Divestiture, Deception, and Demotion: The Garment Motif in Genesis 37–39*

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Abstract
In a previous issue of JSOT, Victor Matthews treats the garment motif in the Joseph story, but does not include the Judah/Tamar story (Gen. 38) in his analysis. I argue that this chapter is more concerned with garments or personal objects than any in the Joseph narrative, and therefore deserves examination alongside chs. 37 and 39. In all three chapters, garments play a pivotal role in plot development as markers of status and authority by which identities are revealed or concealed. The motif is manifest in a variety of ways: deception through loss or removal of garments, deception through forced recognition, and authority signified via possession of garments or personal items. The Judah/Tamar episode in ch. 38 demonstrably shapes in various ways the reader’s understanding of garment-related events in these chapters.

In a previous article in this journal, Victor Matthews identifies and discusses the ‘garment motif’ in the Joseph story (Gen. 37–50).1 By way of structural analysis, the author labels chs. 37 and 41.33(?)–45.28 as the

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first stage' of the story, relating how the young Joseph is presented with a garment by Jacob, loses it (ch. 37), and ultimately receives garments and royal insignia from the king of Egypt (41.41-42). This postulated first stage serves as an inclusio, enveloping 39.1–41.32(?), which Matthews labels an 'embellishment', his 'second stage' in the development of the story, wherein the morally upright but naïve Joseph loses his garment at the hands of Potiphar’s wife. In each incident, the author notes how garments serve, explicitly or implicitly, as status indicators—from favorite son, to servant, to prisoner, to favored official. In his first stage, 'Clothing explicitly serves within the framework of the narrative as a device signaling these status changes'. The garment motif in ch. 39 is considered by Matthews not to be 'an explicit part of the story', apparently because of its occurrence in the embellished second stage. Nevertheless, the presence of the motif here leads him to conclude that 'the continued appearance of explicit or implicit scenes involving clothing thus add to the argument that this transitory material [in chs. 39–41] is part of a well structured narrative, not one that has been expanded later'. Leaving aside the ambiguous language in this statement, the observant reader of Genesis cannot help but notice the omission of the intervening ch. 38 in the above analysis (not discussed in his article). This exclusion stems from the author’s reliance upon traditional source analysis, which eliminates the chapter from the Joseph story. Such an omission would be understandable if the narrative in ch. 38 had nothing to do with clothing or personal items, but precisely the opposite is the case. Indeed, ch. 38 is arguably more concerned with garments or objects of one’s wardrobe than any in the Joseph story. Unlike the adjacent chs. 37 and 39, this chapter contains not one but two


4. By 'implicit', I take him to refer to the absence in ch. 39 of any explicit statement regarding the garment’s origin or social significance (see Matthews, ‘Anthropology of Clothing’, pp. 348, 350-51).

5. How can chs. 39–41 be both a later embellishment, yet still an integral part of a 'well structured narrative'? Matthews appeals to the supplementary character of chs. 39–41—‘regarded as embellishment of the [Joseph] narrative which originally only included detailed accounts of Joseph’s life until his sale as a slave and his rise to power’ (Matthews, ‘Anthropology of Clothing’, p. 348) to explain why the motif here is implicit, as opposed to explicit.
instances where such items, indicative of status, play a pivotal role in the plot. Moreover, one is justified in asking why ch. 38 can be excluded from analysis while at the same time the 'transitory material' in chs. 39–41 is identified as an integral part of the narrative on the basis of the garment motif? If garment-related actions form the requisite criteria, then should not ch. 38 be considered as well, perhaps a 'third stage', following the author’s analysis, and one that shapes the reader’s understanding of the motif in surrounding chapters?

The interpretative history of Genesis 38 is by now a well-known story in modern biblical scholarship and the above critical comments bring into focus the conflicting views adopted by biblical scholars over the past half century regarding its position in Genesis. On the one hand, the Joseph story proceeds quite smoothly without the Judah/Tamar episode; on the other, its seemingly abrupt insertion into the narrative at this point has been accounted for through various source and literary analyses.6 Earlier scholars more often than not viewed the chapter as an originally independent, and for the Joseph story irrelevant, tradition awkwardly inserted at this point.7 By the mid-1970s and early-80s, studies appeared

6. The intrusive nature of ch. 38 has long occupied exegetes, ancient and modern. Earlier histories and/or paraphrases altered the narrative in various ways, either relocating, editing, or even omitting altogether the Judah/Tamar episode (e.g. Jubilees, Testament of Judah, the Biblical Antiquities of Pseudo-Philo, and Philo’s On Joseph). Reasons for the placement of the chapter are offered as well in Jewish exegetical tradition (e.g. Gen. R. 85.2, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Sforno sub 38.1 in Migra’ot Gedolot; compare Spinoza’s comments in Samuel Shirley [trans.], Theological-Political Treatise [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991], pp.120-21; for the Latin text see Carl Gebhard [ed.], Spinoza Opera [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925], III, p.130). For discussion and further references, see Judah Goldin, ‘The Youngest Son or Where does Genesis 38 Belong’, JBL 96 (1977), pp. 27-44 (27-29), and Esther Marie Menn, Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Study in Literary Form and Hermeneutics (JSJSup, 51; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 73-74, 107-213. Menn’s reference to Sarna’s omission of the chapter in his earlier work on Genesis (Nahum M. Sarna, Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel [New York: Schocken Books, 1970]) should be revised in light of the latter’s treatment of the chapter in his JPS commentary on Genesis (Menn, Judah and Tamar, p. 74; compare Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989], pp. 263-64).

citing multiple verbal and thematic ties to the rest of Genesis, without necessarily disputing that the chapter could have been a later addition. In other words, if the story were inserted at some point in the redactional process, then there were good reasons for its placement between chs. 37 and 39 and the individual(s) responsible spliced the narrative in 'highly artful' fashion.\(^8\)

In terms of popularity and influence, Alter's treatment of this chapter—his parade example of the literary bankruptcy of traditional 'excavative' scholarship—has dominated much subsequent discussion. His close reading of Genesis 38 discerned a number of themes linking the Judah/Tamar episode to its frame story, especially the selling of Joseph in ch. 37. Most prominent among these are: Judah's pledge that he would supply a kid from the flock//dipping the garment of Joseph in the blood of a slaughtered goat; Jacob is asked to recognize (נְּבַלְמָה) the bloodstained garment of Joseph//Judah is asked to recognize (נְּבַלְמָה) the insignia he gave in pledge; Judah takes the lead in the deception of his father//Judah himself is then deceived by Tamar.\(^9\) Others elaborated upon Alter's initial analysis,

8. See, e.g., Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 10: 'careful splicing of sources by a brilliant literary artist'; Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 263: 'skillful blending of the chapter into the larger story'; Menn, *Judah and Tamar*, p. 75: 'the final redaction of Genesis 38 in its present context is intentional and artful'. In his influential study, Goldin saw no reason to reject the independent origin of the story, but felt that analysis of the resulting union of the two, that is, the Judah/Tamar episode within the Joseph narrative, was just as much valid as the detection of hypothetical sources. For him, the inserted chapter reinforced the Genesis theme of the reversal of primogeniture, applicable both to Judah, who now emerges as the worthy royal ancestor, and to Zerah, the younger of his twin sons ('Youngest Son', pp. 29-44).

9. Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, pp. 3-11. Alter was not the first to note such connections. As he indicates, a number had been observed by rabbinic exegetes (see Gen. R. 84.19, 21; 85.2, 9; b. Sot. 10b; for the former, see Judah Theodor and Hanoch Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary* [3 vols.; repr. with additional corrections by Albeck; Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965], I, pp.
calling attention to analogies between ch. 38 and the rest of Genesis, as well as other passages in the Hebrew Bible. While many have focused on parallels between chs. 37–38 (especially Fokkelman), few have addressed the thematic and/or linguistic correlations between chs. 38–39 or chs. 37–39 as a whole. Most noteworthy for our specific topic, the garment motif, are the studies of Bal and Furman. In stressing ch. 38’s chronological discontinuity, Bal rejects Alter’s argument for ‘a thematic unity as a substitute for the apparent lack of chronological continuity’ as ‘both too easy and too drastic’. Rather, for her the solution to the problem of ch.

1024-25, 1031, 1043 [Hebrew]). These links and others were reviewed by Cassuto in his 1929 study (in Hebrew) of the Judah/Tamar story—not cited by Alter—in Umberto Cassuto, ‘The Story of Tamar and Judah’, in his Biblical and Oriental Studies. I. The Bible (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), pp. 29-40 (30-31 and n. 6); see also Donald B. Redford, A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50) (VTSup, 20; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), p. 18 n. 3 (on הָיוּ). Alter’s comments (Biblical Narrative, p. 5) on the ‘unbroken narrative continuum’ between Jacob’s mourning in 37.35 and the selling of Joseph in the verse following (leaving aside the problematic syntax, which he acknowledges) echo those attributed to R. Samuel ben Nahman in Gen. R. 85.1 (Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, I, p. 1030; not cited by Alter).


38 rests ‘within the binary opposition between the two narrative devices of chronology and analogy’. The latter, analogy, provides the key to the similarities resulting from the chronological displacement: ‘In all three chapters, deceit is committed with the help of an object used as a pledge or as a proof, each time a significant part of the victim’s outfit’. Furman as well recognizes garments as ‘textual signifiers’ in the Joseph story, which ‘support the theme of sibling rivalry and the resulting victory of the youngest’, but she moves beyond the theme itself to explore the larger significance attached to the gender-determined ways in which these garments are used by the characters. For the author, the difference between male and female uses of and attitudes toward garments in Genesis—male ‘truth value’ vs. female ‘multiplicity of meanings’—is metaphorically comparable to the situation in modern literary studies with the female pluralistic view serving ‘as the very metaphor for textuality and the deconstructive nature of modern reading practices’.

Despite their different emphases, both Bal and Furman recognize the importance of garments in chs. 37-39. Indeed, this motif is arguably more prominent in chs. 37-39 than elsewhere in the Joseph story or Genesis.

Here the reader encounters, in the space of three consecutive chapters, no

13. Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 90. The chronological device she explains, drawing on Gérard Genette’s study of Proust, as *paralepsis-on-analipsis*, that is, extra information inserted as an *aside* to fill a previous gap (p. 94). The deviating chapter mirrors the actions of its subject Judah, who deviates from the ‘right path’ at Timnah (p. 95).


15. For the males, garments are ‘symbolic markers of filial love and recognition’ and reinforce the emotional link between men, a link from which women are excluded (Furman, ‘His Story Versus Her Story’, pp. 143-44, 147). For the women, Tamar and the wife of Potiphar, garments ‘function as communicative devices between the sexes’, and as such are invested with a multiplicity of meanings, being ‘a means of self-inscription in a system that neglects them’ (p. 147).


17. The motif is also found in Gen. 27 with Jacob’s deception of Isaac (via the skins of the slain kid and the garments of Esau in vv. 15 and 27), although here the garments themselves do not play as singular or prominent a role as in chs. 37-39. Rather, the text emphasizes the tactile nature of the ruse: Jacob is concerned that his father might feel him (that he is not hairy) and, having touched the skins on his hands, Isaac believes him to be Esau. Indeed, the narrative implies that this is the most reliable means of identifying his sons (v. 21), thus, the success of Rebecca’s plan. While Isaac does later smell his garments, the text does not dwell on these as primary objects in the deception. Additionally, unlike Gen. 37-39, the success of Rebecca’s ruse hinges upon the deceived party’s associating these with someone other than their true owner.
less than four instances (the coat of Joseph, the veil and garments of Tamar, the insignia of Judah, and the robe of Joseph in ch. 39) where garments or other personal items play a pivotal role in plot development as the means by which identities are revealed or concealed. Such frequency justifies, I believe, a closer, but by no means exhaustive or definitive, reading of these chapters, not for the purpose of defending or denying any given position on the redaction history of ch. 38 or the Joseph story, but rather to explore precisely how this motif functions and the import of the similarities and differences in its usage, and to investigate more thoroughly the effects produced by the inclusion of the Judah/Tamar narrative.\(^{18}\) But first a word or two regarding my approach to the analysis that follows.

Lest the reader anticipate yet another ‘Alteresque’ reading of a Genesis narrative that has endured innumerable such analyses, I do not offer here a reading that celebrates the subtle artistry of a narrator/redactor or unique monotheistically motivated narrative techniques. While not denying the variety of sophisticated literary strategies and devices manifest in biblical narrative, I hesitate to draw conclusions about the intentions of an ancient author or editor, as opposed to those of the (actual) modern reader (*intentio lectoris*) and/or the text (*intentio operis*), however blurred the distinction between the two may be.\(^{19}\) The analysis offered herein no doubt reveals as much about my own intentions and desires as it does about an unknown ancient narrator or redactor. While many extol the subtle and sophisticated


\(^{19}\) For these, see Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (ed. Stephan Collini; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45-88.
artistry of the Genesis redactor/narrator, they are often less clear as to how the redactional process worked. If ch. 38 is considered an independent tradition that was at one point skillfully ‘spliced in’, is one to assume that the redactor, aware of the intrusive nature of the material in its ‘original state’, then shaped the chapter, adding words and phrases where appropriate, in order to create a recognizable thematic unity—at least for those clever enough to discover it? Such artful splicing on the part of biblical writers/narrators, according to Alter, is to be distinguished from ‘some automatic mechanism of interpolating traditional materials’.20 The problem of course is how does one distinguish between the two? One ‘less perceptive’ exegete’s interpolation could well be another’s ‘artful splicing’.21 As others have noted, such interpretive strategies are more a matter of hermeneutics than compositional poetics.22 In saying this, I do not wish to downplay the importance of Alter’s contribution to biblical studies. I, like countless others, have learnt much from his insightful analyses.

20. Alter, Biblical Narrative, p. 10. While Alter may be convinced that he has uncovered what lies at ‘the heart of the biblical author’s intentions’ (p. 189), at least in the biblical narratives he examines, the authority with which he makes such a statement must be measured against his own obvious ideological biases about the text. These are particularly evident, for example, in the author’s appeal to the intentional ‘incoherence’ of Num. 16 (pp. 133-36), where alternative readings are sacrificed on the altar of the author’s normative biblical poetics; compare David Damrosch, The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 298-307, and Burke Long, ‘The “New” Biblical Poetics of Alter and Sternberg’, JSOT 51 (1991), pp. 71-84.

21. Compare Bal, Lethal Love, pp. 89, 91, on Gen. 38. Others eliminate the problem altogether by concluding that ch. 38 was an integral part of the narrative from the beginning (e.g. Fokkelman, ‘Literary Structure’, p. 181: ‘It [ch. 38] stands where it belongs and where it was put by a brilliant artist, right from the genesis of Genesis on’; see also n. 6 above).

22. See, e.g., Adele Berlin, ‘Literary Exegesis of Biblical Narrative: Between Poetics and Hermeneutics’, in Rosenblatt and Sitterson (eds.), Not in Heaven, pp. 120-28. Berlin states: ‘We should not mistake hermeneutic principles for compositional techniques. Hermeneutics is not poetics. To be sure, there is a close relationship between them; but they are not one and the same... The discovery of similar words and/or themes in different pericopes is, in one sense, no different from the discovery of other types of correspondence like, say, the numerical correspondence in gematria. If it seems preposterous to base an interpretation on the latter, and quite reasonable to base it on the former, it only means that tastes in hermeneutic principles have changed. Some of that change is reflected in the popularity of this form of literary exegesis’ (pp. 127-28); see also Levinson, ‘The Right Chorale’.

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Coming back now to the garment motif, in isolating the four cases mentioned above, a number of repetitions and patterns, lexical and thematic, emerge—present in some, absent in others.

Deception via Removal or Loss of Garments/Personal Items

In each case, the deception or concealment hinges upon the initial removal or loss of garments or objects. This is perhaps most prominent in the opening incident with Joseph in ch. 37. Here the removal is accomplished in the most forceful manner (37.23) with the brothers stripping their father’s favorite of his precious robe. Unlike chs. 38–39, this initial deed is then subsequently impressed upon the mind of the reader by further acts involving the rending of garments (in mourning rituals of Reuben and Jacob, and as well the father’s inference that his son, like the garment held before him, has been torn to pieces), such that the entire episode leaves the reader with the lingering image of clothing tattered and torn. Moving to ch. 39 with Potiphar’s wife, the text is somewhat ambiguous as to how, but not why, Joseph lost his garment. Did he leave it whole in the hands of the frustrated seductress, seeing that he could not otherwise escape her grasp (v. 12), or was she left holding only a portion of it? Or, as some rabbinic exegetes suggest, had Joseph removed it voluntarily prior to his ‘change of heart’ (Kugel) and subsequent flight? Her act of grabbing the garment (ΠΠ3 1ΠΕ3ΒΠΓΠ) implies a forceful removal and thereupon reminds the reader of the shredded clothing of ch. 37; thus, the focus on actions related to wardrobe in ch. 37 could well influence one’s reading of

23. The latter option is explored in midrashic and talmudic traditions, which both exculpate and implicate Joseph. An exchange in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Sot. 36b) interprets the phrase ‘to do his work’ in 39.11 as a reference to Joseph’s sexual intentions, although at the last minute an apparition of his father caused him to change his mind. The complicity of Joseph is more explicit in an interpretation preserved in Aggadot ha-Talmud, wherein the two of them go to bed naked (טלא שיניים לאמם תורמים); see E.Z. Malemed, Halakhic Midrashim of the Tannaim in the Talmud Babli (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1943), p. 478 (in Hebrew). Still another reading (Gen. R. 87.7) interprets the statement that ‘there was not a man in the house’ (Gen. 39.11) to indicate Joseph’s initial willingness followed by sexual impotence (alluding to the taut bow of Joseph in Gen. 49.24; see Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, III, p. 1072). For discussion of these and other interpretive traditions, see James L. Kugel, In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 94-98, and the anthology of texts in his The Bible as it Was (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Belknap, 1997), pp. 257-61.

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On the other hand, the success of the deception depends on the ability of Potiphar’s wife to convince her husband of Joseph’s guilt, and the credibility of her story would be diminished if Potiphar returned to see a portion of the garment in her hand, leaving the possible impression that she herself had removed it, that is, that she, not Joseph, was the aggressor. Thus, the narrative shifts emphasis, at least where her story is concerned, stressing through repetition in her reported speech the location of the incriminating object: it is no longer in her hand, but beside her. Awaiting the arrival of her husband, she in fact guards it carefully (v. 16), given that it is her only proof. Joseph had removed the tunic in anticipation of a sexual encounter and in his haste had not retrieved it. So the inferred condition of the garment, whether torn or whole, is not altogether insignificant in shaping the reader’s moral perception of Joseph’s actions. But thanks to the omniscient narrator, the reader knows that Potiphar’s wife cannot be trusted, and this, along with the memory of tattered clothing in ch. 37, leaves the reader more receptive to the possibility that Joseph’s tunic was removed by force and torn in the process.

In ch. 38 Tamar’s trickery begins with the removal of her ‘garments of widowhood’ and continues with Judah’s surrendering his insignia to Tamar, apparently permanently (v. 23), as pledge. While neither action could be said to involve the kind of physical force observed in the surrounding chapters, there is a type of reciprocal relationship at work here whereby each compels the other to act. For example, Tamar’s uncoerced removal of her widow’s garments, resulting in a temporary change of status, leads to a situation wherein Judah is coerced into yielding his

24. For טֶרֶס, compare the seizure and rending (ךְפֵר) of Jeroboam’s garment in 1 Kgs 11.30 and the pairing of מִזְרָח and שֵׁלך in Deut. 22.28 (a man seizes a virgin and lies with her).

25. In characteristic fashion, Genesis Rabbah elaborates on the Hebrew נַפִּיר אֱלָהָי in 39.16: ‘R. Abbahu said: She kept them (the garments) to herself, embracing, kissing, and caressing them’ (87.8—note the plural; Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, III, p. 1074).

26. In her brief summary of events in ch. 39, Bellis, even though the text does not specify as much, refers to the portion of Joseph’s garment left as evidence: ‘Joseph... flees, leaving a piece of his garment behind in her hand’ (Alice Ogden Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994], p. 92). Compare this with Matthews’ version of events: ‘He is only able to escape her clutches in the end by pulling out of his livery and leaving it in her hands’ ('Anthropology of Clothing', p. 351).
symbols of status and authority. Tamar’s temporary change of status results in Judah’s loss of the same, but one might also argue that the childless Tamar in turn had been forced to resort to such deception because her father-in-law did not wish to jeopardize the life of his remaining son.27

Deception through Forced Recognition

In three situations the turning point is reached in the narrative when the intended target of the deception is asked, or rather forced, to identify (a) specific object(s), insuring the success of the stratagem. In ch. 37 the brothers ask their father to identify (נְנָבְרֵל) the robe as that of his son or not; in ch. 38 Judah is confronted with the same situation regarding those items he unwittingly relinquished to his daughter-in-law, who then asks him to ‘please identify (נָגִים) the owner of these...’; in ch. 39 Potiphar’s wife retains possession of Joseph’s garment, or a portion thereof, until the arrival of her husband, whereupon he presumably recognized it as that of Joseph. In juxtaposing events in this fashion, the parallels between chs. 37 and 38 are obvious: in each the narrative reaches its climax with a direct question of recognition followed by the expected, or at least hoped for, response, indicating the success of the subterfuge. In ch. 39, however, no such question is asked or answered. Potiphar is not asked to identify the garment as that of Joseph and, in fact, utters not a word in the chapter. But the reader, who encounters the deception in ch. 39 after chs. 37–38, is by no means wholly ignorant at this point of such matters and, upon reading of Joseph’s loss of raiment, knows the drill only too well. Thus, all that is required is the implication of recognition, here conveyed through the stated emotional response and subsequent actions of Potiphar (vv. 19-20).

So how then might the above relate, if at all, to the actions of Tamar? Perhaps the most significant difference emerges with respect to the function of the garment in the trickery. Unlike the case with Joseph, Judah and the wife of Potiphar, where the items in question—part of the subject’s personal wardrobe or accoutrement—serve as the means by which their owner is identified or recognized, the veil of Tamar does the precise opposite in that it conceals, rather than reveals, her true identity. But is this concealment then equivalent to deception; in other words, does the veil donned by Tamar really deceive Judah into thinking her to be—or should

27. For Tamar’s behavior, see Menn, Judah and Tamar, p. 66.
we say recognizing her as—a prostitute? This would seem to be a reason-
able inference from 38.15: 'When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a
harlot, for she had covered her face'. More recent scholarship neverthe-
less argues against such a reading, citing biblical and ancient Near Eastern
texts to show that the veil was not part of a prostitute's costume. Moreover,
leaving aside her dress, others have noted that the text itself is vague
or evasive regarding Tamar's status: she is never explicitly called a prosti-
tute; rather, the association is made by Judah and Hirah, and may have as
much to do with her location and mannerisms as her dress. We do possess
additional evidence, not cited in the majority of commentaries or recent
studies, for the ancient view that the veil was intended only to hide her
identity. Both the LXX and the Vulgate expand the verse with the state-
ment that he (Judah) did not recognize Tamar—thus, 'When Judah saw
her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face and he
did not recognize her'—implying that the veil had more to do with hiding
her true identity than portraying her as a prostitute. Regardless of the
origin of this expansion, its presence demonstrates that some ancient
interpreters/translators wished to clarify the meaning of the verse and to
disassociate the clothing from the profession. Thus, the actions of Tamar,
at least as far as the garment itself is concerned, relate more to conceal-
ment than deception per se, although the former is central to the success
of the latter. Unlike Jacob in ch. 37 and Potiphar in ch. 39, Judah does not
fall prey to Tamar's ploy because he recognizes her through a personal
garment or object, although ironically he is later identified in this fashion.
Additionally, with respect to concealment, the actions of Tamar recall
those of the brothers in ch. 37. In 38.14, 16, she covers herself (DDPT) with
a veil, concealing her face (ΓΠΕ ΠΠΟΣ). The same verb occurs in 38.26,
when Judah protests, 'What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal
irDDlw) his blood?' While he rejects the brothers' plan in favor of a more
lucrative one, his talk of a cover-up, as it were, anticipates, literally, the
adopted tactic that would later prove instrumental in his own undoing.

28. E.g. Bird, 'Harlot as Heroine', p. 204; Menn, Judah and Tamar, pp. 72-73.
29. LXX adds και ουκ επεγνω αυτηυ ('and he did not recognize her'), followed by
the Vulgate's passive ne cognosceretur ('she was not recognized'). These are cited in
the critical apparatus of the earlier BHK (7th edition), but do not appear in the later
BHS. For full treatment of this expansion, its significance and interpretive history, see
my 'Unveiling the Versions: The Tactics of Tamar in Genesis 38.15', Journal of the
Hebrew Scriptures 3, article 7 (2001); online at <www.purl.org/jhs>.
Authority Signified by Evidence in Hand

In his reading of Genesis 39, Alter draws attention to a number of verbal motifs repeated throughout for thematic emphasis, including יּוֹלְדָּה (‘all’), הַיָּבָא (‘house’) and דְּרוֹב (‘in the hand of’). The latter occurs no less than eight times in the narrative (39.1, 3-4, 6, 8, 12-13, 22-23; nine if one adds the דְּרוֹב in 39.1). In four cases, דְּרוֹב signifies the authority granted Joseph by Potiphar (vv. 3, 4, 6, 8); in vv. 12-13, the phrase is used of the garment, or portion of it, now possessed by Potiphar’s wife; and, coming full circle at the end of the chapter, דְּרוֹב denotes the authority given to Joseph by the chief jailer (vv. 22-23). In the majority of occurrences (39.6, 12-13, 15, 18), the preposition is governed by the verb בָּעֵל: just as Potiphar leaves everything in Joseph’s hands, Joseph in turn leaves his robe in the grasp of Potiphar’s wife—placing his uncertain future in her less than capable hands. Thus, דְּרוֹב in the story is of dual symbolic significance in that it conveys both the delegated authority possessed by Joseph and the means by which he is divested of that same authority. Dominion, or rather the possession of it signified via דְּרוֹב, consequently passes from Potiphar to Joseph, is temporarily undermined by Potiphar’s wife, and finally is partially restored to Joseph in prison.

Hebrew דְּרוֹב also plays a role in Tamar’s scheme to obtain a child from her father-in-law (vv. 18, 20, 28-30). In v. 18, Tamar responds to Judah’s query regarding a sufficient pledge, ‘Your signet, your cord, and the staff that is in your hand (דְּרוֹב הַיָּבָא וְוֹרֶשֶׁת וְרָאמֶל ןַף יְדָיו)’. In v. 20, Judah sends the promised kid in care of (דְּרוֹב) his friend Hirah, who attempts to retrieve the pledge from the hand of (דְּרוֹב) Tamar. As with the Egyptian temptress and Joseph, Tamar succeeds in wresting and retaining ownership of incriminating evidence from Judah. With both, the removal or surrender and subsequent possession (דְּרוֹב) of the item(s) signifies as well a divestiture.

31. I do not wish to imply that frequency of occurrence must in all cases be meaningful. In ch. 37, for example, the root דְּרוֹב is found seven times, yet this repetition does not, as far as I can discern, yield any particular exegetical significance or ‘exegetical gain’ (see Berlin, ‘Literary Exegesis’, p. 124; also Levinson, ‘The Right Chorale’, p. 136).
32. Commentators and others have noted the sexual innuendo attaching to הָמַלָּה (e.g. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, Narrative in the Hebrew Bible [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], p. 40). In contrast to the reluctant Onan, Judah stands poised and eager to act.

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of authority and status, if only temporarily. Judah is not only unable to retrieve his pledge, but is humiliated and powerless in the face of Tamar’s successful maneuver, while Joseph, as Matthews observes, is demoted from privileged servant to prisoner. The protagonist’s situation quickly improves, however, with his eventual ‘investiture’ at the hands of Pharaoh (‘Removing his signet ring from his hand [ Heb. כָּלָל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל], Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand [ לֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen’, Gen. 41.42). As for Judah, his privileged status as progenitor of the Davidic line precludes reprimand for the incestuous act. Finally, in the etiological birth notice at the end of the chapter, this status is not associated, as we might expect given the previous uses of בֵּית וו, with the hand of the apparent firstborn Perez. Rather, it is Zerah who bears the crimson thread (w. 28, 30)—yet another reversal of sorts in a biblical book distinguished by its frequent use of this dominant younger sibling motif.

Conclusion

Returning to the study of Matthews and his emphasis on garments as markers of status and authority, each of the four incidents in chs. 37–39 involves a temporary loss or change of status: Joseph’s loss of his robe, the symbol of his favored status, signals a change of fortune, from preferred son to household slave; Tamar enhances her chances of gaining a child by

33. As Menn notes, the repeated references to Judah’s ignorance and absence of intention to commit such an offense demonstrate the narrator’s awareness of the gravity of the act and the need to minimize the severity of the transgression (Judah and Tamar, p. 62). Later Jewish exegetes, mindful of the consequences of this union for the Davidic line and especially the messiah, were more direct in their defense of Judah. For example, one interpretation in Gen. R. 85.8 describes how God sent forth an angel to instill in a reluctant Judah the desire for Tamar (מלאך שראה מเหויתו של המגזר). See Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, II, p. 1042).

34. This reading, I admit, is somewhat weak given that, as others have noted, the text is ambiguous regarding the validity of Perez’s status as firstborn. After all, Zerah did emerge first, if only partially. Moreover, the genealogical significance of the event, Perez being in the Davidic line, is ignored in Genesis itself (compare Ruth 4.18-22 and 1 Chron. 2.3-15; see further John A. Emerton, ‘Judah and Tamar’, VT 29 [1979], pp. 401-15 [407-409], and Frederick E. Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], pp. 115-16). Alternatively, one could interpret the crimson thread as a status marker for the rightfully firstborn Zerah, unjustly supplanted by his brother. For the similarities between this birth narrative and that of the twins of Rebecca in Gen. 25 (already noted in part in Gen. R. 85.7), see Menn, Judah and Tamar, pp. 89-94.
temporarily discarding those garments marking her restricted status as a confined levirate widow; Judah is forced to relinquish his symbols of status and authority and concede defeat in recognition of the same; and Joseph’s ill-fated encounter with, and hasty retreat from, the wife of his superior *sine parte tunicae* results in his demotion, from favored servant to prisoner.

Matthews draws attention to the obvious similarities between chs. 37 and 39 (stripping of honor along with garment), but insists that the motif in ch. 39 (his ‘embellishment’) is present implicitly only to reenforce this ‘prime element’ in his *inclusio*. Thus, following the structural analysis of Coats, he correlates structure with motif, although he offers no rationale for the causal link between the two. Within the context of chs. 37–39, however, one could just as easily account for the implicitness of the motif in ch. 39 as stemming from its position as the *last in a series* of garment-related maneuvers: here the reader requires only a minimum of detail to complete the story.

Finally, with the inclusion of ch. 38, the investiture of Joseph in 41.42—Matthews’s Episode 3 and the enclosing event for his *inclusio*—takes on added significance in the juxtaposition of the two characters. Not only, as others have observed, is Joseph’s resistance to sexual advance in ch. 39 in stark contrast to Judah’s willingness to accommodate the needs of the inviting Tamar in ch. 38, but also Judah’s loss of insignia, his *divestiture*, foreshadows Joseph’s imminent *investiture*; consequently, reading 41.42 in the light of ch. 38, the reader is inexorably led to contrast the two events as a measure of the character of each.

The above reading of Genesis 37–39 suggests that, as far as the garment motif is concerned, the Judah/Tamar episode—whatever its literary history, be it secondary embellishment, seamlessly stitched interlude, or awkward

35. Compare Gunn and Fewell, ‘The exercise of her sexuality could give her status, a status which he [Judah] has effectively denied her’ (*Narrative*, p. 38); see also the comments of Susan Ackerman in her *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp. 228-30.

36. How does the literary history of 39.1–41.32 explain (Matthews’s term) the implicitness in this stage? That is, why assume that the motif must be implicit in material that is judged to be ‘embellishment’ or ‘transitionary’? Does the author have reason to believe that such texts in biblical narrative are as a rule less explicit in their treatment of recurring themes?

37. Matthews, on the other hand, suggests that the removal of Joseph’s garment in ch. 37 should be viewed as ‘a reversal of the investiture ceremony’ in ch. 41, thus buttressing his view of the motif in chs. 37 and 41 as an *inclusio*.
intrusion—merits consideration as a significant component alongside chs. 37, 39 and 41 (Matthews’ Episodes 1-3), and one that demonstrably shapes in various ways the reader’s perception of garment-related events in these chapters and beyond.
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