-20). Did Jacob simply get lost along the way; was the limp too painful to travel the distance; or did he never actually intend to settle in Succoth? The text does not specify, and Jacob's reasons are left unstated. Like the Jabbok text itself, much ambiguity remains in Jacob's transition from his old life as a runaway to his new life as a settled man in his father's homeland. Long, however, does not stand alone in arguing for a moral change in Jacob's character.

Interpreting Jacob's encounter psychoanalytically, Michael Abramsky claims that Jacob moves from a pre-liminal stage of development to a liminal stage, and finally to a

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[106] Ibid.

post-liminal stage. In his psychoanalytic Midrash of the Jacob story, Abramsky draws on insight from Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, mythology, and literary traditions to describe the change in Jacob's character. Borrowing from the tripartite system of Victor Turner and also from the mythological work of Joseph Campbell, Abramsky calls the Jacob of the opening narrative "pre-liminal." He is a man of the mundane world subject to the usual desires of power, greed, ignorance, and lust. He is an ordinary man troubled by conflicts; in stealing the birthright and the blessing, Jacob displays envy.[107] These early conflicts in Jacob's life foster the development of a "deceptive personal core," which Jungian psychology refers to as the shadow. In psychoanalytic terms, the shadow is the inferior part of the personality. The repression of the shadow into the unconsciousness causes it to be splintered off and then manifested in action. This shadow side is represented in Jacob's "trickster" personality—cerebral, clever, and goal-oriented.[108] This shadow side dominates his personality in the beginning, and, according to Abramsky, reinforces the evil inclination (*yetzer ha'ra*); his actions ultimately put distance between himself and God.[109] According to Yiddish thought, *b'shert* ("predestination, fate") involves bringing the will or *ratzon* ("desire, life energy") into line with the *ratzon* of God ("obedience, submission"). Conflicts of this lower, pre-liminal stage block a person from recognizing his/her purpose. However, tragedy may open the heart to a vision of who God is and who God wants this person to be. Thus the

[107] Michael Abramsky, "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 29, no. 1 (2010): 107.
[108] Ibid., 108.
[109] Ibid.

evolution of the soul involves climbing the ladder from the darkness of the ego to the realm of purpose and meaning.[110]

By contrast, the liminal stage refers to a rite of passage where the protagonist must wrestle with who s/he is and who s/he may become. Here, the sense of identity dissolves; life is ambiguous and indeterminate. According to Abramsky, Jacob's transformation begins, as it does with most hero myths, with a journey. This journey sets the stage for transformation, and for Jacob, the inauguration of the journey and the transformation occurs at Bethel, where God shows Jacob *possibilities*. He can become a landowner and his seed will father a nation, the same promise made to his grandfather Abraham. According to Mussar tradition, humankind moves toward wholeness (*sh'lemut*). God has planted seeds or potential, and the human must complete the work of creation.[111] Kille has stated that the placing and consecrating of a stone at Bethel suggests a beginning of God's temple and the beginning of Jacob's transformation. For Jung, stones represent the Self which may guide individuals into higher levels of being.[112] Nevertheless, this liminal stage is mere *possibility*—the hero tries to grow by using wiles or becoming more perfect in the way s/he expresses flaws. Here learning occurs gradually as the hero starts to relinquish old ways and to surrender to new realms of meaning.[113] Indeed, psychoanalytic interpretation makes it clear—just as Bethel is incomplete without Peniel, so too transformation is incomplete without struggle. For Abramsky, Jacob's struggle at the Jabbok provides the ultimate transformation.

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[110] Ibid., 109.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 110.
[113] Ibid., 112.

Like Abramsky, Wink also views the wrestling as an internal, psychological dynamic. In order to achieve wholeness, the repressed and negative shadow side must be brought to light and acknowledged in order to be conquered and properly integrated into the personality. When Jacob faces his own treachery, deceit, and dishonesty, he conquers his "split-off side" and becomes whole.[114] In Judaic thought, *teshuvah* ("repentance") carries a twofold meaning: to return or go back to one's origin or an authentic way of life after a period of absence; and to respond to a call originating outside of oneself. Thus, God and humankind must partner together to bring the world to *tikkun olam* ("perfection" or "wholeness").[115] Abramsky's reading of the Jacob cycle through the lens of *teshuvah* entails three processes. First, Jacob had to recognize that his actions toward Esau were wrong, which involved insight or doing, rather than merely finding a more sophisticated means of deception. It entailed "constructive repentance" or real change. Second, *teshuvah* opens Jacob up to true authenticity through undoing the wrong. When Jacob both apologizes to Esau and attempts to give a portion of the wealth he has accumulated (Gen. 33:8-11), this compensation begins to make the victim (Jacob) whole.[116] Third, Jacob loses the desire or seed which began the destructive process; he accepts Esau as his father's heir and begins to establish his own unique identity as a patriarch.[117] This wrestling match and the repentance it fosters transitions Jacob to the post-liminal stage. Here, Jacob transforms from an ego-dominated stage characterized by anxiety-induced deception to a position of faith where he trusts God's wishes and protective hand.[118]

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[114] Ibid., 113.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Indeed, it might be argued that Jacob is "wounded" by his own deception. Thus the encounter at the Jabbok exchanges this wound for a wound that ultimately heals.
[117] Abramsky, "Jacob Wrestles the Angel: A Study in Psychoanalytic Midrash," 114.
[118] Ibid., 115.

For John A. Sanford, Jacob's transformation from ego-dominated to a person of faith hinges on three things: wilderness experience (or suffering); the experience of a power greater than himself at work in his life; and loving someone (Rachel) other than himself.[119] Sanford views the entirety of Jacob's story through the lens of psychological development and Jacob's movement toward wholeness. Jacob's wholeness cannot be achieved apart from reconciliation with his brother; Jacob's wound can only be healed by facing his delayed, deferred confrontation with Esau. Jacob's wound, then, ultimately finds its healing in the hands of someone else—his twin brother. At the Jabbok, Jacob is wounded by his opponent, and according to Sanford, the struggle itself is the heart of the encounter. Moreover, the wound Jacob receives is not a "limiting" wound but rather a wound through which pours the life of God. Sanford states, "Such [wounded] persons are affected so deeply that they cannot return to their former selves, but constantly journey ahead through life, and every day of their lives they are forced to live with the realization that inner reality is but a hair-breadth away… [the wound] is also a great blessing, for through such a wounded ego there pours the life of God."[120] For Jacob, perhaps wounding and blessing are one and the same. His limp represents the kind of fearful intimacy with God that no one else in the Hebrew Bible achieves, for only one who is known can be wrestled with.[121] And only one who knows he is wounded can be healed. Here the psychoanalytic reading of Sanford, which posits the possibility for the wounded to be healed, runs counter to a Lacanian interpretation. For Lacan, lack cannot be satiated, thus, a wound always remains. As Evans writes, "No matter how many signifiers one

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[119] John A. Sanford, *The Man Who Wrestled God: Light from the Old Testament on the Psychology of Individuation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 21.
[120] Ibid., 42.
[121] Dr. Gary Furr, Senior Pastor, Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama.

adds to the signifying chain, the chain is always incomplete; it always lacks the signifier that could complete it."[122] The missing signifier is constitutive of the subject.[123]

Therefore while it is clearly tempting to tie up the loose ends of Jacob's story, to proclaim that the wounded has been healed, a Lacanian reading of Jacob's limp suggests otherwise. About suffering, Frank says, "One of our most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer. The voices of the ill are easy to ignore. . . These voices bespeak conditions of embodiment that most of us would rather forget our own vulnerability to. Listening is hard, but it is also a fundamental moral act."[124] In tying up the loose ends of Jacob's story, have scholars failed to listen to it? Jacob's story is about a man who suffers and a story where victory and defeat are one and the same. After the struggle is said and done, Jacob's wound remains. Like his story, Jacob's wound is an excess that continues to speak. The limp is a visible symbol of an invisible pain, what Jennings has called a "public sign of a private wound."[125] As such, the trace of the wrestling match exists on two levels—the inside and the outside. The wound is both a deep psychical pain associated with the wounds Jacob brought with him to the Jabbok—and also a physical pain associated with the wound he sustained that night. Jacob's wound, then, blurs the boundary between what is known only to the man and what is revealed to and even embodied by the community. Jacob's wound is an embodied story, bearing implications both for the patriarch himself and also for the community; Jacob's wound becomes a source of stories about Israel's own woundedness, told obliquely. For Frank, it is precisely the communal element which renders Jacob's

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[122] Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 99.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 25.
[125] Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel,* 253.

suffering useful. Jacob's wound was embodied by the wounded storytellers who memorialized it in their own bodies: "Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle" (Gen. 32:32 NRSV). These wounded storytellers' relationship with God is, like Jacob's, an ambiguous one. They are, like their forefather, people whose wounds remain open. They are, like their forefather, people who struggle with God. And their story is, like their forefather's, a story of suffering.

Frank notes that suffering can be discussed in five key ways. First, suffering involves whole persons and thus requires a "rejection of the historical dualism of mind and body." The subject who suffers is a body-self. Second, suffering takes place when a state of severe distress threatens the "intactness" of a person. This distress can be immediate or imminent, real or perceived. Third, suffering can occur in relation to any aspect of the person. Fourth, suffering is a result of processes of resistance to the lived flow of experience. To suffer, a person must not only perceive a threat but must also resist that threat. Finally, suffering is social in nature. Suffering is both an existential universal and also a novel experience culturally elaborated in distinct worlds.[126] Central to the notion of suffering is telling the story as a form of resistance. In story, the "flow of experience" is reflected upon and redirected. If torture—or suffering—is defined by Elaine Scarry as "unmaking the world,"[127] then resistance through story becomes the remaking of the body-self. Yet at a deeper level, a storyteller not only resists but also controls the telling of his/her experiences. Ultimately, the storyteller not only makes

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[126] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 169-170.
[127] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

meaning out of suffering but also decides what kind of meaning is made by the story s/he tells.

Frank illuminates four aspects of the story which demonstrate that it is an "illness story" with ongoing usefulness.[128] First, the self is formed through *uses of the body*. Jacob wrestles with his body, and he is wounded in his body. He leaves the Jabbok with a limp, (the "stigmata" of the encounter) and a new name (the blessing of the encounter). This blessing is bought with the wound. The self is found through the body, hence the body-self. Second, *the body-self is also a spiritual being*. Frank views Jacob's attacker as God, and notes that Jacob's impulse toward him is curiously expressed as resistance. Jacob "contests" the divine. Frank notes that what is being contested is ambiguous. Is Jacob wrestling a blessing out of God, or is the angel wrestling the petitioner for a blessing out of Jacob? Or is Jacob wrestling *in order to be wounded*, since that wound will open him to the spiritual aspect of life he has resisted ever since he stole the blessing that belonged to his brother? Third, *the wounded, spiritual-body exists in moments of immanence*. In his embodied resistance and through the wound, Jacob discovers that he has been on holy ground. Frank notes, "The holiness of the ground is created in the wrestling that sanctifies that ground. Peniel is a place where Jacob may have thought God was absent; he learns in his wounding that God is present."[129] Finally, *the spiritual body-self assumes an ongoing responsibility*. Jacob leaves the Jabbok in order to be(come) Israel. Frank avers that the "postmodern Jacob" never works out his resistance once and for all. The self must continue to wrestle and continue to be wounded in order to rediscover the ground it now stands on as sacred. For Frank, "to be is to wrestle with

[128] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics,* 180-182.
[129] Ibid., 181-182.

God."[130] The Jabbok encounter functions as a foundation story for ancient Israel, which will continue to "be" with God, continue to wrestle with God. Indeed, it is in the community of wounded storytellers where meaning is made from the story.

What kind of meaning is being made, then, by the community telling the story of Jacob's encounter at the Jabbok? Given the ambiguity of the outcome—Jacob is purportedly victorious yet leaves with a limp—it is not difficult to imagine that the community is pointing, in part, to the instability of the patriarchy. This particular patriarch and what he represents—their own relationship with God—is inherently ambiguous. Jennings notes, "The wound is a wound at the heart of patriarchy, the very patriarchy that will come to be (mis)recognized as the defining characteristic of 'Israel…' In Jacob's name patriarchy… is rendered oddly unstable, limping (rather than striding) toward an uncertain future—a patriarchy always already subverted from within."[131] This subversion of patriarchy is expressed most notably in the legal addendum to the narrative (Gen. 32:32). Immediately before crossing multiple thresholds—from past identity to future identity; and from liminal, wandering location back into the land—the eponymous ancestor of the nation is struck עַל־כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ ("upon the calf of the thigh"). The יָרֵךְ is variously rendered as "thigh" or "loin" and as such signifies the site of a man's procreative power.[132] Nanette Stahl has noted the crucial implications of the placement of Jacob's wound—it renders Jacob's connection to the Abrahamic covenant, embodied through the rite of circumcision, as wholly ambiguous.[133] Stahl comments, "The legal addendum, which highlights the national implications of the struggle by invoking a taboo

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[130] Ibid., 182.
[131] Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*, 256.
[132] Cf. Gen. 46:26; 24:2-9; 47:29; Ex. 1:5; Judg. 8:30.
[133] Nanette Stahl, *Law and Liminality in the Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 81.

that alludes to the maiming of Jacob's genitals, his castration, also hints at the problematic nature of Jacob's legitimate right to his father's blessing. This shadow of doubt is transferred, through dietary abstention, to his progeny as well."[134] Moreover, after the encounter, Jacob does not father any additional children.

In response, the Israelites do not eat the "sinew of the vein" (גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה).While נָשָׁה functions as a hapax legomenon in the Hebrew Bible, a subtle philological connection can be made with the closely related verb "to forget" (נָשָׁה). Moreover, a close philological connection also exists between "sinew" (גִּיד) and the verb "to tell" (נָגַד). Is the refusal to eat a memorial not to נָשָׁה but instead to זָכַר, to remember? Stahl has observed that the law does not appear in either of the two series of dietary injunctions (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14:3-21) or elsewhere in the Bible.[135] For Stahl, this suggests that there might be aspects of the episode which the law memorializes (or remembers) but which biblical theology would rather keep at a distance. There is an element of taboo to the struggle which future generations dare not replicate.[136] The wounded storytellers, then, appear to tell a story representing their profound ambivalence to the promises made to Abraham and Isaac regarding "seed," "offspring" (זֶרַע). In contrast to the portable practice of circumcision, here Jacob/Israel is memorialized not through practice but rather through the avoidance of it. Stahl notes,

> Memory, and by extension history, thus seem to be called into question in the dietary taboo whose very purpose is precisely to evoke memory and whose etiological frame is meant to give it historical resonance. On the one hand, the law affirms that Jacob's descendants did indeed become a nation among whose founding memories is their progenitor's encounter with the divine; on the other hand, the avoidance hints at partial obliteration of that memory. The threat of

[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 78.
[136] Ibid.

> annihilation which hangs over the encounter—and which is seemingly overcome with Jacob's transformation into Israel—reappears in the legal addendum, casting a shadow over the destiny Jacob wrestled so hard to secure.[137]

The threat of annihilation hangs over Israel/Judah throughout its history, depicting its wound(s) as festering sores that are always open (Isa.1:5-6). God promises to "bind up the brokenhearted" (Isa. 61:1; Psa. 34:18; 147:3), yet Israel's literary (hi)story suggests otherwise. For both the man and the nation, the story is one of suffering, of defeat. For Frank, stories of suffering contain two sides—chaos and quest. Suffering stories demonstrate the threat of disintegration, called the chaos narrative; alongside the hope for a new integration of the body-self, called the quest narrative. Quest stories, according to Frank, reflect a confidence in what is waiting to emerge from suffering.[138] Sandwiched between these two sides is the restitution story, which involves remaking the body in an image, derived either before the illness or elsewhere.[139] However, the individual who is telling the restitution story is not necessarily the same individual who is ill, defeated. The purpose of such a story is to pronounce "good as new," a kind of "talisman against future sickness."[140] Such a story is not only projective—the future will not be disrupted by illness—it is also protective—the present illness is merely an aberration in an otherwise healthy life.[141] Not only is such a story impossible, it also deprives the subject of telling his/her own story. The "expert," or someone outside the subject's lived experience(s), tells the story. For Frank, the quest narrative is the only viable option: "The quest narrative recognizes ill people as responsible moral agents whose primary action is witness; its stories are necessary to restore the moral agency that other stories

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[137] Ibid., 83.
[138] Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 171.
[139] Ibid., 87.
[140] Ibid., 90.
[141] Ibid.

sacrifice."[142] A quest story allows agency through a subject's (self) testimony and moral responsibility as part of a community of those who suffer. The dual imagery inherent in the Jabbok text—sunlight, indicating some peace or resolution might be achieved—alongside a limp, the excess of a wound—suggests that Israel's story is both about the chaos of communal disintegration and the quest to wrestle honestly and to make meaning out of suffering. For a people who frequently reside in wilderness, for a people who are more often on the move than settled in the land, the encounter at the Jabbok represents the ambiguity inherent in their "struggle" with God and the perceived instability of that relationship. Their grasp on life, on the land, on God, is tenuous and always already wounded and wounding. The wound is already there before the story is (re)told—a story with an invisible assailant and an invisible wound. The story remains, like Jacob's wound, half-open.

The invisibility of the wound—and of the assailant—gestures not only to identity but also to elements of space and time in the story. It is in darkness where the assailant makes himself (un)known, and it is in darkness where Jacob sustains his wound. It is therefore necessary to walk heel-to-toe with Jacob into the darkened space of encounter.

[142] Ibid., 134.

The Dark

At the Jabbok, Jacob is left in the dark. Examination of the preceding events demonstrates that the narrative frequently situates Jacob in darkness. It is in darkness where Jacob is attached to his origins—his mother's womb, an attachment that Jacob will break physically but not psychically. Throughout the story, Rebekah dictates Jacob's actions, using the blindness or darkness of her husband's eyes to aid her deception (Gen. 27:1-29). It is also in the darkness of exile, dispersion—"and he left" (וַיֵּצֵא) (Gen. 28:10)—where Jacob is detached from his origins in an isolating apophasis. At Bethel, the dark night functions as both aporia and as annunciation of the divine. It is in the darkness of the night and in the marriage bed that Jacob is deceived (Gen. 29:21-30). And at the Jabbok, it is with darkness as proximate temporal and spatial companion that Jacob sees the face of God and lives. From the birth canal to Bethel to the Jabbok, it is only in the dark that God is revealed and concealed in Jacob's life. Further examination demonstrates that the Jabbok encounter is a mirror darkly through which Jacob's whole life is (un)reflected.

In this chapter I draw on the theoretical insights of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gary Saul Morson to argue that the Dark is a strategic intersection of space and time in which the events of the narrative take place and the identities of the characters unfold. I utilize Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to demonstrate that the Dark "authors" and is "authored by" those individuals who traverse it, sojourn in it, and are inhabited by it.[1] Therefore darkness is not limited to time and space but also reveals/conceals the faces of the characters. The Jacob Cycle in general and the Jabbok scene in particular

[1] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

demonstrates "loose play" and the surprise of "eventness." Therefore, human and divine agency in/with the Dark becomes "momentous" in the formation of identity.[2] Multiple possibilities are laid out, raising the question of the moral agency of its characters. Consequently this chapter will explore both the darkness of space and the darkness of the faces hidden in the shadows.

Dark Spaces and Dark Faces in the Jacob Cycle

Rebekah's womb is the first dark space in the story. It is a dark space which gestates life yet is also a site of struggle. As one who carries the struggle in her body, Rebekah's very life is endangered, even as that struggle produces life after the requisite period of time (Gen. 25:24). Rebekah's womb is an example of Bakhtin's chronotope, or "time space." Bakhtin explains,

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.[3]

Time becomes "thick," takes on flesh, as Rebekah's body thickens. With the thickening of her body, the plot of the story also thickens. The narrative is shaped by the embodied struggle of Rebekah. Her struggle, the narrative relays, is not limited to the normal pains of childbirth. Rather, her embodied struggle is actualized in the struggles of two nations who are housed in the time space of her womb: "And Yahweh said to her, 'Two peoples are in your womb and two peoples are in your belly. And people will be divided from people and one people will be stronger than the other; and the chief (one) will serve the

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[2] Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 22.
[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

insignificant (one)'" (Gen. 25:23; translation mine).[4] Yahweh's prophecy does not explain the "why" of that struggle. It is the birthing process—the transition from the dark womb—which provides a hint. Attendant midwives can see that Jacob is gripping Esau's heel. The struggle of the two nations is embodied in the bodies of Jacob and Esau.

By order of their birth, Esau is to inherit the rights of primogeniture. The conflict this engenders revolves around the ways in which human life has been institutionalized. Walter Brueggemann states:

> Primogeniture is not simply one rule among many. It is the linchpin of an entire social and legal system which defines rights and privileges and provides a way around internecine disputes. But the same practice which protects the order of society is also a way of destining some to advantage and others to disadvantage. That world of privilege and denial is here disrupted by the God of blessing who will sojourn with the "low and despised" (cf. Luke 7:34). This narrative, then, is a radically revolutionary announcement. It dares to call into question a conventional settlement of power. The governing oracle and the narrative which flows from it are not disinterested. They are an attempt to arrange the blessings in an alternative way. And with that attempt, painful possibilities are reopened. Many things are placed in jeopardy.[5]

Key here is this notion of the "possibilities" that are (re)opened in the time space of Rebekah's womb. While W. Lee Humphreys has referred to the words of Yahweh's oracle as "great and enigmatic,"[6] John E. Anderson has noted perceptibly that the

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[4] In R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 98-101, Heard explains the complexities involved in translating Yahweh's oracle to Rebekah. He notes that the last line of v.23 is usually read "The older will serve the younger" (as by Alter, 1996:127; Dicou: 175; Dillmann: 195; Driver: 245; Fewell and Gunn, 1993:74; Gunkel: 289; Hamilton, 1994: 177; Hendel: 11; Kunin: 05; von Rad: 264; Skinner: 359; Speiser: 193; Syrèn: 82; Turner, 1990a: 119; Wenham, 1994: 175; Westermann: 411; ASV, JPSV, KJV, NEB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, RSV). Syntactically, Heard says, the case is not closed. The syntax of the entire clause must be considered, as a lack of explicit case markers requires other recourse to consider subject and object of the verb יַעֲבֹד. A fuller discussion of the syntactical analysis appears in chapter five.

[5] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 290.

[6] W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 157.

"trickster oracle" is the key to unlocking the Jacob Cycle.[7] It is this oracle which demonstrates that the characters in the Jacob Cycle are not locked in a deterministic (story) world. William James's description of determinism delineates the contours of a deterministic (story) world:

> The future has no ambiguous possibilities *hidden in its womb*: the part we call the present is compatible with only one totality. Any other future complement than the one fixed from eternity is impossible. The whole is in each and every part, and welds it with the rest into an absolute unity, an iron block, in which *there can be no equivocation or shadow of turning*[8] (italics mine).

Here, the world described by James would warrant carrying out the predetermined patterns of birth order. As firstborn, Esau would receive the requisite allotment of resources and be sacredly connected to God, and no "equivocation or shadow of turning" could undermine that tradition.[9] The narrative would be predetermined and the future of characters predestined. The element of surprise would be removed. Here, however, the oracle portends a different story altogether. While not addressing the two boys directly, Yahweh's prophecy hints that the Deuteronomistic tradition ought to be held loosely. In the words of Bakhtin, a surprising "loophole" may break the expected "rhythm" of the story.[10] Or it may not. Possibilities are (re)opened. In a reading that follows closely the theoretical insight of Bakhtin, Gary Saul Morson draws a distinction between "determinism" and the "loose play" of time offered by the indeterminist. Morson states, "The determinist asks us to accept a singular world, the indeterminist a world in which there is a 'certain pluralism'—what James calls an excess, and Bakhtin a surplus of

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[7] John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 50.
[8] William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," cited in Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 83.
[9] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 184-185.
[10] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time,* 90.

possibilities."[11] What is envisioned by the indeterminist, Morson adds, is not chaos but instead some "loose play."[12] In this time space, Yahweh reveals that Rebekah's womb is a "charged" space. It is a site of creation that hearkens back to Creation. Darkness in the depths, a surplus of water, and space made habitable, are elements in the birthing process of Creation and in the birthing process of Rebekah's children. Jacob and Esau gestate in the Dark of Rebekah's womb, where fecundity and struggle twist together. So too the "stuff" of Creation gestates in a Dark that is at once rife with possibilities and loose play, and also a site of struggle. It is a space, like Rebekah's womb, that must be made habitable. And, it is a space, like Rebekah's womb, that gestates, waits for a particular time before giving birth.

Both Rebekah's womb and the "womb" of precreation are night watches, fertile time spaces. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas, this is clearly not wasted time: "There is a nocturnal space, but it is no longer empty space, the transparency which both separates us from things and gives access to them, by which they are given. Darkness fills it like a content; it is full, but full of the nothingness of everything."[13] Similarly, darkness will fill the time space of both Bethel and the Jabbok. Just as the creative stuff of Creation is water, deep and darkness, spirit and spoken word and face of *tehom*; so too the company Jacob keeps at the Jabbok is with night and sun, stream and face.

In the "looseness" of this created (story) world, the surplus of possibilities also creates space for the moral choices of the characters (including the divine character) to be scrutinized. The ways in which characters "play" in the "looseness" of time becomes an

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[11] Ibid., 83-84.
[12] Ibid., 84.
[13] Emmanuel Levinas, "There is: Existence Without Existents," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 31.

important part of the discussion. A character's agency—his or her ability to act in moral or amoral ways—is foregrounded in the indeterministic (story) world. In the episode immediately following the transition from the womb, the moral choices of the characters are thrown into question.

Waiting in the Shadows

As the events of the narrative unfold, Jacob frequently (dis)appears in the shadows. Jacob's character is authored in the dark chronotope of the family tents which he is said, in the translation of E. A. Speiser, to "keep" (Gen. 25:27).[14] The family tents function as another kind of dark "womb" that offers him protection from the world outside. Even as he "keeps" the tents, there is a sense in which the tents also "keep" him. The participle ישב ("dwelling," "remaining,") (Gen. 25:27) suggests Jacob's occupation of this time space is ongoing. Jacob remains in darkness for a long time. Avivah Zornberg's examination of the Zohar reveals an uncertainty to the way in which Jacob is "authored" there: "There is a suggestion that Jacob is born without a strong *personal* bent of his own. The early years of his maturity are spent in the created worlds of his father and grandfather; he is engaged in a search for God *by indirection*."[15] Indeed, as the chapter entitled "The Name" has revealed, the author's description of Jacob suggests his subjectivity is intricately connected to someone else—Esau (Gen. 25:26). He gestates in the darkness of Rebekah's womb, transitions into the world of Esau's shadow, and dwells in the shade of the family tents. The world of shadows in which he lives also suggests an

[14] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 193-194.
[15] Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 164.

ominousness to his character, according to Speiser.[16] Similarly, David Zucker states that there is a sense here of "keeping secrets, keeping his own counsel, plotting, scheming, allying himself with the darkness of the tent versus the more open-field approach of brother Esau."[17] Moreover, Esau occupies a duality of spaces, transitioning out of the field and back to home and hearth. The spaces occupied by Esau is in keeping with the time space of adolescence, where character is developed in quests outside the home, even as it continues to be nurtured inside it. Transitions between inside and outside mark the transition from child to adult. For Esau, this is an embodied movement, a chronotopic "world" in which "eventness" can take place. In the words of Bakhtin, "[Chronotopes] are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied."[18] In both tying himself to the knots of the tents, and untying himself through moving outside them, Esau opens himself up to the element of surprise, "eventness." As Morson states, "For there to be eventness, there must be alternatives. Eventful events are performed in a world in which there are multiple possibilities, in which some things that could happen do not. In such a world, time ramifies and its possibilities multiply…"[19] In transitioning from outside the tents and back, Esau is presented with many possible outcomes. And as the narrative demonstrates, not all the possible outcomes are favorable. Transitioning out of the family tents, like transitioning out of the womb, opens individuals up to dark possibilities and dark choices. Someone else is always waiting in the shadows. Esau's sojourn into Jacob's tent of shadows results in the exchange of birthright for stew. All the

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[16] Speiser, *Genesis,* 193-194.
[17] David Jeremy Zucker, "Jacob in Darkness (And Light): A Study in Contrasts," *Judaism* 35, no. 4 (1986): 404.
[18] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 250.
[19] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, 22.

while, God (dis)appears absent from the scene. If God is anywhere at all, it is in the shadows. If, however, in Cusan terms, God is "enfolded" in all, then he is also implicated in all. God's agency, then, along with the human characters, is also called into question.

For Bakhtin, the eventness of Being implies moral reflection upon individuals' actions. Each act of being serves as an "answerable act or deed,"[20] juxtaposed to other unrealized behaviors. Jacob could have respected the rights of primogeniture. Esau could have, as well. Jacob could have given a gift without demand of reciprocity. Isaac and Rebekah could have created a family life where neither child was favored over the other. The community could have constructed its moral and ethical framework around *Hesed*. Instead of remaining an ethical and theological ideal, the community could have taken steps to actualize it. God could have shown up in this moment but did not, indicating, perhaps, his support of Jacob's actions. As Anderson quips, "God is not a disinterested bystander or someone who withdraws and spasmodically appears when it is convenient for his characterization (that is, when there are no deceptions occurring) but is a figure deeply woven into the fabric of the story."[21] From the birth canal to Bethel to Peniel, God works through human agency to act as Jacob's patron. For Anderson, there is no divine circumlocution but instead divine centrality. If such is the case, then God is also implicated here. Inaction is as open to critique as action.

All of these unrealized possibilities, however, are framed with the presupposition that Jacob's action is *immoral*. This is not necessarily the case. Jacob's action is not necessarily *immoral*. It is not clear how much mutability existed with primogeniture, and, as Sarna points out, there is reason to think Jacob's actions are viewed favorably. For

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[20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 10.
[21] Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*, 50.

Sarna, there is no doubt that the way Jacob acquired his brother's birthright could not have been considered either unusual or objectionable in the context of his times. Sarna claims there is every reason to believe Jacob's dealings with Esau represent a stage of morality where shrewd opportunism was highly respected.[22]

In almost the same breath, however, Sarna states outright that Jacob's dealings, both here and in the next episode involving Isaac and Esau, *are immoral*. Sarna avers, "The biographical details of Jacob's life read like a catalogue of misfortunes…. All the foregoing makes quite clear Scripture's condemnation of Jacob's moral lapse in his treatment of his brother and father. In fact, an explicit denunciation could hardly have been more effective or more scathing than this unhappy biography."[23] Sarna's comments regarding Jacob's behavior are helpful for considering his agency in these events and framing it morally. However, his statements cannot be substantiated textually. In the absence of comment from the narrator or judgment by God, the question remains. Sarna's comments, moreover, fail to consider the post-exilic nature of the text, which frames the reality of the exiles through the character of Jacob. The appropriation of the birthright by Jacob may symbolize the competition for resources between the returnees and remainees, who would have been represented by Jacob and Esau respectively. Therefore morality and moral agency exists on two levels, in the poetics of the story world through the actions of its characters and in the rhetoricians behind that narrative which seek to frame it in particular ways. Danna Fewell's point is apt: "The narrative discourse as a whole also operates as moral agent in its creation of communal space for moral reflection."[24]

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[22] Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History*, 188.
[23] Ibid., 184.
[24] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Space for Moral Agency in the Book of Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, forthcoming.

While the rhetoric of the story—the way it is constructed and remembered—receives merely a gesture here, the final chapter entitled, "The Crossing," deals with this in additional detail.

The next scene in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 27) demonstrates that each of the characters sojourn in the Dark. A dark authorship hovers over the narrative, authoring each of the characters who are situated in it. For Isaac, his body acts as a chronotope: "And it happened when Isaac was old, that his eyes grew too bleary to see…" (Gen. 27:1 Alter). The darkness covering Isaac's aged eyes is a time space where Isaac is enveloped in a dark vulnerability. His field of vision, however, is not only blurred or darkened by old age. His field of vision has been dark around the edges from the start of the narrative, where he said to "love" only Esau (Gen. 25:28). It is his ongoing blindness, the love for only one child, which frames the giving of the blessing to Esau as a foregone conclusion. Isaac's preference imposes a "rhythm" to the story that resembles Bakhtin's notion of authorship, described by Morson as a "controlling presence at every moment."[25] Time may shadow his eyes here, but it is his preference which shadows the narrative. Similarly, Rebekah's preference also darkens, blurs, her field of vision. Her preference also shadows the narrative. Indeed, the potential for conflict between husband and wife is even *fore*shadowed from the start (Gen. 25:28). Here too Jacob waits in the shadows, caught between the (over)protective love of his mother and his continued sojourn in the darkness of the family tents. That darkness authors him, like a child, to follow his mother's instructions with minimal protest. Rebekah dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes; she covers his smooth skin with the skins of kids. All this Rebekah does before the face of God (Gen. 27:7). When the aged father asks Jacob whether he is Esau, twice Jacob

[25] Morson, *Narrative Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, 90.

responds, "I am" (Gen. 27:18-19; 24). Gordon Wenham notes that Jacob's response is an overcompensation of identity. The normal reply in Hebrew to Isaac's question would have been, "Esau am I," but Jacob instead employs the more assertive form, "I am Esau."[26] Jacob's masquerading and his staunch assertion that he is Esau, coupled with the darkness of Isaac's bleary eyes, completes the deception. Jacob, once again, supplants Esau. Once again, God has (dis)appeared from the scene. He is either nowhere to be found, or he is hidden in plain sight. Either way, this act of deception functions as a transition in Jacob's life. For the first time, there is movement. It is a movement from darkness to darkness which authors him in a different way—he is awakened to possibility. His exile from the shadows of the family tents casts (side)shadows upon the narrative.

Sleeping and Waking in the (Side) Shadows

Jacob's expulsion is a transition from everything familiar—*va-yetze*, "and he left" (Gen. 28:10). Jacob leaves Beersheba, a place with strong patriarchal associations—places where his father and grandfather often stayed (Gen. 22:19; 26:23, 33). Beersheba is also associated with security (Gen. 21:31; 26:26ff.), divine assurance (Gen. 26:24), and patriarchal worship or the presence of God (Gen. 21:33; 26:25; 46:1).[27] Kevin Walton notes that Beersheba is a place as near to anywhere that Jacob might call "home." Walton continues, "Thus the reminder that Jacob is leaving this place, emphasizing the sense of absence he is to feel—from place, from family, and from God."[28] Two reasons are given for Jacob's dispersion—the need to find an acceptable wife (Gen. 27:46-28:2)—and fear

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[26] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 208.
[27]Kevin Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown: The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative* (Cumbria, CA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 42-43.
[28] Ibid.

of Esau's anger (Gen. 27:42-45). In his Midrash, Rashi states that the leaving of a righteous person from a place *makes an imprint*.[29] Given the relationship between *Ya'akov* and *a'kev* ("heel" or "footprint"),[30] it is likely that Jacob left his imprint—his footprints—throughout Beersheba. Similarly, the memory of the footprints of *Ya'akov* has been imprinted on the mind of the Israelite audience throughout the long stretch of patriarchal narrative. Yet Zornberg notes that the void in Beersheba following Jacob's absence may have been felt within Jacob as well: "Rashi speaks of a void left behind Jacob as he begins his journey. But perhaps the void is *in* Jacob, as well. As he 'goes out' of his place, a vacuum separates him from his origins, a kind of necessary detachment."[31] Zornberg adds:

> In leaving home, Jacob goes out into exile. This is an exile not only from his geographical home but, in some radical sense, from himself. His going out makes an imprint on himself: how is he to know himself in that strange country, that darkness of exile? As he begins his journey, the sun sets (Gen. 28:11); when he returns, twenty years later, the narrative describes a sunrise (Gen. 32:32). Both these markers of time, the Midrash suggests, are functions of Jacob's personal sense of time. Between these two points, there is darkness, the Dark Night of the Soul.[32]

For Jacob, the darkness of exile, the darkness of the place to which he is exiled, is the very thing on which personal transformation may hinge. Prior to that transformation, however, Rashi notes that fourteen years of elapsed time must be accounted for. Rashi claims that during the fourteen years prior to Jacob's arrival at Bethel, he hid himself in the House of Study of Eber. While he was going to the House of Laban, he was learning Torah from Eber. Due to the merit of the Torah, Jacob was not punished for those years

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[29] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 181.
[30] Brown, F., S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 784.
[31] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 181.
[32] Ibid., 185.

spent away from his father.[33] Even in the Midrash, the image of Jacob's containment suggests sequestering in scholarly darkness, a kind of womblike protection from the world. Darkness protects—even overprotects, like his (m)other.

At Bethel, however, the Dark acts as a companion both to Jacob who sleeps under its heavy cover and to Yahweh (and his heavenly consort) who appears in the midst of it. Jacob's exile transitions him from the chronotope of womb and tent to what Bakhtin refers to as the chronotope of the threshold. This chronotope is connected with a "breaking point" in life, the moment of "crisis," the decision that changes a life. As such the threshold chronotope is "highly charged with emotion and value."[34] Bakhtin viewed this particular chronotope as linking naturally to "encounter," even to mystery-time.[35] Beersheba may be a (time)space *associated with God*, but it is the time space of Bethel where Jacob "encounters" God. Significantly, Bethel is time space away from home and out of the shadows, even as it is enveloped in the shadows of the night. Yet it is a moment of crisis, a moment of psychic disintegration away from home and hearth, where in his sleep, Jacob is awakened to (side)shadows. Morson delineates between foreshadowing and sideshadowing, noting that:

> Whereas foreshadowing works by revealing apparent alternatives to be mere illusions, sideshadowing conveys the sense that actual events might just as well not have happened. In an open universe, the illusion is inevitability itself. Alternatives always abound, and, more often than not, what exists need not have existed. *Something else* was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that "something else." Instead of casting a foreshadow from the future, it casts a shadow "from the side," that is, from the other possibilities. Along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present. Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes.

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[33] Rashi, "Bereishis/Genesis," in *The Torah: With Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1995), 306-307.
[34] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 248.
[35] Ibid., 248-249.

> While we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else might have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text.[36]

At Bethel, the night falls "unexpectedly," Zornberg notes. When Jacob comes to that place, she notes that he "collides" with it. Suddenly, before he knows it, the place takes him over.[37] In his remarks on the Bethel episode, Rashi notes Jacob stays at Bethel "because the sun had set." Rashi states, "It should have written, 'And the sun had set, and he spent the night there' because the sun had set implies that the sun set for him, suddenly, not in its normal time, so that he should spend the night there."[38] Indeed, this is no "normal time" but instead a threshold chronotope where a dark God authors a set of possibilities heretofore hidden in the shadows.

Until Bethel, the "presence" of God in Jacob's life is marked by a kind of semi-presence or even absence. God is presumably behind the scenes, foretelling Jacob's usurpation of Esau (Gen. 25:23), and invoked in Isaac's blessing (Gen. 27:28-29). However, Jacob has not yet met God face to face, nor does he claim God for himself, as evidenced by his reply to Isaac: "And Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you found [the game] so soon, my son?' And he said, 'Because *the LORD your God* gave me good luck'" (Gen. 27:20 Alter). This is the God of Jacob's father. This is not yet Jacob's God. But in this "certain place" (Gen. 28:10), after the sun had set and the night had fallen, he took one of the stones "of the place" (Gen. 28:11), put his head down and lay down "in that place" (Gen. 28:12), saw a vision of God, proclaimed that "the LORD is in this place" (Gen. 28:17), noted "how fearsome is this place" (Gen. 28:17); and called "the

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[36] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, 117-118.
[37] Bill Moyers et al., *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 290.
[38] Ibid., 311.

name of that place" Bethel (Gen. 28:19), the house of God.[39] Before the narrative places Jacob at Bethel, however, the place already contained the dark footprints of worshippers gone by. Israel's literary history demonstrates that long before the writing of the Bethel episode, Bethel was already haunted by worshippers.

In the eighth century during Amos and Hosea's prophetic careers, Bethel was a primary sanctuary (Amos 5:5; 7:10-13; Hos. 10:5). And before its excoriation by the prophets as a place of seduction, Bethel had been a sacred site for assembly (Judg. 20:18, 26; 21:2; 1 Sam. 7:16).[40] It remained until King Josiah's Deuteronomistic reform, which obliterated country shrines and priesthoods in favor of Jerusalem-centered worship (2 Kgs. 23:15). Bruce Vawter states, "Somehow, Bethel is envisioned as a quintessential meeting place of God and man (sic)—exactly what a shrine or sanctuary is supposed to be—a place where God's *messengers* are constantly *going up and down* bearing petitions and responses, therefore a *gateway to heaven*."[41] When he happens upon this "place," Jacob leaves his own dark footprints there. It is here, in this darkened place of holiness, that Jacob encounters the Divine Absence that henceforth promises Divine Presence. What might be expected of such a theophany—judgment for Jacob's multiple moral infractions—is absent. What is present, instead, is the promise of Presence.

> And the LORD was standing beside him and He said I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. *Remember, I am with you*: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. *I will not leave you* until I have done what I

[39] In Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2008), 149, he notes that this repetition of a term is generally a thematic marker in biblical narrative.
[40] Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 311.
[41] Ibid., 312.

promised you (Gen. 28:13-15 TNK) (emphases mine).

J. P. Fokkelman notes that this nocturnal encounter is the pivoting point between two family entanglements—the one with Esau from which he has just escaped—and the one with Laban, which he will experience immediately following the night at Bethel.[42] Fokkelman states, "In that darkness the light of revelation shines suddenly and surprisingly. The vertical dimension which Rebekah was allowed to glimpse during her pregnancy is now opened up for Jacob himself. Election and blessing prevail over judgment and punishment."[43] Fokkelman's theological comments are apt, yet his phrasing further exemplifies the binary of light and dark, where the light shines (in spite of) the dark, offering something better. Similarly, Anderson maintains that if God intends to reprimand Jacob for his moral infractions, ironically, the chosen mode of punishment is not rebuke but a "litany of unconditional promises."[44] Moreover, the Bethel oracle's return to Abraham rather than to Isaac indicates Yahweh's sidestepping around Isaac, who has also been deceived; whose god Jacob claimed made him lucky (Gen. 27:20). Yahweh's rhetorical return to Abraham indicates that the promise rightly belongs to Jacob. Finally, parallels exist between God's promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:14 and God's affirming of the land to Abram in Genesis 13:14-15. These associations bypass Isaac and reinforce Yahweh's annoyance at Isaac's preferential treatment for Esau; or they may signal profound changes in intergenerational identity and associated "blessings," the transference of wealth. Either way, Anderson concludes, "The compound effect of these narrative cues demonstrates that God views Jacob and his duplicitous

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[42] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 122.
[43]Ibid., 121.
[44] Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle,* 82-83.

actions positively."[45] Thus, throughout the unfolding of the narrative, human agency, whether through Rebekah or Jacob himself, is always undergirded by an unseen face who has, through his oracle, suggested a script. In the wake of that script, however, human choice has been "momentous."[46] The rest of Jacob's life, Fokkelman agrees, occurs amidst this continuing election and under the guise of God's presence. Moreover, it appears that presence is not dependent upon location, even though place is critical to how the story works out its details, including Jacob's encounter with the deity both at Bethel and at the Jabbok. The presence of God in Jacob's life, henceforth, will not hinge upon visiting particular holy places. God's presence will not depend upon Jacob's pilgrimage but upon his own person. This is significant in considering that those producing the story—the returnees—must discover that the presence of God is portable. Even in exile, the presence of God makes itself felt through prophetic utterances (e.g. Second Isaiah) which promise deliverance and return. Therefore, the portability of the presence of God is significant for Jacob individually and for the post-exilic "returnees" that he symbolizes. The promise made to Jacob at Bethel, then, is a familiar ringing in the ears for the community producing this story.

Here, Jacob responds with a prayer: "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father's house—the LORD shall be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21 TNK). Jacob's response to God's beneficence is conditional. Jacob, ever the wrestler, struggles rhetorically with God, bargaining with God just as he did with the famished Esau.[47] While this "dark side" of Jacob persists, so does his quest to move from disintegration to

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[45] Ibid, 33.
[46] Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, 22.
[47] Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, 151.

integration. To "return safe" means to return "in peace" or "in wholeness." Rashi interpreted בְּשָׁלוֹם as "whole from sin," free from any defect caused by sin. Here, Rashi also demonstrates clear displeasure with Laban, claiming that בְּשָׁלוֹם also meant not learning from the ways of Laban.[48] Safe return is his hope for the journey and it is the essence of Jacob's prayer. The promise from God is *Presence*; the *possibility* Jacob yearns for is wholeness. Jacob turns the aporia of darkness into an occasion for night prayer, the first night prayer in the Hebrew Bible. In her explication of *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*'s Midrash, Zornberg notes, "[Jacob] intended to pray in daylight, in the mode of all human prayer till then, drawing strength from the light of the sun; but God put out the lights and Jacob discovers a *new possibility—almost an impossibility*, an oxymoron, as the *Sefat Emet* conceives it—called the Evening Prayer"[49] (emphasis mine). The aporia of darkness is the very aporia of God, and in his prayer, Jacob turns the impossibility of God into the possibility of Presence. And yet, prayer in general strains itself, as Derrida has said: "For this particular prayer asks nothing, all the while asking more than everything. It asks God to give himself rather than his gifts."[50] When Jacob prays for peace, and God promises presence, both speak of *possibility* in the face of *impossibility*. The aporia is the Dark which partially hinders Jacob's movement, yet it is the very thing that allows for excess. Rashi notes that it is this night prayer which gives Jacob light-footedness. When Jacob lifted his feet and went to the land of the easterners, his heart lifted his feet and it became easy to walk.[51] Bill Moyers links Jacob's light-footedness with the binding of the feet of Isaac. Moyers claims that after lying all night in the place where his father was

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[48] Rashi, "Bereishis/Genesis," 316.
[49] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 188.
[50] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 56.
[51] Rashi, "Bereishis/Genesis," 317.

bound hand and foot, unable to use his legs, Jacob discovers a "certain energy," even in relation to the "haunted family" from which he hails.[52]

Moreover, Jacob has turned the *impossibility* of what the Hebrew Bible says about such encounters—"You cannot see my Face; for no one shall see me and live" (Ex. 33:20 NRSV)—into a *possibility* that such an encounter might occur not only in the sleeping, but in the waking as well. The possibility of such an encounter must "unsay" what is impossible in the text in order to "say" what is possible of the God behind and beyond the text. Derrida states,

> And the language of ab-negation or of renunciation is not negative: not only because it does not state in the mode of descriptive predication and of the indicative proposition simply affected with a negation, but because it denounces as much as it renounces; and it denounces, enjoining; it prescribes overflowing this insufficiency; it mandates, *it necessitates* doing the impossible, necessitates going (*Geh,* Go!) where one cannot go.[53]

This episode at Bethel foreshadows the encounter later at the Jabbok where Jacob meets God "face to face," cracking open the "no" inscribed upon the face of the Hebrew Bible, this aporia, into excess. Seemingly, the Hebrew Bible's inscribed "no" upon the Face of All Faces, and upon the face of the page, is perhaps more contingent upon the face of the human than on the face of God.[54] Here, at Bethel, Jacob's face is still hidden behind a mask of disintegration, running from the face of Esau, even as masquerading as that face is the reason for his footprints. Later, Jacob will meet God face to face, individuating him from his brother (Gen. 33:10). For now, however, this dark encounter offers the *possibility* for an encounter of greater intimacy.

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[52] Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation,* 294.
[53] Derrida, *On the Name*, 59.
[54] One may hear resonances here with the central question of C. S. Lewis' final novel, *Till We Have Faces* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956): "How can the gods meet us face to face until we have faces?"

The final "dark" event leading up to the Jabbok encounter begins in "broad daylight" (Gen. 29:7) and ends with darkness: "Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark, not telling him that he was fleeing" (Gen. 31:20 TNK).[55] When Jacob arrives in broad daylight at the door of his uncle Laban, he is deceived by Laban through the darkness. After working for her for seven years, Laban promises to give Rachel to Jacob in marriage. After spending the night together, Jacob awakens to find himself in bed with the wrong woman—Rachel's sister, Leah. Zornberg states, "…[Leah] takes Rachel's place under the marriage canopy; and in the darkness, in which forms and structures become fluid, in which transformations, fantastic combinations, and splittings become possible, Leah *becomes* Rachel."[56] Leah becomes Rachel in the same way that Jacob *became Esau* before the Face of his father, Isaac. Yet this time, Jacob is deceived though the darkness. Zucker states, "Darkness is essential to Laban's 'putting one over' on Jacob. The wedding feast lasts well into the evening, for it was only 'when evening came' (Gen. 29:23) that Laban brought Leah to Jacob, and it is, ironically, in the contrasting light of morning that the new husband sees that he has been outmaneuvered."[57] This time, the darkness acts as a protective cover not for Jacob, but for Leah. The nocturnal time space of the marriage bed supposedly transitions her as one covered by the protection of a father to one covered by the protection of a husband. As the chapter entitled, "The Face," has shown, however, Jacob offers neither protection nor love. Here, the dark deception is underscored by the emphasis on Leah's eyes—described as "weak," hearkening back to Isaac's blind eyes, which Jacob used to his advantage in

[55] While the TNK translates the Hebrew of the phrase as keeping Laban in the dark, the Hebrew itself deals with stealing the heart of Laban.
[56] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*, 211.
[57] Zucker, "Jacob in Darkness (And Light): A Study in Contrasts," 407.

order to deceive. Soon thereafter, the relationship between Jacob and Laban disintegrates, with each one keeping the other in the dark about the sheep and the goats they were breeding. Jacob notices that Laban's face was not with him as it had been in the past (Gen. 31:2, 5). Jacob takes his wives and other possessions, keeping Laban the Aramean "in the dark" as he leaves Laban's house (Gen. 31:20). The God who promised to be present with Jacob appears to Laban at night and warns him not to harm Jacob (Gen. 31:24, 29). The two make a pact not to harm each other. And Jacob sets his face toward the Mount Gilead and toward Edom, the home of his brother (Gen. 31:21).

Side Shadows at the Jabbok

At the Jabbok, the darkness is present/absent in several ways: through dust and dark which render seeing the visage of God (im)possible; through the self-concealing and ambiguous nature of Elohim/ish; and through the apophatic gestures of silence, isolation and trembling which characterize the encounter.

To begin, at the beginning, when darkness was on the face of the אֶרֶץ, two men kicked up some dust together by the river Jabbok. Rashi was the first interpreter to notice darkness on the surface of the text. Rashi noted that Menachem explained that וַיֵּאָבֵק ("and he wrestled") meant "and a man became dusted." According to Menachem and Rashi, Jacob and his assailant would raise dust with their feet through their movements. Rashi further amended Menachem's interpretation by drawing on Aramaic. Rashi stated, "It appears to me that it means 'and he became bound up' and it is an Aramaic word, like 'after they became bound up with it,' and 'tied them in a bow,' which means 'tying in a bow'; for it is the way of two people who are struggling to topple each other that one

hugs and ties up the other with his arms."[58] Being bound and kicking up dust at the Jabbok recalls the earlier episode at Bethel, also in darkness, where Rashi again draws on an image of darkness in relation to the promissory blessings of God. In his night prayer just prior to the Jabbok encounter, Jacob reminds God: "Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count'" (Gen. 32:13 TNK). Rashi rightly notes that the word used by Yahweh at Bethel was עָפָר ("dust").[59] While Rashi's reminder may seem like splitting philological hairs, here his Midrash evokes the connection between darkness (both the dark night and the dust) and the promissory blessings of God. These promises are made to Jacob in the darkness at Bethel; they are prayed for in the dark prior to their wrestling match; and later they are actualized in the dark at the Jabbok. Therefore it appears that at the Jabbok, Jacob and his assailant are doing more than kicking up the dust—they are also kicking up the promises. Theirs is a physical and psychological negotiation of what has already been promised, with darkness as proximate companion. Similarly, the Zohar also draws upon the imagery of dust in order to underscore the apophatic nature of the episode.

The Zohar views the assailant as the demonic angel of Esau (named Samael) and compares the dust or powder with the *Shechinah* or ash the Rabbis mention in the Midrash: "What is the difference between them? Ash, residue of fire, never generating fruit; dust, yielding all fruit, totality of above and below. . . But ash never generates fruit or vegetation, so *va-ye'aveq,* and he wrestled, arriving with that *avaq*, ash, riding upon it,

[58] Rashi, "Bereishis/Genesis," 370.
[59] Ibid., 364.

to contest against Jacob."[60] For the Rabbis, the dark ash symbolizes Lilith, the demonic feminine, who is barren, while dust symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who receives all emanation and bears life below.[61] The wrestling until the break of dawn (Gen. 32:26) symbolizes the night of exile that Israel endured. "For now exile resembles night—it is night!—and that ash rules over Israel, who lie in alien dust, until morning rises and day brightens. Then Israel will prevail; to them will be granted the kingdom, since they are the holy ones of the Most High. . ."[62] Esau, then, in the Rabbinic mind, stands in variously for the demonic wrestling opponent Lilith who wages war in darkness, the tragedy of the exile, and later, as a polemic against Christianity. Thus, in the Rabbinic mind, "Israel" (the man and the nation) wrestles with a formidable opponent whom he/it will eventually overcome. The Darkness of the exile preoccupied the Rabbinic mind, prompting them to make theo-political statements regarding the assailant's identity.

For Catherine Keller, the scene prompts a different kind of political reading. In her theo-political interpretation of the encounter, Keller states:

> If we face the shadow in the night—whether we call it Other, angel, Elohim, problem, sibling—we may find ourselves moved by a strange eros. This "wrestling" (*va-ye' avek*), as Rashi comments, "is the way of two people who strain to push each other down to the ground—they embrace and struggle with each other" (*hovko ve-ovko*; Gen. 32:24). Limping into the next day, ultimately wounded ("touched in the hollow of the thigh"), the place of this nocturnal struggle has opened up: it is called *Peni'el*. Face of godhood.[63]

Keller notes that the image of the dark evokes fecundity—that which is birthed, begotten in dust or dirt. What is birthed, it seems, is actually a rebirth, though certainly not of

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[60] Daniel C. Matt, trans., *The Zohar* Vol. 3 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 28.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 29.
[63] Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 230-231.

Jacob. Rather, the dark allows for a rebirth or unearthing of promises already made in the dark. In the dark they are (con)tested amidst arms and limbs and fears and a wrestle and embrace that (dis)appear markedly similar. Could it be that both Elohim/ish and Jacob are (re)born on this night to the possibilities inherent in the promises? As Edward Hirsch has said, the element of the dark is crucial to interpretation of the Jabbok text. Hirsch's literary, poetic reading of the Jabbok encounter connects to what William Wordsworth termed "spots of time," as well as Virginia Woolf's "moments of being" and James Joyce's "epiphanies." Hirsch states,

> Psychologically, everything must happen under the eerie cover of darkness because Jacob's experience is unsightly, epiphanic, and prophetic, an event out of time. The linear flow and narrative momentum of the overarching story—Jacob's return to his homeland and reconciliation with his brother—are radically interrupted; indeed, what we think of as chronological or historical time is completely ruptured on this night of nights… He is now a solitary traveler left on the edge of a deep gorge. The nocturnal setting is so crucial because he has moved outside the arena of what can be apprehended by daylight and has entered the realm of the visionary. He has moved from eyesight to vision. The dangerous encounter that follows is the pivotal moment—the turning point—in Jacob's life. The great archaic genius of the Yahwist was to literalize in a human figure the encounter with the Otherworld.[64]

As a specific time space, the darkness of the Jabbok demonstrates the unfinished nature of the story, embodied in the bodies of Jacob and the antagonist. In what Bakhtin has called the "chronotopic motif of meeting,"[65] at the Jabbok the "inner unfinalizability" of these characters is foregrounded.[66] Here they "act into the open future," one without teleology.[67] It is a suspension of time in which the promises made to Jacob at Bethel are radically and grotesquely called into question. The dark at Bethel had authored Jacob to

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[64] David Rosenberg, ed., *Genesis, As It Is Written: Contemporary Writers On Our First Stories* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 183-184.
[65] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 99.
[66] Morson, *Narrative Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, 92.
[67] Ibid., 99-100.

trust in the provision of God. It was in that dark chronotope where the promises he needed to hear were uttered. Just prior to the moment of meeting at the Jabbok, he offers a night prayer that God remember those promises. Darkness there, as in Rebekah's womb and in the tents he kept, had been protective. At the Jabbok, however, a radical re-authoring of darkness takes place. Here, the darkness becomes a space where the anxieties of his waking life are heightened. This mysterious man may kill him, just as Esau may. The promises made to him at Bethel are of no use if he does not make it through the night. The assurance offered in the dark at Bethel is removed at the Jabbok. This time space is a disintegration, a rupturing akin to the darkness of exile he felt so long ago (Gen. 28:10) and akin to, it would seem, the darkness of exile for the nation he comes to represent.

Equally critical to this time space is not only the darkness, but also the isolation of the protagonist and the relative silence of the antagonist. A familiar trifecta of apophasis hovers over the scene at the Jabbok: darkness, isolation, and relative silence. It is the darkness of this time space which on the one hand, appears to act as a protective shield for Jacob's mortality (Ex. 33:20), even as the presence of that darkness heightens the anxiety of the moment. The dark renders the Face of all Faces (in)visible. Derrida posits two variations of (in)visibility. First, Derrida refers to the visible in-visible, an invisible of the order of the visible that one keeps in secret by keeping out of sight. Like a veil over a face, a surface is concealed beneath another. Whatever one conceals in this way becomes invisible but remains within the order of visibility. Derrida also refers to absolute invisibility; this absolutely non-visible refers to whatever falls outside the register of sight: the sonorous, the musical, the vocal or phonic but also the tactile and

odoriferous. Desire also falls into this category, where "seeing in secret" moves secrecy beyond the secret.[68] For Derrida, this provokes the *mysterium tremendum*. Elohim/ish looks at Jacob, facing him, while Jacob must only hear him—"What is your name?" (Gen. 32:28). Most often, Derrida claims, this *mysterium tremendum*, here, Elohim/ish or the Face of all Faces, is heard through the voice of another—angel, prophet, messiah or postman. "God looks at me and I don't see him and it is on the basis of this gaze that singles me out and my responsibility comes into being."[69] It is, as Derrida claims, dissymmetrical—the gaze sees Jacob without Jacob seeing it look at him.

There is, of course, something of trembling within this encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*, with this Face and his frequent companion, darkness. An encounter with this Face of all Faces holds the potentiality or portend(iality) for death. It is violence and fraternal fear, after all, which this apophatic text narrates (Gen. 32:7, 25, 28). For Jacob, the *mysterium tremendum* is both human and divine, as his wrestling partner attests: "For you have striven with *Elohim* and with *Anashim*" (Gen. 32:28). Both the "fear of Isaac," who functions as his proximate wrestling partner, and the fear of Esau, whom he will face the next day, are cause for trembling. He trembles because he faces, on the one hand, the (un)known—"Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of things that may be, only?"[70] Does Jacob's trembling portend a certain death at Esau's hand? Jacob's future—the stuff of life and death—is concealed in darkness. Jacob is left in the dark. His future is a secret to him. Derrida writes:

> A secret always *makes* you tremble. Not simply quiver or shiver, which also happens sometimes but tremble. A quiver can of course manifest fear, anguish,

[68] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 90.
[69] Ibid., 91.
[70] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).

> apprehension of death; as when one quivers in advance, in anticipation of what is to come. . . A quiver is not always very serious, it is sometimes discreet, barely discernable, somewhat epiphenomenal. It prepares for, rather than follows the event. . . On the other hand, trembling, at least as a signal or symptom, is something that has already taken place. . . It suggests that violence is going to break out again, that some traumatism will insist on being repeated. Most often we neither know what is coming upon us nor see its origin; it therefore remains a secret.[71]

Trembling takes place, Derrida states, because [Jacob] is afraid of what already makes him afraid. He has been threatened, the sound of it still ringing in his ears (Gen. 27:41-45). He waits, not only for the repetition of the threat (Gen. 32:7) but ultimately for what has been forestalled—the possibility of his own death. Thus he trembles not only because the threat may be repeated—but that it may be actualized. More immediately, however, Jacob trembles because in the concealed face of his opponent, death stares him in the face. The Dark, death, and this man-God all share the same face, one who, in Derridian terms, appears (un)like the *kryptō*.

For Derrida, the *kryptō* refers to the concealed, dissimulated, secret clandestine. It is that which extends beyond the visible, making its home in the field of secrecy beyond the nonvisible to that which *resists deciphering.* Rather than being merely invisible, the *kryptō* or secret is illegible or undecipherable.[72] That is, it is purely apophatic, that which resists—"Why do you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:29). It is this refusal to (self)-disclose, coupled with the darkness as his companion, which keeps the secret. Darkness and silence cloak the conversation—and conversation partner—in mystery. Darkness, isolation, and silence function as aporia. Derrida's comments on the *Akedah* are equally apt for the verbal resistance displayed by the Face of all Faces at the Jabbok. This Face

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[71] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 53-54.
[72] Ibid., 89-90.

speaks. He says a lot. As Derrida puts it: "Speaking in order not to say anything is always the best technique for keeping a secret."[73] But even if the Face of All Faces says everything, he need only keep silent on a single thing to conclude that he has not spoken. The silence impregnates the whole discourse. The Face speaks and he resists speaking. He responds without responding, in the form of a question (Gen. 32:29). He responds indirectly. The Face speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing that he must keep secret—namely, his identity, his Name and Face.

But why this dark apophasis, this heavy silence? For Derrida, the face of death and the face of love appear to be one and the same. In speaking about Abraham's role in the *Akedah*, Derrida (un)says:

> Abraham comes to hate those closest to him by keeping silent, he comes to hate his only beloved son by consenting to put him to death. He hates them not out of hatred, of course, but out of love. He doesn't hate them any less for that, on the contrary. Abraham must love his son absolutely to come to the point where he will grant him death, to commit what ethics would call hatred and murder."[74]

Certainly, the Jabbok encounter is not the only occurrence of a spasmodic action on the part of this Face toward one of his chosen just prior to an event of significance (cf. Ex. 4:24-26). Is the weapon wielded by the darkness and the Face it conceals something akin to love, a kind of holy, preparatory purgation? Is this "beloved enemy," as Frederick Buechner calls him, the "face of love"?[75] For Derrida, it appears that God—the name of the absolute other as other and as unique—wields not only the flint knife of Abraham, or in the case of Jacob, the power to kill—but paradox, scandal, and aporia. It is the dark which functions as the "bottomless collapse," that place where everything else "bottoms

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[73] Ibid., 59.
[74] Ibid., 65.
[75] Frederick Buechner, "The Magnificent Defeat" in *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 7.

out" and what is left is a Face who has left his darkened signature. And it is a Face which might, along with Derrida, claim the following:

> I offer a gift of death, I betray, I don't need to raise my knife over my son on Mount Moriah for that. Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably.[76]

Derrida's "day and night," and more aptly, the night at the Jabbok, functions as merism for Jacob's whole life. From dark time space of the womb, to the possibilities awakened in the dark at Bethel, that elusive presence, that *kryptō*, has left dark footprints, a dark signature of presence, over Jacob's whole life. Jacob's response is something of the apophatic, too, some measure of *Gelassenheit*: "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" (Gen. 28:16 NRSV) and, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"(Gen. 32:30 NRSV). Life is offered in the Face of death. Reconciliation is offered in the Face of hatred (Gen. 33:4). And darkness has (un)shaded into the morning (Gen. 32:31).

Nevertheless, the dark and ambiguous nature of the Face at the Jabbok has caused scholarly and theological trembling for Christian interpreters past and present. In his trans-canonical examination of the Jabbok encounter, Samuel Tongue traces scholars' own wrestling matches with the text. He begins with Hosea's canonical Midrash, through Rashi's interpretations in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, through the Reformation, all the way to contemporary retellings. Unsurprisingly, for Reformers such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, Jacob's wrestling partner was some iteration of the divine, whether God or Jesus. Their anxiety was palpable, as Tongue attests:

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[76] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 68.

> Luther and Calvin seem to have little difficulty imagining the assailant as God Himself, incarnate as the unrecognized Son, rather than merely a man or an angel. This fits with the theologies which they are trying to construct around the paradoxical relationships between the Christian and a God able to destroy and bless, to discipline and to love, *whilst remaining dark and obscure* (emphasis mine).[77]

Tongue's survey reveals not merely anxiety surrounding the nature and character of God as revealed in the text. The history of interpretation also demonstrates that dark images both textual and theological or psychological, whether of the night itself or of Jacob's supposed purification in a "dark night of the soul," was at the forefront of these interpreters' minds. Indeed, their psychological struggle with the darkness of the text appears to mirror in intensity the physical struggle between Jacob and Elohim/ish.

Tongue notes that for Calvin in particular, a deep paradoxical need existed for an adversary to prove Jacob's faith.[78] It was, in Calvin's words, "an occasion to exhibit, as on a field of battle, an example and proof of our strength and firmness […]. But this could not be done without an adversary, *for what advantage would it be to fight with a shadow*?"[79] (emphasis mine). And yet fighting with a shadow, or a shadowy figure, is exactly what Jacob does, for how can a face properly be seen in darkness? Even as Jacob exclaims that he has looked upon God and lived, how much of "God" does he actually see? For Calvin's theological vision, the adversary has to be more than Josephus's phantom.[80] In order to prove one's faith it must be tested against a God, who "not only exhorts us to be strong, but supplies us also with arms, endues us with strength, and also fights himself, in a manner, with us, and is powerful in us, and enables us to overcome

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[77] Samuel Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretive Struggles Over Genesis 32:22-32* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 176.
[78] Ibid, 174.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

our temptations."[81] For Martin Luther, however, Calvin's interpretation of God as conqueror is deeply problematic, for Calvin's interpretation (and therefore Calvin's God and the story Calvin (re)tells) is, as Tongue puts it, "dark with ambiguities."[82] Luther seems fascinated with the "dark side of God," as he links the Jabbok encounter with the *Akedah*.[83] Luther states that the Jabbok encounter, as well as the binding of Isaac, indicates "a dark side to the nature of God, an aspect of his character which seems to want to annihilate his own promises, and which can be resisted only by clinging more firmly to these promises."[84] The obscurity and paradoxes involved in the nocturnal wrestling match appeal to the "imaginative faculties, especially, for the Reformation mind, with the implied stakes of 'wrestling' a blessing from *an obscured and terrifying God*" (emphasis mine).[85] "Obscured" and "terrifying" are apt descriptions of the Face's endarkenment in the Jabbok encounter. The Face remains both obscure—(apo)phatic for what is visible and knowable—and terrifying for the way he attacks the very person he has promised to bless. Ultimately, the Reformers struggled with the notion that the God who appeared at the Jabbok was not, perhaps, the same God who appeared to them in their prayer closets. Certainly, this remains a challenge even for contemporary (religious) interpreters who dust off their Hebrew Bibles and read a difficult text about a dark God who nearly kills the same person he has promised to bless.

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 175.
[83] Ibid., 174-175.
[84] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, Luther's Works, Vol. 6, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 146-147.
[85] Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretive Struggles Over Genesis 32:22-32*, 175.

Ian Douglas Wilson challenges Mark D. Wessner's positive assessment of this encounter,[86] arguing that instead of blessing it produces *both* blessing *and* fear. Nevertheless, Wilson's conclusion is still positive, using vocabulary not found in the text itself: "Ultimately, this divine encounter transforms, even sanctifies, the person(s) involved and prepares the persons for divine service, bearing witness to the awesomeness and holiness of Yahweh."[87] Wilson's assessment is also an implicit "stamp of approval" on the character of God. Rather than allowing the dark and unruly portrayal of God present in the text to stand on its own, Wilson's interpretation domesticates God.

However, other scholars such as Otto Kaiser and R. N. Whybray provide alternative images of a Face who appears anything but domesticated. If God's Face is in view at all, for these scholars it appears dark, immoral, or altogether unruly. In his examination of three difficult narratives in the Pentateuch (Gen. 22:1-19; Ex. 4:24-26; Gen. 32:22-32), Kaiser draws on the tension between *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus*. When speaking about the near sacrifice of Isaac, Kaiser holds in tension the "dark God" who, on the one hand, threatens to destroy the very meaning of life; and the "revealed God," [88] who is working to fulfill the promises he has made (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-16). This tension between a revealed God who makes promises and a dark God who threatens the very promises he makes certainly finds resonance in the near

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[86] Mark D. Wessner, "Toward a Literary Understanding of 'Face to Face' (פנים-אל פנים) in Genesis 32:23-32," *Restoration Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2000): 169-177.

[87] Ian Douglas Wilson, "Face to Face with God: Another Look," *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no 2. (2009): 114.

[88] Otto Kaiser, "Deus Absconditus and Deus Revelatus: Three Difficult Narratives in the Pentateuch" in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw,* ed. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 77. Here Kaiser states explicitly: "Our entire human experience militates against understanding God only as the beneficent, revealed God devoted to human beings in his salvific will. If indeed he is Lord of all reality, then his nature also includes unpredictability, inaccessibility, and hiddenness, for everything that lives also suffers. Only an understanding that conceives his revealed nature together with this hidden quality preserves his comprehensive divinity."

sacrifice of Isaac; and is present explicitly in the *panim el panim* encounter at the Jabbok. Not even prayer, Kaiser maintains, appears to pacify or protect from a dark God who attacks the patriarch at night.[89] Jacob's night prayer in Genesis 32:10-13 does appear effective in that it saves him from violent encounter with Esau. However, his prayer does not save him from violent attack from Elohim/ish. Rather, it is prayer that appears to stimulate it. Indeed, it is only after Jacob prays that he is attacked and is forever marked by God. Kaiser affirms:

> The context makes it clear that prayer in fact does not protect a person from such an encounter with the dark God. . . Whoever has encountered God will remain marked by him, even after having won the struggle with fear in prayer. Prayer itself thus mediates between the *deus absconditus* and the *deus revelatus*, between the God who delivers human beings over to their own fears and anxieties and the God who nonetheless promises his presence as the foundation of the basic trust from which they live (Gen. 28:15; 31:3; 32:10).[90]

For Kaiser, this tension between *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus* demonstrates the "struggle for certainty" of God's "sustaining, sheltering presence."[91] For Kaiser every theodicy ultimately deconstructs itself. Indeed, Jacob's God, or the god who wrestles with him, appears at once enshrouded in darkness, hidden, and yet also paradoxically and even violently present. This God is a kind of hyper-presence, even as it must be admitted that this is a God who is still hidden. To use Terrien's terms, this God is *self-concealing*.[92]

In his theological monograph, Samuel E. Balentine traces the hiding of the face of God in the Old Testament. The phrase "hide the face" (פָּנִים סָתַר) occurs 29 times in the Hebrew Bible: four times in the Pentateuch, twelve times in the Psalms, eleven times in

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[89] Ibid., 81.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Samuel E. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

the Prophets, and twice in the Wisdom literature.[93] Balentine says the reason for the hiding of God's face is to demonstrate that Israel's God will not brook unfaithfulness; if Israel does not adhere to God's demands on their loyalty, they cannot expect the benefit of his presence.[94] Yet as the Jacob Cycle demonstrates, God appears more than willing to brook the unfaithfulness and deception of Jacob, even acting as a trickster himself while Jacob is in the womb. Moreover, despite the nature of Jacob's character, God continues implicitly to sanction his success (Gen. 27:26-38; 28:13-22; 30:25-43; 31:24). Still, it must be noted that Jacob's success does not necessarily mean that God is present to him in an intimate way. Balentine maintains that this problem of the presence of God appears in virtually every stratum of the Old Testament.[95] For Terrien, the full force of the Hebrew reflexive must be noted (e.g., Is. 45:15, a "self-concealing God"). For Terrien, this terminology reflects more accurately the Hebraic understanding of divine hiddenness—an active and sustained hiding with an emphasis on divine freedom and sovereignty—the "presence of an absence." It is precisely this "elusive presence" that for Terrien provides the key to understanding not only the Hebrew Bible but the Bible as a

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[93] Ex. 3:6; Deut. 31:17, 18; 32:20; Ps. 10:11; 13:2; 22:25; 27:9; 30:8; 44:25; 51:11; 69:18; 88:15; 102:3; 104:29; 143:7; Is. 8:17; 50:6; 53:3; 54:8; 59:2; 64:6; Ezek. 39:23, 24, 29; Mic. 3:4; Jer. 33:5; Job 13:24; 34:29.

[94] Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164.

[95] In Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, 171, Balentine states that in the early narratives of the wandering in the wilderness, it is the lack of food and water that prompts Israel to question God's presence. In the lament psalms, it is the experience of unjust suffering which leads the worshipper to accuse God of being capricious in his treatment of his people. In the Prophets, the experience of God's hiddenness is identified with God's departure from Jerusalem. And in the Wisdom literature, the hiddenness of God's activities arises out of the fragmentary nature of human understanding. Indeed, Balentine contends: "Israel's struggle with God's hiddenness ought not to be treated as if it were merely a footnote to an otherwise optimistic and unshakeable faith. The evidence of the present study would hardly support such an understanding. It indicates instead that Israel was repeatedly plagued by the experience of God's hiddenness. Time and again the disparity between religious convictions and the realities of actual experience brought the issue into the forefront of Israel's thought… What calls for chief mention here is the fact that the experience of God's hiddenness, just as the experience of his presence, is an integral part of Israelite faith. Both experiences derive from the nature of God himself. He is both hidden and present, both near and far away," 171-172.

whole.[96] However, scholars are divided as to just how "present" or "absent" this Face may be in the Jacob cycle. Is this Face one who lingers behind Jacob at every step, haunting his footsteps all the way through? Is this Face one who is maddeningly absent, thus forcing human agency to propel events forward throughout the narrative? Is this a Face that is present, even hyper-present (and violently so), but only at the Jabbok?

For Humphreys, a further complication arises when attempting to (un)cover the Face at the Jabbok—the fact that the Face at Bethel appears markedly different from the Face at the Jabbok. While there was a certain mysterious quality about the first encounter at Bethel, for Humphreys this encounter was clearly constructed around God's promise of support, protection and safe return. By contrast, the *panim el panim* at the Jabbok takes on a dark and mysterious quality in significant ways; it is not clear at times just who is who as the episode unfolds, opening with the laconic: "And a man wrestled with him until the rising of the dawn" (Gen. 32:25).[97] The Face is at once *ish* and *Elohim*, man and God. Humphreys questions whether this transformation represents Jacob's own developing awareness of who and what this figure is—from man to God. Jacob's life of struggle with all around him, then, is finally also a life of extended struggle with God.[98] This struggle with God seems in part a struggle to release God from the rhetorical grip of his prayer and wrestling partner. Humphreys notes that at certain key moments in the narrative (Gen. 29:31; 30:22; 31:3, 24), God does act in ways that further Jacob's desires and fulfills the promises made in Genesis 28:13-15. Nevertheless, God is most fully present in what others say of him—Leah and Rachel, Laban, and especially Jacob. In

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[96] Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, throughout.
[97] Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal*, 191.
[98] Ibid.

each instance, Humphreys asserts, God is spoken of in ways that serve the interests of the one speaking of him. God is a character constructed in the stories these characters tell. This is a God constructed by Jacob, a God who facilitates Jacob's good and who serves Jacob's needs. This is a God in danger of becoming "Jacob's God," and, as Humphreys notes, perhaps the Jabbok encounter is God's opportunity to confront Jacob; it is a time for God to reconstruct Jacob.[99] In this way, it seems both God and Jacob are in the process of be-coming; each character's markings upon the other, may change the other. Indeed, Jacob's wrestling match at the Jabbok River appears to work on both levels, leaving him both physically wounded (Gen. 32:32) yet also allowing him to confront his brother without fear (Gen. 33:1-3).[100] Nevertheless, the "dark God" that appears at the Jabbok is not an isolated incident in the Hebrew Bible. Several intertexts also demonstrate the dark nature of this God.

While R. N. Whybray does not discuss the Jabbok encounter specifically, the texts he does examine (portions of the primeval history in Gen. 1-11; Gen. 18; and Job 1-2) uncover a Face that appears all too willing to act in an immoral or amoral way. For Whybray, these narratives constitute a small part of a much larger problem—namely, can one properly speak of a consistent view of God in the Hebrew Bible?[101] Whybray's presentation variously presents this Face as one who is vulnerable, an anthropomorphic construction that is pre-Yahwistic; and at other times amoral or immoral, a depiction derived from folklore that glorifies Moses. In such depictions, the human (be it Moses, Abraham, or someone else) is depicted as more righteous than the god that human

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[99] Ibid., 194.
[100] Ibid.
[101] R. N. Whybray, "The Immorality of God: Reflections on Some Passages in Genesis, Job, Exodus and Numbers," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21, no. 89 (1996): 89.

represents. Whybray draws on seminal scholars Hermann Gunkel and John Skinner, who raised similar questions about the nature of the divine character. Gunkel asked, "What can one expect of human judges if the highest judge does not care for justice?" and Skinner likewise, "Unrighteousness in the Supreme Ruler of the world would make piety impossible."[102] In each of these stories stand two facets of the character of God that are difficult to reconcile: on the one hand, the caring God whose loving guidance of his people, though it may necessitate severe discipline, is tempered with mercy; and on the other an "irrational god" who loses patience with his people and is ready even to destroy them.[103] In speaking of the Joban prologue specifically, Athalya Brenner calls this a "dark side" of God which has not yet been conquered.[104] In particular, the Face at the Jabbok is indeed a Dark one, one embraced and concealed in the Dark. The Face is one as blank and as black as the Dark itself, one undecipherable yet who has nevertheless left a dark signature upon the place and the page.

The Trope of the Blank

It is necessary to end again at the beginning, when darkness was on the face of the deep. In the end, the dark is still on the face of the page, as Fokkelman has observed, "The ending is most ambiguous: Jacob passes as a delivered man, but is lame. Looking back we see that the entire event has been imbued with ambiguity. The adversary's identity, the issue of the struggle, the 'striving' in v. 29, asking for one another's names: all these elements can be and must be looked at from two sides."[105] To put it darkly, the ending is itself a type of apophasis—it says, says otherwise, and ultimately resists

[102] Ibid., 102.
[103] Ibid., 117.
[104] Ibid., 111.
[105] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 222.

finality. The ending is like a blank page continuing to be written on and then erased. In *The Breaking of the Vessels*, literary critic Harold Bloom traces what he calls "the trope of the blank" from the poetry of Milton to Wallace Stevens. Derived from the French "blanc," for "white," "blanc" is also, paradoxically, related to the word "black." Both black and blank share the same root, meaning "to shine or flash."[106] To be assailed by the blank is to draw near to the printed page as if there were no words on it at all. Readers are struck by the pages' density, emptiness, or unintelligibility. Words become no words, and the page is unreadable. Wallace Stevens puts it well: "It is difficult to read. The page is dark. Yet he knows what it is that he expects. The page is blank or a frame without a glass, or a glass that is empty when he looks."[107] To put it simply, the Face is glimpsed through a page darkly. Brought out of the dark yet kept by it still, the Jabbok and all the faces that haunt it, recede into the night.

For the community constructing and remembering this text, the picture of Jacob who knows the displacement of darkness, who receives deferred promises in that dark displacement/exile, and whose relationship to the divine is obscure or dark symbolizes their reality of exile following the Babylonian conquest. The Jabbok story symbolizes the darkness of their exile, of their present, and possibly of their future. The text is a kind of Midrash, a continued searching, which is itself apophatic. The final metaphor, the crossing, is explored in the next chapter. It is this metaphor which I use to further develop the reality of those whose cultural memory produced this text. Therefore the last chapter will transition more firmly from characterization and poetics to rhetoric and history.

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[106] Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire*: *Reflections on Genesis*, 361.
[107] Wallace Stevens, "Phosphor Reading by His Own Light," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Random House, 1990), 267.

The Crossing

In order for Jacob to return safely home (Gen. 27:42-45; 28:10-13, 20-22; 33:18-20; 35:27-29), he must first cross the threshold of the Jabbok River. The crossing Jacob makes is both physical and symbolic, both violent and physically dangerous at the moment of the crossing itself (Gen. 32:25; 33:1-3); it is also a crossing rife with emotive content: fear of fraternal retribution (Gen. 32:6-12); abasement on the part of Jacob, whether real or manipulative (Gen. 33:5-11); and Esau's choice to embrace (Gen. 33:4) rather than to kill (Gen. 27:41). In the end, the Jacob Cycle is a story that foregrounds human concerns. It is about two brothers and the nations they represent, Israel and Edom/Idumea. It is a story about boundaries erected between two nations who are proximate others and the ways in which those boundaries are reified through narrative. The story is powerful because it represents Israel's profound ambiguity regarding its relationship to itself and to proximate others, to God, and to the land following the Babylonian conquest. The narrative consequently shapes the characters of Esau and God in ways that represent that ambiguity. This means that the story is told in a way that allows for multiple, even contrasting memories, demonstrated by the tension, struggle and trickery throughout the Jacob Cycle. The Jabbok story is no casual, disinterested recollection of a shared past. Rather, the story is an example of how wounded storytellers construct a past based on present needs and future anxieties. The Jabbok text—and the Jacob Cycle generally—functions as a hinge between the community's past, present, and future.

In this chapter, I draw on collective/cultural memory studies and the socio-narratological insights of Arthur Frank to demonstrate that the Jabbok functions as a

"useable past" in the wake of communal trauma.[1] The Jabbok story and its characters represent that trauma and situate communal identity through crossing, maintaining, and reifying boundaries. In this chapter, I examine the historical reasons for this trauma and the attendant ambiguity it creates between the two nations represented by the story. I also trace narratively the multiple and contrasting ways in which these characters and this story can be remembered, arguing that they are conduits for meaning-making. Further, I suggest that not all memory is useable. Forgetting what is not useful is as vital as remembering what is useful,[2] thus the contrasting memories represented in the story allow for its wide explanatory power.

Remembering Esau

In order to consider the depiction of Esau in the Jacob Cycle, I will first consider the nation he represents, Edom/Idumea, and the historical reasons for their tension with Israel. Second, I will trace the multiple ways in which Esau's character can be read or "remembered" in the Jacob Cycle. Finally, I will consider the depiction of the Edomites outside the Jacob Cycle, surveying intertexts from the postexilic prophets, as well as a key narrative in the book of Numbers. These intertexts also offer ways in which this man and the nation he represents can be "remembered."

Scholars differ on the historical placement of the patriarchal stories vis-à-vis Israel and Edom. For scholars such as Israel Finkelstein, the relations between the two brothers, the fathers of Israel and Edom, "reflect a clear case of seventh century

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[1] Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20.
[2] Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3.

perceptions in more ancient costume."[3] Finkelstein situates the tension between the two nations in late-monarchic times. Assyrian sources attest to Edom's emergence as a fully developed state only in the eighth century BCE. He claims that prior to the eighth century Judah was an isolated and sparsely populated kingdom. In terms of wealth, territory, and military might Judah could not compare to the North. After the Assyrian Empire dominated the Northern Kingdom in 720 BCE, Judah grew, developing a sense of its own importance and divine destiny. Therefore, it envisioned its survival as evidence of God's intentions from the time of the patriarchs, indicating that Judah should rule over the land of Israel.[4] Diana V. Edelman confirms that Edom rose to prominence only after Israel had disappeared as a kingdom. Likewise, Edelman places the political rivalry between Judah and Edom at the end of the monarchy until the conquest of Idumea by the Maccabees.[5] The placement of the Edomites in this particular historical moment is critical to understanding the ways in which they are linked to the Babylonian conquest and therefore remembered in the biblical record. As Juan Manuel Tebes has noted, the burden of guilt for Judah's exile has been placed, almost exclusively, on the Babylonians. However, there are some biblical passages, Tebes argues, that allude to the involvement of a southern Transjordian people, the Edomites, descendants of Esau.[6] The biblical texts that Tebes cites are contradictory about the same historical details regarding the fall of Judah and the destruction of the Temple.

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[3] Israel Finkelstein, Amihay Mazar, and Brian B. Schmidt, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Diana V. Edelman, "Genesis: A Composition for Construing A Homeland of the Imagination for Elite Scribal Circles Or For Educating the Illiterate?" in *Writing the Bible: Scribes, Scribalism and Script*, ed. Philip R. Davies and Thomas Römer (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49.
[6] Juan Manuel Tebes, "The Edomite Involvement in the Destruction of the First Temple: A Case of Stab-in-the-Back Tradition?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36, no. 2 (2011): 220.

The first text Tebes cites is 2 Kings 25, which provides the data to situate the siege in the 10th of Tebeth (early January 587 BCE) and its end to the 9th of Tammuz (end of July 586 BCE), totaling a period of 18 months of siege. Here, the Babylonians are the only cause of Judah's collapse (cf. Jer. 39:1; 52:4; Ezek. 24:1). The Edomites are not mentioned.[7] Second, Jeremiah 39 and 52 detail Zedekiah's flight and captivity, while no negative mention is made of the Edomites. The only allusion comes from Jeremiah 40, which notes that the Babylonians appointed the Judean Gedaliah as governor, and groups of Judeans escaped to the land of Edom. Tebes contends, "Although it could be argued that feelings of sorrow among the Edomites for the Judeans' fate could somehow have superseded the 'national' rivalry between Judah and Edom, there is no question that Jeremiah would likely have alluded here to an Edomite intervention during Nebuchadnezzar's attack had it occurred."[8] In surveying the MT as well as the versions in the LXX, Tebes notes that the Judean historical memory was in constant flux, and that important details such as the chronological sequence of events, as well as the role of the Edomites, belong to later editorial layers.[9] 2 Chronicles 36 also details the destruction, also laying blame for it squarely on the Babylonians, this time with a decidedly "divine punishment" motif.[10]

Other biblical sources such as Obadiah, Lamentations, Psalms, Amos, Joel and Ezekiel (a few of which I survey for rhetorical purposes later in this chapter) do refer to Edom negatively. In particular, Obadiah 11, Lamentations 4:21-22, and Psalm 137:7 are cited by Tebes. The negative tone is obvious, and Tebes states that it is possible that

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[7] Ibid., 222.
[8] Ibid., 224.
[9] Ibid., 227.
[10] Ibid.

Edom celebrated, if not favored, the fall of their bitter enemy. It is possible that they acted by omission against Judah by not providing asylum to Judean refugees, and it is even possible that they gained territorially and economically as a result. In the end, however, there is no evidence that this actually took place.[11] However, the buildup of their supposed crimes continued to accrue throughout biblical and extrabiblical literature, as 1 Esdras 4:43-45 places blame for the burning of the Temple squarely on the Edomites.[12] Some scholars read these texts at face value, arguing for the involvement of the Edomites in the downfall of the Temple; for example Edelman claims, "[U]nless the Edomites were extremely myopic, they saw the Babylonians coming and recognized that their survival meant disassociation from Jerusalem."[13] Likewise, John Lindsay suggests that Edom and Babylon were close collaborators against Judah.[14] For Tebes, however, the tradition of Edom's participation in the destruction of Jerusalem was based not on the historical events of 586 BCE but instead on the *perceived* behavior of the Edomites in this and later periods. Tebes claims that this accords with so-called "stab-in-the-back" traditions of modern defeated nations.[15] These traditions included six major themes: first, cultural nationalism, a "golden age" of cultural creativity; second, feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, and vengeance; third, jingoism, xenophobia, and racism; fourth, "lost cause" legends; fifth, the "divine punishment" theme; and finally, "stab-in-the-back" myths.[16]

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[11] Ibid., 230.
[12] Ibid., 231.
[13] Diana V. Edelman, *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite, For He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition,* Archaeology and Biblical Studies Series 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 28.
[14] John Lindsay, "Edomite Westward Expansion: The Biblical Evidence," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1999): 72.
[15] Tebes, "The Edomite Involvement in the Destruction of the First temple: A Case of Stab-in-the-Back Tradition?" 232.
[16] Ibid., 235-236.

Taken to its logical conclusion, then, the payoff for Tebes's argument lies in the scapegoating of Edom. Archaeological records have provided evidence for the appearance of material culture similar to those found in contemporary settlements of southern Transjordan, considered the homeland of the Edomites. This archaeological research has found locally manufactured wares, "Edomite" pottery and cultic objects concentrated in Horvat Qitmit and Tel Malhata in the Beersheba Valley and En Hazev in the Araba.[17] The Edomites supposedly crossed the Wadi Arabah in two-wave movements, allowing for a slow and persistent influx of people, material culture and folklore coming from Edom and reaching southern Judah beginning in the eighth century BCE.[18] Moreover, the lax administration of the Persians allowed for an influx of southern Transjordanian population into the Negev and areas further north, suggesting their assembling into and adopting the culture of the local people.[19] The payoff for Tebes, then, is to situate the Edomites as the "people of the land," over against the "Golah" returnees. The Edomites, then, become a primary source of xenophobia for the Jewish elite. In conclusion, Tebes argues:

> I would argue that the Edomites were a main focus of the Golah's xenophobia and that the myth of the stab-in-the back was its main theme. The "blame Edom" theme reads as an artful piece of propaganda of political importance. Although evidence of their direct involvement in the attack on Jerusalem is absent, Judean folklore soon after—as is already evident in Obad. 11—developed the notion that the Edomite jubilation had to do with an actual participation in the fall of the city. The presence of Edomites in southern Judah and probably Jerusalem in the late Judean kingdom served to reinforce the idea that the Edomites, close neighbors that were considered their "brothers" according to the customary use of kinship terminology for describing political and geographic realities, were a treacherous people that stabbed Judah in the back at its weakest moment.[20]

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[17] Ibid., 241.
[18] Ibid., 243.
[19] Ibid., 248-249.
[20] Ibid., 250.

If Tebes's instincts are right, and I believe that they are, then a semi-historical reason is offered for the Jacob Cycle's construction of Esau as inherently unworthy of the birthright and blessing.[21] The narrative's construction of Esau betrays Israel's collective cultural memory concerning Edom. Consequently, the character of Esau is not without historical valence. This link from historicity to rhetoricity is an important one, as Jan Assmann has remarked appropriately:

> Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past… The past is not simply 'received' by the present. The present is 'haunted' by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present.[22]

Here discussion of how cultural/collective memory functions will illustrate the ways in which characters can function in narrative. The words of Mieke Bal are a useful place to begin: "The people with whom literature is concerned are not real people. They are *fabricated creatures* made up from fantasy, imitation, memory: *paper people, without flesh and blood* " (emphases mine).[23] Here, Bal's statements require slight adjustment—Jacob and Esau are not without historical valence. They are instead conduits for the makers of meaning in the Israelite community. It is in the hands of narrators that they are crafted and in the pages of narrative that they are contained. Historicity and non-historicity are not appropriate terms here, as Scott Elliott has explained:

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[21] Admittedly, a counter-reading exists that may offer a more sympathetic characterization of Esau and therefore call into question Tebes's argument. Such a counter-argument goes beyond the scope of this study, however I will point to the creative work of Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel,* trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2005), who views the patriarchal traditions as "invented history." His reading, like Tebes's, also views the patriarchal narratives through the lens of the Golah/Am Ha-Aretz. The main difference, however, is that Liverani argues that the narratives depict peaceful coexistence rather than scapegoating of Esau and the Edomites.

[22] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8-9.

[23]Cited in Scott Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 59-97.

> Narrative forces the negotiation of boundaries between truth and mendacity to take place elsewhere. What seems like a relatively clear-cut dichotomy between fact and fiction is in fact a mirage. For instance, everything we know about historical (read "real") figures has been garnered through a series of encounters—narrated. Even firsthand experience is recounted through the telling of stories, stories that have, at their heart, an interest in explanation, which is to say meaning-making.[24]

Cultural/collective memory studies reveal the two components which anchor communal meaning-making. First, the subjective, biological component acknowledges that no memory is ever purely individual but always shaped by collective contexts. Individuals "remember" in socio-cultural contexts. Second, memory is used metaphorically. Societies do not remember literally; a shared past is reconstructed creatively and selectively according to a culture's present knowledge and needs.[25] A close connection exists, for example, between a nation's version of its past and its national identity. This link extends, Astrid Erll claims, to John Locke, who believed there was no such thing as an "essential identity," but that identity is constructed and re-constructed by "acts of memory, by remembering who one was and by setting this past Self in relation to the present Self."[26] The past, then, may be past, but it is a useable past, and the stories that are told "make life social."[27] The Jabbok text serves, to appropriate Frank's comment, as a "story [for Israel] to grow up on."[28] Indeed, it is "growing up," the maturation of boys into adulthood—and fledgling nations into fighting ones—which the Jacob Cycle narrates. From the beginning, it appears a foregone conclusion that Esau—and therefore Edom—would be subservient to Jacob and the Israelites. And yet further exploration of Yahweh's statements prior to their birth cast an ambiguous light on who was to achieve

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[24]Ibid., 67-68.
[25] Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 5.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 20.
[28] Ibid., 7.

primacy, suggesting inclusion of the "noninstrumentalizable, heretical, subversive, and disowned."[29]

Within the narrative, Rebekah's womb is the first threshold to be crossed, and it is there where fraternal conflict gestates: "And Yahweh said to her, 'Two peoples are in your womb and two peoples are in your belly. And people will be divided from people and one people will be stronger than the other; and the chief (one) will serve the insignificant (one)'" (Gen. 25:23; translation mine) As R. Christopher Heard has noted, scholars typically translate the last line: "the older will serve the younger."[30] He avers that syntactically, the case is not closed, noting the ambiguity involved in who will serve whom. The syntax of the entire clause must be considered, as a lack of explicit case markers requires other recourse to consider subject and object of the verb יַעֲבֹד. Heard claims the translation choice "the older will serve the younger," contradicts the most frequent constructions of Hebrew grammar; while "the younger will serve the older," pits Israelite ethnic pride *vis-à-vis* Edom. On the other hand, Heard states, seeking a resolution by translating the phrase "one people will be stronger than the other" also fails to close the case. The odd syntax of *subject-verb-object* (or as containing an unmarked nominative absolute), v.23bß predicts Jacob's purchase of Esau's birthright (Gen. 25) and the theft of his blessing (Gen. 27). Moreover, for Heard, it grants Jacob's actions a "veneer of divine approval, or at least of divine foreknowledge," rendering Jacob's later

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[29] Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, 27.

[30] In R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 98-99, Heard notes that the following scholars translate the phrase in that way: Alter, 1996:127; Dicou: 175; Dillmann: 195; Driver: 245; Fewell and Gunn, 1993:74; Gunkel: 289; Hamilton, 1994: 177; Hendel: 11; Kunin: 05; von Rad: 264; Skinner: 359; Speiser: 193; Syrèn: 82; Turner, 1990a: 119; Wenham, 1994: 175; Westermann: 411; ASV, JPSV, KJV, NEB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, RSV.

subservient attitude towards Esau (Gen. 33) contrary to the divine oracle.[31] However, if read according to the more natural syntax of *object-verb-subject*, the oracle predicts Esau's pre-eminence, inverting the relationship of Jacob's actions to the divine will specified above. This second reading, Heard maintains, renders Jacob's purchase of the birthright and theft of the blessing, contrary to the oracle; his later subservient attitude toward Esau, then, gains a "sense of divine approval."[32]

In the end, however, Heard concludes: "By using the ambiguous *noun-verb-noun* pattern with no additional markers, the narrator has essentially compelled readers to make their own decisions about the sense of v. 23bß."[33] For Rashi, the vagueness of the oracle in Gen. 25 meant that sometimes one brother would prevail, sometimes the other: "They will not be equal in power, when one rises the other falls…"[34] This means that the community may have begun to form multiple, even contrasting memories, represented by the tension and struggle and trickery. Foregrounding one memory means forgetting or discarding another. Assmann's comments on the emotive aspects of memory are apt: "Remembering means pushing other things into the background, making distinctions, obliterating many things in order to shed light on others. This is what brings horizon and perspective into individual memory spaces, and these perspectives are emotionally mediated."[35] Some memories are not always usable, and societies may not want to remember them. Zakovitch maintains that the verse's contrary readings reflect the vicissitudes that would characterize future power relations between the nations of Edom

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[31] Ibid., 100.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Rashi, *Bereishis/Genesis*, in *Torah: With Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated*, eds. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1995), 275.
[35] Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies,* 3.

and Israel.[36] Following Zakovitch, I suggest that this slippery text has wide explanatory power. It elucidates the power not only of remembering, but also of forgetting; of foregrounding or privileging one character and allowing another to recede into the background.

Whatever decision is made, the prenatal oracle points beyond two brothers to the two nations they represent, Israel and Edom. Indeed, as Heard notes, a prenatal oracle often "shapes readers' expectations and evaluations of the entire forthcoming narrative and, indeed, the entire relationship between Israel and Edom reflected in the Hebrew Bible."[37] Specifically it is the narrative's construction of Esau which reveals Israel's collective cultural memory concerning Edom, as Frank notes: "Stories breathe life not only into individuals but also into groups that assemble around telling and believing certain stories."[38]

For a culture whose thinking and writing are often centered on *Toledoth*, it would have been important to preserve this particular mode of remembering concerning Esau; doing so would help to fashion their own identity as those expressly *not Edom*. Communities establish identity as much around w*ho they are not* as they do around w*ho they are*. Here Jürgen Reulecke's comments on generationality-generativity-memory prove illuminative. The term "generationality" expresses the twofold meaning of a *Toledoth* or generation. On the one hand, Reulecke states, generationality refers to characteristics resulting from shared experience that individuals or larger "generational units" collectively claim for themselves. On the other hand, generationality can also refer

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[36] Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 16.
[37] Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah,* 100.
[38] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 3.

to the "bundle of characteristics resulting from shared experiences which are ascribed to such units from the outside..."[39] These shared experiences or characteristics can function as the "legacy offered to posterity in the form of narratives, bequeathed works, institutions, designed places, and more, and also, according to Freud, engraved in subsequent generations even without an expressed intention to pass them on, although these later generations might also (consciously or unconsciously) reject, re-interpret, or erase them."[40] Here, however, narrative does serve as an "expressed intention" to pass down a particular memorialization of Edom vis-à-vis Esau. The Jacob Cycle is a text that delights in trickster antics, even as it denigrates the dis-elect.

The narrative, for example, makes no moral judgment on Jacob's actions and instead highlights the crudeness of Esau's character: "And Esau said to Jacob, 'Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished'" (Gen. 25:30a TNK). Rather than using the ordinary Hebrew word for "stew" (*nazid*) Esau instead points to the stew and says, "this red stuff" (*'adom-'adom*). Vawter notes the link between אֱדוֹם and the red land or land or red clay, just as man, the אָדָם, had been formed from the red earth (Gen. 2:7). In the Hebrew Bible's only other story about the birth of twins, the author also sees red. Perez and Zerah are sons of Jacob's son Judah (Gen. 38:27-30). The root of Zerah means "to shine," and the story relates it to the "crimson thread" (cf. Isa. 1:18) that was tied to Zerah's hand. The name derivation, Zakovitch avers, better suits Edom. However, Zerah was also the name of an Edomite clan, further linking these intertexts (Gen. 36:17;

[39] Jürgen Reulecke, "Generation/Generationality, Generativity, and Memory" in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 119.
[40] Ibid., 123.

1 Chr. 1:37).[41] Zakovitch states: "Apparently, then, in the popular, orally transmitted version of Jacob and Esau's birth, the midwife tied a red thread to the hand of Esau-Edom, who was about to be born, but Jacob cheated and successfully pushed his way out first—as is now told about Perez."[42] The secondary physical description of Esau as "hairy" links him to Seir, the name of the region where Esau makes his home (Gen. 32:4). In both instances, Bruce Vawter claims, Esau's identity is accorded by geography—by a territorial boundary. Esau's physical characteristics draw attention to it, as hairiness or shagginess appears to be a mark of incivility. Thus with respect to Esau, Vawter states, "the author's wordplays go beyond mere cleverness and insinuate a bias against him from the beginning."[43]

Moreover, the verb used for gulping down (*la`at*) occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. In rabbinic Hebrew, it is reserved for the feeding of animals.[44] These linguistic cues, in addition to the rapidity of Esau's actions in Genesis 25:34—he ate and drank, he rose and went away, and he belittled his birthright—delineates the Hebrew writer's characterization of Esau as impetuous and vulgar. Not all scholars, however, agree that this linguistic evidence points to the vulgarity of Esau's character. Heard does not view the connection to post-biblical Hebrew as strong enough to warrant intention on the part of the author. Rather, Heard claims, interpreters such as Skinner, Speiser, Wenham and Alter overreach because of an overall tendency to denigrate Esau and not

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[41] Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 19.
[42] Ibid., 20.
[43] Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 288.
[44] In Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 131, he notes Abba ben David's contention that rabbinic Hebrew developed from a biblical vernacular excluded from literary usage: the writer would have introduced the vernacular term for animal feeding to suggest Esau's coarsely appetitive character. Even if one allows for semantic evolution, however, Alter says that it is still safe to assume that it was always a cruder term for eating than the standard biblical one.

from sound lexicography.[45] Heard does allow, however, that the narrator's punning etiology may function at a higher level of abstraction. Heard states, "Esau eats some of Jacob's stew, that is, Edom (*'ĕdôm*) eats 'red' (*'ādōm*). The narrator may be hinting that, by overestimating his hunger (if that is what Esau did) and underestimating the value of his birthright (if Esau did so), Esau in effect ate himself up."[46]

It is the vulgarity of the narrator's presentation of Esau, perhaps, that allows for the writer to demonstrate how Jacob can circumvent the rights of primogeniture. Jacob supplants Esau by taking his birthright. This birthright, as the story will later show, is intimately tied to the father's blessing. Brisman, among many others, correctly notes the close connection in Hebrew between *bĕkōrâ* ("birthright") and *bĕrākâ* ("blessing").[47] The flipping of two letters occurs just two chapters later, when Jacob supplants Esau for the second time, taking not just birthright but also blessing. Here too the narrative makes no moral comment on Jacob's conduct but instead concludes the episode with another indicator of Rebekah's disdain for Esau: "Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?'" (Gen. 27:46 TNK) Her disgust follows the narrator's comment earlier that when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. These women were a source of "bitterness" to both Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:34-35). Here again, the unusual placement of this narrative comment—immediately preceding Jacob's deception—may stand in as justification for favoring the one brother over the

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[45] Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, 104.
[46] Ibid., 105.
[47] Leslie Brisman, *The Voice of Jacob: On the Composition of Genesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 68.

other. In Midrash Rabbah, the Rabbis' whimsical presentation of Esau's marriages demonstrates their preference for Jacob: "So for forty years Esau used to ensnare married women and violate them, yet when he attained forty years he compared himself to his father, saying, 'As my father was forty years old when he married, so I will marry at the age of forty.' Hence it is written, And when Esau was forty years hold, he took to wife."[48] Vawter notes that in the Priestly account no rivalry exists between Jacob and Esau. Nevertheless, the Priestly writer also views Esau as "debased" on the basis of his choice of wife.[49] Still, Heard insists that the characterization of Esau (and, by extension, other dis-elect characters in Genesis) is "shot through with ambiguities" and the answers to such questions are resolved only by "acts of readerly will."[50] Esau is characterized negatively, in other words, because a particular reader or readers prefers to read him in that way. Nevertheless, whether Esau (or Lot or Ishmael) is read positively or negatively does not appear to matter: "Even on the most positive possible readings, Lot, Ishmael, and Esau remove themselves or are removed by Yahweh from their (potential) place among Abraham's descendants and from any share or claim or historic right in Canaan."[51]

For Vawter, the perpetual hostility and political back-and-forth between the two nations is demonstrated in Isaac's blessing of Esau, which Vawter calls an "afterthought in the narrative."[52] Isaac tells Esau: "See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth and the dew of heaven above. Yet by your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your

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[48] H. Friedman, trans., *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* (London: Soncino Press, 1986), 581.
[49] Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, 297.
[50] Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, 182-183.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, 305.

brother; but when you grow restive, you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Gen. 27:39-40 TNK). Vawter notes the connection between the Edomites and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 16:12), both peoples depicted as "warlike, brawling people inhabiting a harsh and inhospitable land, whose further destiny is one of subjection to others."[53] On the face of it, Vawter claims, Isaac's blessing appears to envision a time when the Edomites had regained their independence from Israel and Judah, beyond the Davidic and Solomonic purview attributed to the Yahwist.

David Carr's diachronic analysis of the fractures of Genesis also takes into consideration the relationship between Jacob and Esau as indicative of the political anxieties between the two nations. Carr divides Genesis into the "pre-promise traditions" that stand at the beginning of the redactional process—an independent primeval history, the Jacob and Joseph compositions, and the successive Israelite and Judean editions of the Jacob-Joseph narrative.[54] Carr views the Jacob story as the composition with the clearest distinction between the authorial hand and his "precursor traditions" (Gen. 25, 27-31) and the broader Jacob story (Gen. 28:20-22; 31:4-16; 24; 29). Many of these precursor materials which appear to celebrate the trickster would have had a home in Northern resistance movements to early Davidic-Solomonic power structures. Carr claims that the later additions which bend these trickster materials into a Jacob story introduced a number of important shifts that anticipate a new power structure centered in the North.[55] For Carr, the author of the Jacob story focused on introducing a highly "political form of theology" into the narrative he created, one that closely linked Jacob

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[53] Ibid., 305-306.
[54] David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 297.
[55] Ibid., 298.

with the Northern cult cites such as the royal sanctuary at Bethel, the early capital at Penuel, to Shechem, Mahanaim, Sukkoth, and all the way to Ephratah.[56] In what Carr refers to as the "proto-Genesis Abraham story," the author appears to have crafted the story of Jacob to parallel the story of Abraham. The pre-promise story of Jacob links to the ancestral traditions of Genesis and affirms social structure.[57] However, when the reigns of David and Solomon become a bad memory in the North, the author writes a sequel to Jacob's and Esau's interaction, one that inverts their relationship. With this sequel in place, the final word is of Jacob's self-subjugation to the Edom he once overcame (cf. Gen. 25:23 to Gen. 33). Carr claims that the variety of these readings attests to the existence of one of the many "fractures" in Genesis.[58] For Carr, the combined Jacob-Joseph story originates in the Northern Kingdom, with Isaac's blessing featuring Jacob competing with a southerner (Esau/Edom). The origins of this tradition probably derive from the South, articulating David's right to dominate Edom. However, while Genesis 27 establishes the dominance of an "all-Israelite hero" (Jacob) over a neighboring group (Edom), Genesis 48 focuses more exclusively on the precedence of one Northern group over another, Ephraim over Manasseh. Thus, the originally Southern model of Genesis 27 has been appropriated to articulate Northern intergroup power relationships.[59]

The payoff for Carr is a political-theological one revolving not merely around Israel and Judah's past but more importantly, around their present and future. The proto-

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 299.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 302.

Genesis composition emphasizes divine promise and blessing. This composition insists on God's will to execute the promise, as Carr affirms:

> This kind of marshalling of cultural resources—personal piety and royal ideology—and theological defense of the reliability of the promise is not required when the narrative future is the audience's present. Rather, it occurs when the author must build a bridge from a given narrative to a future that does not yet exist for the narrative's audience.[60]

Thus the various building blocks of Genesis are, for Carr, not etiological tales but rather served to provide assurance and comfort to generations of Israelites/Judahites/Yehudites who struggled to find themselves connected to a God who kept his promises. For Jacob's ancestors, no generation needed to lay claim to these promises more than exilic and post-exilic Israel. Laying claim to these promises, however, exacerbated the need to re-inscribe boundaries between Israel and Edom, also inscribing a clear boundary between those God (s)elected and those he (dis)elected. This inscription of boundaries is indeed a kind of "script"—and, it should be added, one that is given additional cultural and theological weight when placed on the lips of the prophets. The survey below of post-exilic prophetic texts demonstrates that narrative memory can be both portable and multiple. The prophetic (re)tellings illustrate diverse chains of memory which situate tension between Israel and Edom in the present moment of the post-exilic community.

In the exilic period, the enmity between the rival nations was exacerbated by the Edomites' collaboration with the Babylonians, as Psalm 137 attests: "Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall; how they cried, 'strip her, strip her to her very foundations!'" (Ps. 137:7 TNK) Lamentations, which mourns the destruction of the First Temple, expresses a similar sentiment: "Rejoice and exult, fair

[60] Ibid., 306.

Edom, who dwell in the land of Uz! To you, too, the cup shall pass, you shall get drunk and expose your nakedness. Your iniquity, fair Zion, is expiated; he will exile you no longer. Your iniquity, fair Edom, he will note; he will uncover your sins" (Lam. 4:21-22 TNK). Edom's "sins" include their refusal of crossing to Jacob/Israel, in addition to their exultation over Israel's distress during the Babylonian conquest. In recalling their sin, the post-exilic prophet Malachi uses language of borders/territory and peoplehood to denote Esau's wickedness—גְּבוּל רִשְׁעָה (Mal. 1:4). Even their borders are evil. As a result they are הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־זָעַם יְהוָה עַד־עוֹלָם ("the people with whom the LORD is indignant with forever") (Mal. 1:4; translation mine). Here the language revolves around a particular people—a people who will be "damned forever," sharply juxtaposed to Israel who Yahweh covenants to bless forever. Zakovitch links the scene back to the birthright story of the two boys. He notes that the birthright story describes Rebekah's love for Jacob (and Isaac's love for Esau), yet in Malachi's prophecy it is God who loves Jacob and hates Esau, "from which we realize that it was not Jacob's actions that precipitated his fate but God himself."[61] For Zakovitch, God has (s)elected a particular family member, from before the boys' birth.

Obadiah also relies on the language of family—"For the outrage to your bother Jacob" (Obad. 10 TNK) and "How could you glaze with glee on your brother that day…" (Obad. 12 TNK). The prophet utilizes familial language to highlight the incomprehensible nature of Edom's crimes. Here too Esau and Jacob are juxtaposed, as the prophet draws on familiar remnant language: "But on Zion's mount a remnant shall survive, and it shall be holy. The House of Jacob shall dispossess those who dispossessed

[61] Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 27.

them. The House of Jacob shall be fire, and the House of Joseph flame, and the House of Esau shall be straw; they shall burn it and devour it, and no survivor shall be left of the House of Esau…" (Obad. 18 TNK) According to Zakovitch, it is not merely that no survivor is left in Esau's house—it is also that Esau's very name is "most despised" (Obad. 2). Zakovitch views the prophet's use of מְאֹד as a not-so-subtle link to Edom, with the same letters rearranged. Obadiah believes the Edomites' status as "most despised" was intended as a permanent attribute, tied to their very name (cf. Jer. 49:15).[62] For Zakovitch, Jeremiah's prophecy that Edom will be קָטֹן demonstrates that God was responsible for reversing the order of the brothers, transforming Jacob, who is described as Rebekah's younger (קָטֹן) son (Gen. 27:42), into the firstborn and Esau into the קָטֹן. Furthermore, the use of בַּגּוֹיִם hearkens back to the birth story and to the words of the oracle—שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם (Gen. 25:23)—and is a reminder that it was God's intention from the beginning that Esau serve his brother. Moreover, Jeremiah's use of the word בָּזוּי relates to the end of the birthright episode, where "Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). Because Esau despised his birthright, Zakovitch claims, it is only fitting that he should be despised.[63] The prophet's use of קָטֹן also links directly back to Jacob's self-abasement before Esau, suggesting its reversal (Gen. 32:11). The prophetic adaptation(s) of the birth narrative suggests the permeability of the boundary of Rebekah's womb. The crossing of the threshold of Rebekah's womb did not indicate a once-for-all decision about who would be צָעִיר. This boundary, it appears, was a malleable one, based on some nebulous combination of divine will and human autonomy. The prophets function as (eis/ex)egetes

[62] Ibid., 26.
[63] Ibid., 27.

for the unfolding of the boys' (hi)story. Outside the prophetic corpus, the narrative in Numbers 20 offers a final biblical portrait of the Edomites.

The story in Numbers 20 attests to the reification of brotherly boundaries, demonstrating that at no time was the relationship between Israel and Edom congenial—it was always contentious. On their way from Kadesh to Moab, the children of Israel request access through Edom. Moses instructs the מַלְאָכִים to say the following: אָמַר אָחִיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מְצָאָתְנוּ ("your brother Israel says, you yourselves know all the hardship which we found") (Num. 20:14b). Their oppression in Egypt is then recounted. The rhetoric, intended to persuade a crossing, is framed around language of brotherhood and oppression. In describing the relationships among the Israelites, the language is typically familial—בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל is a common expression. Here, brothers ought to help brothers, particularly when considering their reality as an oppressed group, one who has known תְּלָאָה. The request is clearly stated in terms of crossing, and the mood is volitional: נַעְבְּרָה־נָּא בְאַרְצֶךָ ("please let us cross into your land") (Num. 20:17a). The messengers also inscribe their own boundaries on the intended crossing: לֹא נַעֲבֹר בְּשָׂדֶה וּבְכָרֶם וְלֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מֵי בְאֵר דֶּרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ נֵלֵךְ לֹא נִטֶּה יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאול עַד אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲבֹר גְּבוּלֶךָ ("we will not cross into field and into vineyards and we will not drink waters of Beersheba. We will stay on the king's highway; we will not stretch the right hand and left hand until we have crossed your boundary") (Num. 20:17b; translation mine). The term גְּבוּל and its various cognates, such as גָּבַל and גְּבוּלָה refer variously to borders, boundaries, and territories of lands or people. In the case of גָּבַל the nuance of "twisting" or "winding" is

included.[64] Here, the territorial restrictions the Israelites place upon themselves when crossing Edomite territory appear insufficient. The Edomites alone will maintain the boundaries between the brothering nations: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֱדוֹם לֹא תַעֲבֹר בִּי פֶּן־בַּחֶרֶב אֵצֵא לִקְרָאתֶךָ ("and Edom said to him, you shall not cross us, lest we will go out against you with the sword") (Num. 20:18). If that boundary is crossed, it will be re-inscribed with bloodshed, and the Edomite army will protect the boundary. The language is aggressive and final—"you shall not cross."

Yair Zakovitch views the episode as Esau's/Edom's revenge. When Jacob demanded payment in exchange for satiating Esau's hunger and thirst (Gen. 25:31), Zakovitch claims that the request for drinking water in the Numbers narrative (and for crossing at all) is refused. Zakovitch states, "Since, according to Genesis, the brothers made peace with one another after Jacob returned from Haran, it is clear that the writer of Numbers wanted to portray Edom negatively. The story represents the enmity that existed between the two nations in the period in which it was written."[65] Here, too, the Book of Numbers offers what appears to be a final word regarding Edom's fate: "Edom becomes a possession, Yeah, Seir a possession of its enemies. But Israel is triumphant. A victor issues from Jacob to wipe out what is left of Ir" (Num. 24:18-19 TNK). Total erasure is hoped for and propagandized.

Upon closer inspection of the denouement of the Jabbok text, however, it appears that total erasure is not what occurs. Esau and Edom are not wiped out (Gen. 36). Nor, however, does the Jacob-Esau story completely resolve itself in peaceful side-by-side

[64] F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 147-148.
[65] Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, 25.

habitation or by a fair distribution of wealth and resources. Brodie's comments underscore the ambiguity of the scene: "On the one hand, Jacob is announcing his life's achievement, telling how his time with Laban has earned him great wealth. On the other hand… Esau is coming with 400 men… Jacob's achievements, however great, look fragile. He is at a crossroads."[66] After having crossed a threshold physical and theological, Jacob must still attend to the anthropological. He must still meet his brother face to face. He does so through the giving of gifts. In his first protestation that Jacob's מִנְחָה is unnecessary, Esau states: יֶשׁ־לִי רָב ("I have a lot") (Gen. 33:9). Jacob's seemingly gracious response highlights the economic disparity between the two men: יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל ("I have everything") (Gen. 33:11). Here, as is often the case in the narrative, Jacob attributes his success to God's favor (cf. Gen. 27:20; 31:7, 9, 42). Jacob, as the one (s)elected from birth, receives the promissory blessings, as did his father and grandfather. He is also the beneficiary of material largesse. Esau, like the (dis)elect character Ishmael, has been provided for, but the hush money silences both characters; both recede into the narrative background, while the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are foregrounded.

This final scene, when juxtaposed to the narrative in Numbers and the prophetic corpus surveyed above, demonstrates the multiple ways in which stories are adapted and remembered. Erll refers to this disparity of memory as "modes of remembering" in culture. Memories of past events can vary greatly; this holds true not only for *what* is remembered but also for *how* it is remembered. Myth, religious memory, political history, trauma, family remembrance, or generational memories are each different modes of

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[66] Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis As Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 322.

referring to the past.[67] The Jabbok text and its narrative denouement is just one mode among many literary remembrances concerning Israel and Edom. These remembrances—narrations of things past—are also projections of future hopes and anxieties.

Crossing the Jabbok and Coming Home

These communal memories and the future hopes and anxieties they project are embodied by the central figure of the past, Jacob. In his crossing of the Jabbok, Jacob must indeed wrestle with *Elohim* and *Anashim*, God and men. Jacob's wrestling is not limited to the Jabbok encounter alone but is a reality that characterizes his dealings throughout the story. Throughout the story, he is wrestling for material resources with various characters, particularly Laban. Like Esau, Laban is also a proximate other whose story involves trickery and deception. Therefore, the following discussion will center on the various "crossings" Jacob makes in the story world and the ways in which they represent the (hi)storied realities of those in post-exilic Yehud.

In the prescript to the Jabbok encounter, the narrator states: "And on that night he rose and he took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. And he took them and he caused them to cross the river. And he crossed everything he had" (Gen. 32:22-23; translation mine). Used no less than four times (once as a noun in construct, מַעֲבַר) in just two verses, the repeated use of עָבַר foregrounds Jacob's experience as both physical and symbolic. For Leslie Brisman, the etymology of the term is a significant ethnic and national marker for the patriarch. Brisman notes that עָבַר derives from עִבְרִי, associating Jacob's crossing with his identity

[67] Erll and Nünning, eds., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, 7.

as a Hebrew. More importantly, Brisman avers, while crossing and re-crossing the Jabbok, Jacob is also retreading the ground that was previously Abraham's. In crossing the Jabbok, Jacob (re)constitutes himself as Hebrew, indeed as *the* Hebrew, who is to claim the Promised Land.[68] By the time of Deuteronomy, Brisman claims, Jacob has "totally supplanted" Abraham as patriarch: "'A wandering Aramean was my father,' the confession begins (Deut. 26:5)—summarizing essential Hebrew history *from Jacob*…The story as we have it concerns a Jacob who wins his place in line, third of the fathers, but in more than the literal sense *the* father of the children of Israel."[69] While it is Abraham that the New Testament tradition appears to memorialize,[70] for the Hebrews, Jacob/Israel is the central figure of (hi)story and faith. Brisman's analysis captures the ethnic undertones of the term, yet the connection between home, exile, and crossing the Jabbok must also be considered. Namely, וַיַּעֲבֹר hinges on וַיֵּצֵא—he must go out, leave, before he can cross. Jacob's crossing hinges on his exile, on his displacement. His coming home depends on his leaving home. In his leaving home, however, Jacob is thrust into a very real competition for resources. The story world assumes the unjust systems of patriarchy and primogeniture which propel both Jacob and Laban to assume the posture of "tricksters," each one duping the other in order to attain or to retain resources.

It is with וַיֵּצֵא (Gen. 28:10) that Jacob sets out on a path to cross the Jabbok. From the moment he crosses the doorframe of his father's house, he prepares to cross the Jabbok. It is the space in between the two crossings, however, which enables him to acquire the wealth to legitimize his status as one rightly called "Israel." Jacob achieves

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[68] Leslie Brisman, *The Voice of Jacob: On the Composition of Genesis,* 89.
[69] Ibid.
[70] E.g., Jn. 8:48-59; Acts 3:25-26; Ro. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-29; Heb. 11:17-19; Jas. 2:18-23.

primacy over Esau—and subsequently Israel over Edom—not merely through wrestling with אֱלֹהִים and אֲנָשִׁים—not only through brute force—but through a clever and colonizing acquisition of wealth. Jacob's perambulation from Beersheba to Haran, from Peniel/Penuel to Shechem, functions as an archetypal "hero's journey" reminiscent of Edward Said's writings on colonization. In his explication of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Said offers an assessment that is also true for Jacob's journey: "To earn the right to Mansfield Park you must first leave home as a kind of indentured servant or, to put the case in extreme terms, as a kind of transported commodity—this, clearly, is the fate of Fanny and her brother William—but then you have the promise of future wealth… The two movements depend on each other."[71] Throughout Jacob's movement or exile from home, he is consistently promised—or in the position of negotiating—wealth and resources (Gen. 28:3-4, 13-15, 20-22; 29:14-30; 30:25-43; 31:1-18, 38-42; 32:6, 10-22).

When Jacob leaves Beersheba and arrives in Haran, however, he is little more than a fugitive. While his family appeared to possess material means (Gen. 12:16, 20; 13:1-6; 14:21-24; 20:14-16), Isaac sends Jacob off with nothing more than a blessing and the promise that the birthright would transfer to him after his death. He leaves his home as a pariah; he will later return as a man of significant wealth. Jacob leaves Beersheba and crosses into Haran. Upon his arrival in the land of the Easterners, Jacob discovers more than a comely shepherdess—he also discovers an abundance of sheep, a sign of wealth and later the focal point of Laban and Jacob's duplicity (Gen. 29:10). Laban responds to Jacob's arrival with great emotion—he hugs Jacob and kisses him and takes him into his house, calling Jacob bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 29:13-14),

[71] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 88-89.

a statement reminiscent of the bond between the אָדָם and his wife (Gen. 2:23). The relationship between the two men will ultimately include mutual deception and mistrust. From the first meeting, their conversation foreshadows the precariousness of their relationship: "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Gen. 29:15 TNK). As Gordon Wenham notes perceptibly, while Laban's question sounds amiable, the very mention of "working" and "pay" introduces a "jarring note."[72] In his discussion of the quest for the historical Israel, Finkelstein traces not only the historical valence of Esau, but of Laban as well. The attention given to the Arameans in the Jacob stories demonstrate their importance as a people who were sometimes ally, sometimes enemy. Therefore the stories about Jacob and Laban metaphorically express the "complex and often stormy relations" between Iron II Israel and Aram.[73] Similarly, Edelman avers: "It would be logical to posit that the stories dealing with Jacob's outwitting of his 'uncle,' in spite of Laban's attempt to exploit him, may have been based on older folktales reflecting the political tensions between the kingdom of Israel and the adjoining Aramean kingdoms in the mid-ninth century BCE."[74] Textually speaking, the key terms עָבַד and מַשְׂכֹּרֶת will figure prominently in the narrative that follows (Gen. 29:18, 20, 25, 27, 30; 30:26, 29; 31:6, 41; 30:16, 32, 33; 31:7, 41), and, for Wenham, are "laden with echoes of the exploitation Jacob suffered at Laban's hands."[75] Jacob's agreement to work for Laban rather than

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[72] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* Word Biblical Commentary, Vol.2 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 234.
[73] Finkelstein, Mazar, and Schmidt, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism*, 47.
[74] Edelman, "Genesis: A Composition for Construing a Homeland of the Imagination for Elite Scribal Circles or for Educating the Illiterate?" 49.
[75] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 234.

offer monetary payment for Rachel underscores his position as a poor man with fractured family ties; he is without resources himself and unable to ask his father to pay the bride price. Since casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonian times, Jacob offered a sizeable marriage gift in exchange for his marriage to Rachel.[76] After Jacob is duped by Laban and pays off his debt, however, the issues of service and wages are again raised.

In Jacob's demand to leave, he uses the term עָבַד no less than three times, a reminder of Laban's exploitation. Jacob's use of first-person pronominal suffixes is also a rhetorical reminder that the women and children are *his property* that *he has worked for*. They are now a demonstration of *his wealth, his success*, rather than Laban's: "Give me *my wives* and *my children,* for which I served you, and I will go; you know about *my service* to you (Gen. 30:26; translation mine). In demanding to leave, Jacob implies that he is more than a poor man and more than a slave—he is an industrious man who is crossing Laban's land to go back to his own. He is a man who is (re)turning to receive an inheritance (Gen. 28:4, 13).[77] The legal situation between the two men, however, appears muddled, as it is unclear whether Jacob should be viewed as Laban's slave. The Book of the Covenant stipulates that a slave who is given a wife by a master must leave her and any children behind when he leaves his master's service after six years (Ex. 21:3-6). If the slave did not wish to part from his family, he would remain a slave. Wenham says that it is unclear whether this law was to apply in Jacob's case. Jacob's repeated use of עָבַד could imply slave labor, even as Genesis 29:15 insinuates the opposite; as Laban's

[76] Ibid., 235.
[77] Ibid., 254.

nephew, Jacob was offered wages. Because he was a kinsman it was hoped that Laban would treat him more kindly (Lev. 25:35-36). Certainly, Wenham says, Genesis 31:43 could imply that Laban viewed Jacob as a slave rather than as a son-in-law.[78] Nevertheless, Jacob links Laban's newfound wealth to his service: "For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned" (Gen. 30:30a TNK). Jacob's crossing over Laban's borders yields wealth for Laban, which Jacob eventually appropriates.

Jacob's wealth, it seems, exceeds even Laban's: וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֹאן רַבּוֹת וּשְׁפָחוֹת וַעֲבָדִים וּגְמַלִּים וַחֲמֹרִים ("and the man grew exceedingly exceedingly; and there was to him sheep and many maidservants and servants and camels and male asses" (Gen. 30:43; translation mine). Jacob's wealth, it seems, borders on conspicuous consumption and arouses the ire of Laban's sons. The sons' rhetoric revolves around their father's work—עָשָׂה—and their father's glory—כָּבֵד (Gen. 31). These things, the sons claim, Jacob has לָקַח—taken. A convenient appearance of Yahweh compels Jacob to change course, to cross back into his father's land (Gen. 31:3). In his attempt to persuade Rachel and Leah to leave their father's house, Jacob uses rhetoric of propagandistic piety—"The God of my father has been with me. As you know, I have served your father with all my might; but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. God, however, would not let him do me harm… God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me" (Gen. 31:5b-6, 9 TNK). Wenham states, "In other words,

[78] Ibid.

God has not simply transferred the herds from Laban to Jacob; he has done them a favor, giving them a much better life!"[79]

The women side with Jacob, owner of wealth and the presumed recipient of God's favor (Gen. 31:16a). Jacob appeals to service and to the favor of God as reasons for his departing with this wealth (Gen. 31:38-42). He accuses Laban of attempting to send him away empty-handed (Gen. 31:42). The use of שָׁלַח recalls the Pharaoh's sending Israel away from Egypt (Ex. 3:20) and the promise to Moses that Israel would not leave empty-handed (Ex. 3:21). Wenham notes that the same collocation of "send away…empty-handed" is also found in Deuteronomy 15:13-14, which insists that after six years' service a slave shall not be sent away empty-handed. Instead, "you shall furnish him liberally out of your flock…; as the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him."[80]

Jacob arrives in Haran penniless; he leaves with wealth and the blessing of God. Before Jacob leaves, however, a boundary is established between him and Laban. A גַּל ("wave, billow, heap") and a מַצֵּבָה ("pillar, stump") is set up between the two men, and a promise centered upon establishing and maintaining a boundary—אִם־אָנִי לֹא־אֶעֱבֹר אֵלֶיךָ ("I shall not cross to you") and וְ אִם־אַתָּה לֹא־תַעֲבֹר אֵלַי ("you shall not cross to me") . . . לְרָעָה ("for evil"). The two men seal their mutual (crossing) agreement with a meal typical of covenant-making (Gen. 31:53-54). Historically speaking, Finkelstein avers that the biblical description of the tensions between Jacob and Laban and their establishment

[79] Ibid., 271.
[80] Ibid., 278.

of this boundary east of the Jordan seems to reflect the "territorial partition" between Aram and Israel in the ninth or eighth centuries BCE.[81] Narratively, Jacob's crossing from one threshold—his father's house—into another—his uncle's house—has transitioned him from a penniless fugitive to a man of conspicuous consumption, blessed by God, on his way back to the land that has been promised to him. Before taking hold of the promise, however, he must attempt reconciliation with Esau.

Jacob takes his first tentative steps toward peace with Esau through the use of obsequious language and the offer of obsequious gifts. Jacob's language centers, as it did with Laban, around servitude. The appellation לַאדֹנִי ("my lord," with the inseparable preposition לְ), coupled with Jacob's self-construction as עַבְדְּךָ indicates a posture of humility, whether real or contrived. Whether Jacob actually feels humbled before Esau is not the point. His rhetoric is intended to manipulate Esau, garnering his favor and, Jacob hopes, saving him from the promise Esau made long ago to kill his brother (Gen. 27:41). Jacob knows that if ever there was "a time to kill" (Eccles. 3:3), this is Esau's opportunity. The language Jacob uses is one protective step toward a dangerous crossing. Moreover, the language of servitude hearkens back to the oracle at the boys' birth, also centered on servitude (Gen. 25:23). Fearing—and perhaps misunderstanding—Esau's response of sending 400 men towards him, Jacob prays. This prayer is the next tentative step toward crossing over to his brother. Wenham questions how Jacob's "frenetic activity" can "square with his very pious prayer,"[82] yet Wenham's reading interprets too graciously Jacob's character here. Similarly, Thomas Brodie says, "The prayer was

[81] Finkelstein, Mazar, and Schmidt, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism*, 47.
[82] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 291.

real—it changed him."[83] However, it is not clear whether this is piety at work or something more akin to a foxhole prayer begging for mercy from a God he has already bargained with once (Gen. 28:20-22).

In the next stage of the crossing, Jacob sends a מִנְחָה which can signify either a "present" or an offering. Wenham notes that in secular contexts, a present is often a "gift that ingratiates," a "sweetener" (Gen. 43:11; Judg. 3:15).[84] Here too Jacob presents himself as Esau's servant, again hoping to incur favor (Gen. 32:21-22). Yet his meeting with Esau is forestalled by a crossing of another kind—this time the physical crossing of the Jabbok River.

Bruce Vawter and James Frazer provide a sobering reminder that Jacob undertakes no mere "casual crossing" of the מַעֲבַר יַבֹּק. Instead, Frazer states:

> The gorge is, in the highest degree, wild and picturesque. On either hand the cliffs rise almost perpendicularly to a great height; you look up the precipices or steep declivities to the skyline far above. At the bottom of this mighty chasm the Jabbok flows with a powerful current, its blue-grey water fringed and hidden, even at a short distance, by a dense jungle of tall oleanders, whose crimson blossoms add a glow of colour to the glen in early summer. The Blue River, for such is its modern name, runs fast and strong. Even in ordinary times the water reaches to the horses' girths, and sometimes the stream is quite unfordable, the flood washing grass and bushes high up the banks on either hand.[85]

In highlighting the dangers in crossing the Jabbok, Vawter and Frazer's comments underscore the hyperbolic nature of the biblical account. McKay notes, "The itinerary itself, and particularly the river crossing, stretch the imagination to the breaking point. The gorge of the Jabbok is extremely deep, and the idea of crossing it at night with a

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[83] Brodie, *Genesis As Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, And Theological Commentary*, 324.
[84] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 292.
[85] Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading,* 348-349.

crowd of people and herds of animals is extraordinary."[86] For McKay, the physical danger and hyperbolic insinuations of the text are purposeful, representing the symbolic transformation Jacob undergoes. The fight and the crossing of the river function together as a *rite de passage* for Jacob, marking a change from herdsman entrepreneur to respected leader of the tribe.[87] The crossing, then, is polyvalent, functioning both geographically and also symbolically. In expanding the scope of the geography beyond the physical to the symbol, McKay claims, the ambiguities and confusion of the text—what she calls the "missing piece"—are (slightly) clarified. McKay draws on the work of David Pocock, who argues for two geographies, the physical and symbolic (or moral). This two-sided paradigm is linked to disputes between North and South and the impossible nature of Jacob's itinerary. McKay and Pocock acknowledge that in many Genesis traditions, people coming from the North are considered to be of lineal purity, even though people from the South are depicted as more prosperous. In Genesis, Pocock points to twin themes of inheritance by irregular means and bias in favor of those who are bred in the North. In the story of Esau, McKay claims that the "theft" of the birthright and blessing means that Jacob has to flee for safety to the North, where he acquires family and numerous possessions. After Jacob travels southward to meet Esau, however, the geography of his travels stops making sense.[88] Jacob either travels on the "wrong" side of the Jabbok, or having to cross it twice, loops back when the narrative says he continues on in the same direction.[89] For this reason, McKay says that trying to make literal sense of the itinerary is impossible, and even Pocock's insights do not solve the

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[86] Heather A. McKay, "Jacob Makes It Across the Jabbok: An Attempt to Solve the Success/Failure Ambivalence in Israel's Self-Consciousness," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38 (1987), 7.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 8.

geographical problems. His scheme requires the separation of the fight from crossing the Jabbok. The crossing must take place in a southward direction during the flight from Laban, and in a northward direction when Jacob makes his way to Succoth. Thus, McKay claims, "getting the geography right" was unimportant to the purposes of the narrator as he constructed the story.[90] For McKay, the purpose of the story as told by the narrator was to situate it in the perspective of the post-exilic community, those returning to the land:

> Thus the story would have among its aims—as it was told—the creation of a hopeful attitude towards a long, hazardous journey south, with enough expression given to the difficulties to be met to make them appear both real, and yet containable and defeatable; the provision of an image of the future in a new land where former exiles would be welcome and live prosperously… The narrator accomplished his task in something under a hundred words, and spelled out again to his hearers his belief that their race alone was permitted to hold God to a close, intense commitment, upon which they could rely totally.[91]

McKay's overall argument successfully foregrounds the Jabbok encounter as a means for Israel to "use" its past. However, her construction of the post-exilic community's relationship to God does not capture the complexity of a character who appears to break the very boundaries he establishes. Here, Roland Barthes's seminal structuralist analysis underscores the complexities of the role of God in the story.

Barthes's essay meanders between structuralist binaries and poststructuralist unraveling of binaries. Barthes seeks the (dis/un)closure of the text, reading not for where the text comes from (historical criticism), nor for how it is made (structuralism). Instead, Barthes's aim is to discern how it is "unmade, how it explodes, disseminates: according

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[90] Ibid., 8.
[91] Ibid., 11.

to what coded avenues it *goes*."[92] For Barthes, the "coded avenues" wend through three primary *Leitworten*: the Crossing, the Struggle, and the Name (Change). In the narrative preamble to the Jabbok encounter, Barthes notes a double schema in Genesis 32:23-25, where "crossing" functions as follows: in v. 23, Jacob rises, collects, and crosses; in vs. 24-25, Jacob collects, sends across, and remains alone.[93] Here, Jacob not only rises, but the discourse also gets underway; what is said must be distinguished from what is not said.[94] According to Barthes, the crossing can be read in two different ways. First, Jacob himself crosses the ford, if need be, after having made several trips. The wrestling therefore occurs on the left bank of the stream (he is coming from the North), after having definitively crossed over. In this case, Barthes claims, "sending across" is to be read as "crossing oneself." Second, Jacob sends across but does not cross himself. He wrestles on the right bank of the Jabbok *before crossing*. In these two possible readings, Barthes notes two "pressures of readability." If Jacob remains alone *before* having crossed the Jabbok, then Barthes claims the episode must be read as folklore—Jacob desires trial by combat (e.g., with a dragon or genius of the river) so that he can overcome it and be victorious. Conversely, if Jacob and his tribe have crossed and he remains alone on the right side of the stream (of the country where he wants to go) the crossing is without "structural finality," even though it acquires a "religious finality." If Jacob is alone, it is to *mark himself* in solitude, the "familiar setting apart of the chosen of God."[95] For Barthes, the jagged narrative—or what David M. Carr calls "fractures"—must be the "mingled vestige of two stories," one more archaic which renders the crossing itself as a

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[92] Roland Barthes, "Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 247.
[93] Ibid., 249.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 250.

test, and the other more "realistic," attaching geographical significance to Jacob's journey by mentioning the places he passes through.[96] In other words, Barthes refuses to decide between mythology and etiology. He argues for both instead. When including the Wrestling and the Naming in his sequence, Barthes expands the scope of the reading. This allows for two additional possibilities: sending the others across, not crossing oneself, wrestling and naming, and having crossed (Gen. 32:32); or sending the others across, crossing oneself, wrestling and naming, and continuing (Gen. 32:32). Of this pressured readability, Barthes claims, "The theologian would no doubt be distressed by this indecision; the exegete would acknowledge it, hoping that some element, factual or argumentative, would allow him to bring it to an end; the textual analyst, it must be said, if I may judge my own impression, will savor this sort of *friction* between two intelligibilities."[97] When broadening the discussion of Jacob's crossing beyond Barthes's seminal textual analysis to structuralist interpretations, the role of God at the crossing assumes an even more jarring tone.

In considering A. J. Greimas's actantial analysis, for example, Barthes notes that the actants are "filled" as follows: Jacob is the *Subject* (of the demand, of the search, of the action); the *Object* (of this same demand, search, action) is the crossing of the guarded, forbidden place, the Jabbok; the *Sender*, who puts into circulation the stake of the search (the crossing) is God; the *Receiver* is again Jacob; the *Opponent* (the one or ones who hamper the Subject in his search) is God himself (who guards the crossing); the *Helper* (the one who assists the Subject) is Jacob, who aids himself by his own strength. Barthes notes that the formula here is readily apparent, and that the subject be identified

[96] Ibid., 251.
[97] Ibid.

with the receiver is typical enough. What is paradoxical—even scandalous—is the fact that God functions as both the *Sender* and the *Opponent*. For Barthes, the scandalous nature of God's dual role is only matched by the scandalous nature of God's defeat.[98] While it is true that Jacob does prevail over אֱלֹהִים and אֲנָשִׁים, Jacob's opponent does possess enough strength to permanently wrench Jacob's hip out of joint (Gen. 32:25), suggesting that he allows himself to be defeated. The "defeat" of Jacob's opponent is ambiguous, as is the establishment and/or crossing of boundaries between the human and the divine. A brief survey of stories outside the Jacob Cycle also demonstrate the reality of a divine character who "sends," "opposes," permits, or encourages the crossing of social/ethical/geographical boundaries.

Within the Primeval History (Gen. 1-11) alone, several stories indicate that the divine character feels anxiety about the human crossing into the boundary of the divine. By contrast, the divine character appears to transgress the very boundaries he establishes. While אֱלֹהִים does make the אָדָם in his own image (Gen. 1:26), physical boundaries are also enforced to separate God from (hu)man. The first creation story is as much about separation as it is about creation, with בָּדַל as a theme word throughout (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 18), and scholars such as Ellen van Wolde argue that the semantic range of בָּרָא be expanded beyond "creation" to "separation."[99] While the first creation story is based upon the categorizing instincts of the Priestly writer, the second creation story also displays a deep ambivalence about the human "crossing" the divine. Yahweh Elohim does walk in the same space as the man and his wife, yet he also erects a boundary—a

[98] Barthes, "Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33," 257.
[99] Ellen van Wolde, "Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean 'To Create' in Genesis 1.1-2.4a," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 1 (2009): 3-23.

place they must not cross (Gen. 2:16-17). Once they cross that boundary, the anxieties of Yahweh Elohim are expressed: "And the LORD God said, 'Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and live forever!'" (Gen. 3:22). Two primary fears are expressed—that the man know טוֹב וָרָע (a merism for knowing everything)—and that he might וְחַי לְעֹלָם ("live forever"). After expelling them from the garden, another boundary is erected which will guard the way back to the place they crossed (Gen. 3:24). This boundary between the human(s) and the divine must be protected, and the human(s) must not cross it.

Anxieties about the human and the divine coming into contact also occur prior to the Flood (Gen. 6:1-4) and at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). In the precursor to the Flood story, the "sons of God" (בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים) see the "daughters of man" (בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם) and take them as wives. Three remarkable images—"the sons of God" (בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים), the "Nephilim" (הַנְּפִלִים), and the "warriors," "mighty ones" (הַגִּבֹּרִים)—demonstrate for Ellen van Wolde the smallness of this narrative universe.[100] The "sons of God" may correlate to any of the following: godlike Sethites, while the daughters of men are ungodlike Canaanites; dynastic rulers or powerful kings from before the flood and the many women they took into their harems; or godlike creatures who are members not of the class of "man" but of the class "god" or of the members of the heavenly court.[101] The mixing of these two classes of human and (semi)-divine leads Yahweh to construct a temporal boundary on the flesh (בָּשָׂר) of the (hu)man. For Brevard Childs, בָּשָׂר denotes

[100] Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 69.
[101] Ibid.

the temporal, corruptible and weak side of human nature, which contrasts with the life-giving force of the רוּחַ.[102] Flesh is the carrier of the unethical virus: God's sons and the daughters of men have behaved so badly that their wickedness is located in their very flesh. Moreover, the spatial placement of Genesis 6:1-4—immediately before Yahweh's decision to destroy the earth with a flood—has led to, as van Wolde has said, an overall "negative picture" of Genesis 6:1-4.[103]

Ultimately, van Wolde proposes a positive assessment of the story. Debates about whether the story serves as catalyst for the Flood or whether the actions of these human and semi-divine creatures are to be viewed ethically or unethically ultimately blur the point—this small pericope prescribes a boundary that is not crossable for the human, but fully crossable for the divine. The Tower of Babel story displays similar reality. There, humankind repeatedly uses language reminiscent of the first creation story—"let us" (Gen. 11:3, 4; Gen. 1:26; cf. Gen. 3:22). The result of everyone on the earth having "one lip" and "the same words" (Gen. 11:1) is the ability to erect a boundary-less boundary—a city with a tower touching the sky. Earth touches heaven. Boundaries are crossed. Old anxieties resurface, both on the part of humankind, who fears expulsion or "scattering"; and on the part of Yahweh/the Yahwistic writer/worldview, which fears their limitless capabilities. Like sparks, humankind travels upward; Yahweh and his consort travel downward. Yahweh and his plurality confound their speech, scattering them over the earth. The story works on multiple levels, on the one hand demonstrating a clear anxiety and ambivalence concerning city life and empire building—Cain and his ilk are stopped (cf. Gen. 4:17)— and on the other hand reifying boundaries set between the human and

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

the divine.[104] No casual crossing on the part of the human may be permitted. In the Jacob Cycle, there too it is the divine who initiates contact, crossing, both at Bethel and at the Jabbok. Therefore McKay's interpretation of the "intense commitment" upon which the Israelites could "rely totally" does not take into account the complexity of that relationship. Rather, the character of God at the Jabbok and in the texts surveyed above, appears benevolent sometimes and malevolent at others. He creates spaces for the human characters in the story to occupy, yet he expels him from the spaces later on. He will infiltrate their spaces at random times and under strange circumstances. And he will make promises to them which are deferred or which do not appear blissful once they unfold. This is moreover a divine character who tricks and engages in dirty wrestling. In the character of the divine, it is not difficult also to see the anxiety of post-exilic community's relationship to its "benevolent" overlords.

While McKay's analysis assumes too easy a relationship to God in the Jabbok story, her reading captures well the theme of displacement. It is this displacement, captured by Jacob and foregrounded in the chapter entitled, "The Dark," which represents a key reality in the lives of the post-exilic community—coming home. In assigning a post-exilic date for the composition of the Jabbok encounter, McKay demonstrates the ambivalence felt by those groups returning to Palestine. McKay states:

> It is possible to see in the Jacob Cycle, and in particular in this story, some of the tensions of the exilic community being worked out. For this story shows an ambivalent approach to the journey from the north to the land of Canaan. It is presented as being difficult, awkward and dangerous, with an eleventh hour

[104] Other stories outside the Primeval History also function as useful intertexts to discuss the role of "divine crossing" and the aggressive blocking or punishing of crossing. For the sake of space, only mention will be made of them here: the story of the *Akedah* (Gen. 22), which involves the crossing of God and the angel of the LORD, one of whom sends the child into harm's way, while the other provides a ram which saves his life; and the story of Zipporah and the near murder of Moses at the hand of the deity (Ex. 4:24-26).

> hazard of the most tremendous kind which almost stops the patriarch from getting home. And the anxiety about the need to make Israel acceptable to the present inhabitants of the land is expressed in the careful and detailed planning of the gifts sent on ahead to win Esau's favor.[105]

The story of a hero (re)turning home through a journey long and arduous demonstrates the fears of the returnees. McKay's thesis is convincing when considering that the Jacob Cycle is largely a story about a displaced person, transitioning from home and back again. The Jabbok story, as well as the narrative backstory, raises questions about Israel's relationship with God and the land. Is Jacob actually "home" at the end of the narrative, and if so, is home everything he imagined? Just how much of God did Jacob actually "see" at the Jabbok, given the darkened space of the encounter? Just how much of God does Israel actually experience in light of its exilic and post-exilic history? Just how visible is this God to them? Just as Jacob must grapple with coming home to a place that may no longer feel like home and even live out his latter days in Egypt (Gen. 47:27-28); struggle with the reality of family life in the land (Gen. 34:1-31; 36:6-8; 37:1-8; 38:1-30); and acknowledge an identity that remains *both* Jacob ("heel") *and* Israel ("God-wrestler") (Gen. 35:10; 48:2, 8, e.g.); so too Israel as a nation must face tension between the returnees and the remainees (Ezra 2:1-67; Jer. 16:14-15; 23:7-8[106]); how best to rebuild land, Temple, and relationships in Persian Yehud (e.g., Ezra 9:-10; Neh. 13; Ruth 1-4, to name a few); as well as grapple with the perennial problem of the invisible God. For both Jacob and Israel, a rupture exists between the ideal and the real. And for both Jacob and Israel, an aporia exists between the partial fulfillment of a promise and its partial un-fulfillment.

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[105] McKay, "Jacob Makes It Across the Jabbok: An Attempt to Solve the Success/Failure Ambivalence in Israel's Self-Consciousness," 10.

[106] In Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel,* Liverani notes that several places in the patriarchal narratives by contrast argue for co-existence between the returnees and the remainees: Gen. 23:4; 26:3-5; 12:2; 15:5; 17:6; 20:4, to name a few.

Here, the words of Frank provide insight:

> Stories do not simply report past events. Stories project possible futures, and those projections affect what comes to be, although this will rarely be the future projected by the story. Stories do not just have plots. Stories work to *emplot* lives; they offer a plot that makes some particular future not only plausible but also compelling.[107]

For the exilic and post-exilic communities of Judah, violence consistently strained the narrative. Bloodshed rooted their storied lives. Therefore the Jabbok text—and the story it tells of two brothers reconciling, one favored by Yahweh and the other receding into the background—is one peaceable way in which Israel's past is "rooted." Once the violence narrated in the wrestling at the Jabbok is complete—and once the violence of the exile is done—some kind of workable present (and future) must be narrated. For a culture whose (hi)story was so deeply rooted in bloodshed, the denouement of the Jabbok proposes a peaceable but cautious reconciliation. It pictures Idumea and Judah, remainees and returnees, living peaceably but not necessarily together. Ultimately, it pictures Jacob/Israel (s)elected by Yahweh to receive not only material largesse but also narrates a story where Jacob successfully crosses every boundary—physical, human, and divine. Even after these successful crossings, however, what Stephen Geller refers to as the "willed obscurity of the [Jabbok] text" remains.[108] The obscurity of the text is assuredly due, at least in part, to the uncertainty of the exilic and post-exilic communities surrounding its relationship not only to God, but equally important, to the land. Foregrounding the theme of sojourn in the Jacob cycle highlights this tension.

In her evaluation of Genesis, Elisabeth Kennedy examines the word cluster of גר/גור/מגור as a *Leitwort* in the patriarchal narratives. Kennedy believes this word cluster

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[107] Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, 9-10.
[108] Stephen A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), 19.

(which she has translated as "sojourn") contributes to the central themes of land and community in Genesis. She follows the definition of Rudolph Bultmann for "sojourn": a residing place where one did not originally belong.[109] Kennedy views Canaan as both home and not-home for the patriarchs. She states, "In a narrative concerned with instituting a strong tie between the ancestors of Israel and their divinely appointed homeland, sojourn sounds a note of discord. . . sojourn seems a jarring and troubling counter-note to the establishment of an ancestral claim in Canaan."[110] Indeed, throughout the Hebrew Bible a paradox exists in that those who are promised a home never quite receive it. It seems that the hope of home is as elusive as the presence of God. Like God, home too is presence-absence, a kind of docetic reality in the lives of the Hebrew people.

Kennedy notes that the itinerary notice occurs three times in reference to Jacob, allowing for four stages of closure in Jacob's sojourn. First, in Genesis 32 and 33, Jacob returns to Canaan and reunites with his brother; geographically, however, Jacob has not yet come full circle. He has not yet reunited with his father, who had "sent him away" (Gen. 28:5) in the opening itinerary notice of the journey to Paddan-aram. Second, in chapter 35, Jacob goes to Bethel, allowing for a second symmetry in his overarching journey (Gen. 28:20-21; 35:3). This event provides closure to Jacob's extended sojourn circuit. Third, in Genesis 35:27, Jacob comes to his father, fully closing the sojourn circuit. Finally, Genesis 37:1 repeats the note that Jacob is located in the land where his father had sojourned but with a new verb—וישב—indicating he stayed there continuously. Thus Genesis 35:27 records Jacob's arrival in Canaan, and Genesis 37:1 describes his

[109] Elisabeth Robertson Kennedy, *Seeking a Homeland: Sojourn and Ethnic Identity in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 4-5.
[110] Ibid., 2.

ongoing residence there. At the end of his wanderings, Kennedy says, Jacob makes Canaan his permanent home. His movement turns to stasis.[111] The two itinerary notices—Genesis 37:1 and Genesis 35:27—do not, however, attribute sojourn to Jacob. The first notice is located at the end of Jacob's sojourn arc in Paddan-aram, thus positioning his arrival in Hebron as a return from sojourn, a homecoming. The second itinerary notice completes the story of Jacob before launching into the Joseph novella. Whereas his father sojourned there, Jacob "settled" in Canaan. So, did Jacob "belong" to Canaan in a way that was different from his fathers? Was Canaan "home" to Jacob? When God reiterates the promise of land possession (Genesis 35:12), it is nevertheless designated as a place of sojourn because it is given by God. The place of belonging, Kennedy maintains, is not the land of origin which lies in their past, but the land of possession which lies in their future.[112]

Drawing on Anthony D. Smith's territorialization of memory, Kennedy notes that the recording of ethnic memory in the land transforms the territory into ethnoscape. She states, "This note underscores Jacob's status in the land as different from the sojourn experience of Abraham and Isaac; it also points to a particular way of seeing the land. It is home, but it is at the same time the place that was not home one or two generations before; it is at once home and not-home…"[113] While sojourn indicates non-belonging, it is part of the territorialization of memory, which brings about belonging.[114] Thus it appears that Jacob is always to settle in a liminal place—a place that is, for him, at once home and not-home; a place that represents sojourn and belonging. He can plant his feet

[111] Ibid., 67-68.
[112] Ibid., 68-69.
[113] Ibid., 72.
[114] Ibid.

on its soil, walk heel-to-toe with the dirt under his feet, and *yashav* there; but there remains a sense always that his grasp on the land, even on his own life, is tenuous. Jacob's survey of his life as he nears death is as ambiguous as it is poignant: "And Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning'" (Gen. 47:9 ESV). As he examines his life, this grand patriarch, the God-Wrestler, does not describe his days as blessed or whole or explain how he saw the Face of all Faces and lived. Instead, Jacob describes his days as "few" (מעט) and "evil" (רעים). His is an acknowledgement that life is fleeting and not always filled to the brim with excess; sometimes life is tenuously and paradoxically filled to the brim with lack. For all his encounters with the Face of all Faces; for all his successes in (re)turning home and facing his past; Jacob's words still bespeak unfulfilled desire. Israel still experiences a melancholy longing for home. Life is still fleeting, and his hold on it, tenuous. The man Jacob, the nation Israel, and the story Jabbok, all expose their liminality. All are, in one sense or another, professing *shalom* in the face of wounding, exile, and aporia. This deep ambiguity is expressed in the characters of Jacob and God, as the chapter on the Name has articulated. A new beginning is attempted through the bestowal of a new name for Jacob, yet the old name also remains. For Paul Connerton, new beginnings are fraught with ambiguity: "All beginnings contain an element of recollection. This is particularly so when a social group makes a concerted effort to begin with a wholly new start . . . But the absolutely new is inconceivable."[115] Jacob is renamed, yet his life does not change much afterwards. Deep ambiguity and liminality is also expressed in the half-opening of Jacob's wound, as the

[115] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

chapter on the Wound has argued. Part of grappling with ambiguity includes construction of a new beginning through commemorative ceremonies and in bodily practices, as Connerton argues.[116] The commemorative rite established at the Jabbok (Gen. 32:32) functions to mark the event of Jacob's crossing. Images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past, Connerton asserts, are conveyed and sustained by ritual performance.[117] Here, the community's refusal to eat the thigh muscle on the hip socket commemorates Jacob's encounter. It becomes communal *habit*, one way in which societies remember.[118] Yet this habit, this crossing, does not conclude the story in a neat and tidy way.

Narratively speaking, after the crossing of the Jabbok and the reconciliation with Esau, it would seem that the loose ends of the narrative would be threaded back together. Crossing the boundary should end the story. Such is not the case. After making it safely across the Jabbok and into the land of Canaan, Jacob's and Esau's stories do not end. The narrative world refuses to close fully the emotional boundary Jacob crosses with Esau (Gen. 33:10). They do not travel on together, nor do they arrive in the same place (Gen. 33:16-17), perhaps a continued symbol of Jacob's mistrust of Esau's intentions and surely a larger symbol of their ancestors' inability to dwell together in peace.[119] The story, like the lives of the people who lived it and composed it, remains open, liminal. This collective memory transmits, in the words of Assmann, a "collective identity."[120] It is here where memories are made. Assmann states, "It is not a matter of a physical wound

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[116] Ibid., 7.
[117] Ibid., 4.
[118] Ibid., 104.
[119] The scene calls to mind the words of the psalmist—"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity" (Ps. 133:1 NRSV)—as if to convey the rarity of the sentiment and the inevitability of fraternal/familial strife.
[120] Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, 7.

that never stops hurting, nor is it a memory trace in the 'archaic inheritance' of the soul. It is a projection on the part of the collective that wishes to remember and of the individual who remembers in order to belong."[121] Nevertheless, there is, in Jacob and his ancestors, a certain "belonging" achieved precisely through Jacob's limp.

Like the community he represents, Jacob's connection to the land, to God, and to proximate others, is tenuous and contested. Following the structuralist work of Levi-Strauss, Edmund Leach notes that some anxiety seems to have existed surrounding the people's (non-)indigenous status. Leach states,

> The Old Testament as a whole asserts that the Jewish political title to the land of Palestine is a direct gift from God to the descendants of Israel (Jacob). This provides the fundamental basis for Jewish endogamy—the Jews should be a people of pure blood and pure religion, living in isolation in the Promised Land. But interwoven with this theological dogma there is a less idealized form of tradition which represents the population of ancient Palestine as a mixture of many peoples over whom the Jews have asserted political dominance by right of conquest.[122]

The myth of Jacob's limp, then, binds him to the land that his ancestors are to possess. As a lonely exile and wanderer, Jacob's connection to the land is ambiguous. When he is renamed by God, however, he is accorded the status of a "first ancestor with a territorial autochthonous base."[123] It is his lameness, his limp, which binds him to the ground he seeks to possess. In (re)telling this story, the community can "remember" that their claim to the land is sacred and binding. In being (re)named, in sustaining a wound, and in crossing the Jabbok, Jacob's encounter legitimizes the community's claim on the land. Consequently, Jacob, Esau, and God are all conduits for meaning-making in the (hi)storied lives of post-exilic Yehud.

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth: And Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1969), 31.
[123] Ibid., 18.

Facing the Dark

Throughout this study, I have examined the metaphors/images in the Jabbok story: name, face, wound, darkness, and crossing. I have argued that these images constitute a fruitful way to discuss how identity is constructed and remembered through this story and its characters. The place to conclude, then, is with the faces of Jacob, his assailant, and the community producing the story. Jacob's displacement, the brutality at the Jabbok, and his ambiguous reconciliation with Esau represent the central story of the Hebrew Bible—the Babylonian exile and the post-exilic community's long journey "home." The post-exilic community's ambiguous relationship to itself, to proximate others such as Edom/Idumea, and to God, is embodied and contested in the characters of Jacob and his assailant. The story depicts the ambiguity of these relationships through the polyvalence, multiplicity and ambiguity of each of the metaphors in the text. This is a community of wounded storytellers who interrupt, correct, and supplement one another's (re)tellings. Consequently the story is always multiplying meaning through an intersection of theology, ethics, and political strategy. Several concluding comments will demonstrate how this is the case, arguing that the Jabbok story is no casual, disinterested recollection of a shared past. Instead, the Jabbok text functions as a hinge between the past, present, and future. The Jabbok is a highly charged textual site where the communal memory of wounded storytellers is recalled.

Theologically speaking, this study has shown that Jacob's antagonist eludes, obfuscates, even apophaticates. His identity is always already deferred, as my examinations of the images of the name, the face, and the darkness suggest. The chapter on "The Name" has articulated the apophatic nature of Jacob's opponent through the

polynomial nature of the Name—both אֱלֹהִים (itself a multiplicity) and אִישׁ. Moreover, the larger Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25-50) reveals/conceals a multiplicity of names for the divine, which include: "messenger/angel of God" (מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים) (Gen. 28:12); "Yahweh" (יְהוָה) (Gen. 28:13a, 16, 21); "the LORD God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וֵאלֹהֵי יִצְחָק) (Gen. 28:13b); and "God" (אֱלֹהִים) (Gen. 28:20, 21), to name a few. Here, it is unclear whether the biblical author is simply unsure how to reference traces of divinity; if multiple sources and therefore different names underlay these texts; or if these distinctions are intended to represent Israel's consciousness of gradations of divinity within the heavenly realm. In addition to the multiplicity of names throughout the story, at the Jabbok Jacob's opponent also refuses to say his name (Gen. 32:29). The narrator's construction of the character of the antagonist demonstrates deep ambivalence about unraveling the mystery of the divine. Something of the Name must be kept, saved. The Name is therefore (un)made, constantly (un)making and elusive, never enclosed by a frame but traced in dotted lines, and leaving traces behind. The elusiveness of the Name is a kind of countersignature. To borrow a phrase from Derrida, it is a *post-scriptum*.

The chapter on "The Face" has also revealed the penchant of the narrator to withhold the identity of Jacob's assailant, or the Face of all Faces. The multiplicity of the Face (פָּנִים) presented throughout the Hebrew Bible demonstrates a divine character who hears the cry of the oppressed. On the other hand, the Face also appears more than willing to consider violent course correction. The Face is, to gesture toward Levinas, one who bids Jacob not to kill. Nevertheless, the Face also appears to hold the possibility of killing

Jacob. The Face is at once otherworldly and this-worldly; at once monstrous, able to kill, and plaintively beautiful, begging not to be killed. Mystery and multiplicity cohere in the Face. Finally, the chapter on the "Dark" has argued that Jacob is frequently "left in the dark" regarding the identity of the divine. The Dark is a chronotope, a time space, where Jacob's experiences with the divine are situated. It is also a time space where violence and the concealing of identity takes place. The images in these three chapters—name, face, and dark—each attest to the complexity of the post-exilic community's relationship to God and the dark time space of the exile. The very God who claimed to inscribe them on the palms of his hands (Isa. 49:16) is the same God who sends the Babylonians, a clear sign of his opposition (Hab. 1:1-11). It is still this same God who raises up Cyrus to send the exiles home (Isa. 45:13). Consequently it is not difficult to imagine the construction of a divine character at the Jabbok as one who also sends and opposes. For the exilic and post-exilic community, this is indeed a God who forms light and creates darkness, who makes weal and creates woe (Isa. 45:7). This is indeed a God who hides himself (Isa. 45:15). Therefore the name and the face of this divine figure are enshrouded in the darkness of the Jabbok, where he both wounds and blesses Jacob.

The Jabbok also multiplies meaning through a shrewd and ambiguous presentation of ethics. In particular, the chapters on "The Face" and "The Dark" raise the question of human and divine agency. The larger Jacob Cycle, as well as the Jabbok text itself, demonstrates Jacob's many failures as a moral agent. I have foregrounded the faces not only of Jacob and his opponent, but also of those "others" who are also vulnerable in the story world—the women and the children, even Laban and Esau. Beyond the story's poetics exists the very real competition for resources and power, depicted in a text that

delights in trickster antics. That Jacob's actions are not censured beyond his temporary exile from home, and appear in some interpretations as being narratively predestined by the character of God (Gen. 25:23), raises questions about the ethical mandates now on the table. In Jacob's character, it is not difficult to picture the post-exilic community of Yehud doing whatever they could to ensure material blessing, the benevolence of Persian overlords, and ethnic and sexual purity.

Finally, the chapters on "The Wound" and "The Crossing" articulate the proposition of specific political strategies for the post-exilic community. Of primary importance is the community's construction of its identity through cultural memory. That this community envisions itself as both wounded and blessed is critical to their identity. They are enfolded in a multi-generational relationship with a divine character who has promised them land, descendants, and blessing. The community of post-exilic Yehud maps its existence through Jacob, who is pursued, wounded, and blessed by this divine character. Consequently, the Jabbok is an example of how wounded storytellers construct a past based on present needs and future anxieties. The past that is "remembered" is not dead—it is not even past, to borrow a line from William Faulkner. Rather the "past" remains alive through continuing to (re)tell and (re)construct rival "others" as unworthy of the land, even as the story cannot escape the reality of multiple communities laying claim to the land and to the appellation, "Israel." After Jacob crosses the Jabbok successfully, the reconciliation he makes with Esau is a cautious one, demonstrated, perhaps, by Jacob's refusal to travel together (Gen. 33:12-14) and his arrival in Shechem (Gen. 33:18). While Jacob does not dismiss their reconciliation—they must learn to coexist—he does not display desire to live alongside him. So too returnees and remainees

display ambivalence toward one another, vying for the same land and resources. The story's insistence that it is Jacob, not Esau, who is (re)named Israel, demonstrates a decisive word regarding communal politics: the returnees, not the remainees, truly deserve the name, "Israel." Discussion of more sympathetic depictions of Esau, which are beyond the scope of this study, however, demonstrates the instability of returnees' hold on that identity marker. Nevertheless, the Jabbok story suggests that boundary crossings move life forward through a strained coexistence.

Indeed, that seems to be the point—life must move forward. And, if life is to move forward, the darkness must be faced. Perhaps the darkness has been the point all along. When all is said and done, nothing has really been said or done. Darkness remains on the faces of the protagonist and antagonist. In truth, I am uncertain that such labels are even appropriate or helpful descriptors of Jacob and the God-man he encounters. Likewise, darkness remains on the textual face. In its own darkness, the text reifies itself as a *Bet Hamidrash*—a "home of searching,"[1] a textual space where not one meaning but many meanings abound. That is as it should be for any text that self-identifies as "living" and "active" (Heb. 4:12).

In the end, one question remains—what is to be gained by this particular searching? Admittedly, this study exists somewhere outside what can be defined as traditionally exegetical. It has been existential and philosophical, even meditative. I began my search because in names and faces, in wounds and places of darkness, and in crossings actual and existential, I saw something of my own experience. At the Jabbok,

[1] Samuel Tongue, *Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretive Struggles Over Genesis 32:22-32* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 199.

safe and stable notions about God, selfhood, and the long journey home are displaced and darkened. I strained to see through the darkness of the Jabbok because while the story resists answers, it does pose profound questions about what it means to be human. The Jabbok encounter is not punctuated with an exclamation point—an emphatic straight line with a dot at the end. Instead, the line bends into the curve of a question mark. Here, readers who continue to engage this text share something in common with the unnamed individuals who produced it—the need to live inside questions through story. Arthur Frank states, "Stories always pose that question: what kind of truth is being told? Stories never resolve that question; their work is to remind us that we have to live with complicated truths."[2] The complexity of the Jabbok story, which offers movement yet resists finality, allows for continued unfolding. It allows for Midrash, continued searching. It allows for more questions. In that way, the darkness of this text is not without fecundity. Rabbi Shmuel Sperber attests, "To question is a great religious act; it helps you live great religious truth."[3]

A study such as this matters for precisely that reason—this story and its images slip textual boundaries and speak to the heart of human experience. For the wounded storytellers producing the story, the questions raised about identity not only enable them to live religious truth. Indeed, it enables them to live. In that way, the text continues to unfold through those who wrestle with the complicated truths of their story.

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[2] Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.
[3] Rabbi Chaim Stern, *Day by Day: Reflections on the Themes of the Torah from Literature, Philosophy, and Religious Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1998), 240.

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