

BAT-YIPHTACH AND HER BLEEDING BODY:
A CHILD-ORIENTED READING OF JUDGES 11:29–40

by

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BAT-YIPHTACH AND HER BLEEDING BODY:
A CHILD-ORIENTED READING OF JUDGES 11:29–40

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CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF BAT-YIPTACH SCHOLARSHIP

The Text and the Question

Interpreters through the centuries have been troubled by the story of Bat-Yiphtach¹ in Judges 11:29–40² and by its numerous ambiguities and gaps. The story is disturbing, and the

¹ The daughter of Yiphtach, who appears in Judges 11:34–40, is nameless, as are many of the female characters in Judges. Scholars have held various positions as to the significance of the namelessness and the need to rectify it. Some interpreters have named her. For example, Pseudo-Philo names her Seila in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 40.1, cited in D.J. Harrington, “Pseudo-Philo (First Century A.D.): A New Translation and Introduction,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 297–377. Thomas Morrell, the librettist of Handel’s *Jephtha*, names her Iphis, cited in Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence: The Jephthah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 123. Feminist scholars Mieke Bal and J. Cheryl Exum name her Bath-Jephthah (Bath for short) and Bath-sheber (daughter of breaking), respectively. See Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 43; and J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1993), 176. However, Exum also notes that, as a nameless daughter, she stands for all daughters as a model in a patriarchal system. J. Cheryl Exum, “Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43 (1989): 32. Tikva-Frymer Kensky rejects such naming of the daughter because it undermines “the universality and archetypal nature of her story.” Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*, unabridged (New York: Schocken, 2013). <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=724597&site=eds-live&scope=site>. With childist biblical interpretation as my methodology, I call her Bat-Yiphtach to emphasize her significance as an individual child, understood as transitioning young person while also an offspring/child, and to reflect the presumed ancient Hebrew morphology.

² Scholars establish varied ways to structure their analysis of the daughter’s narrative. In commentaries, for example, Tammi Schneider includes it in the chapter, “Jephthah,” whose narrative appears in Judges 10:6–12:7. Discussion of Bat-Yiphtach falls under the heading, “Jephthah’s Vow: Judges 11:30–31.” Tammi Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 159–186. Susan Niditch examines Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative under the heading, “Judges 11:1–40, Jephthah, Epic Hero.” Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 124–135. In Serge Frolov’s form-critical analysis of Judges, Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative is secondary, falling under the heading, “II. Related Matters,” and after the “cycle proper.” It extends from Judges 11:34–40. Serge Frolov, *Judges*, FOTL (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 205–6. Similarly, Mercedes Garcia Bachmann subdivides Yiphtach’s narrative (Judges 11:1–12:7) into two sections highlighting his low social status and his confrontation with the Ammonites. The latter is further subdivided into three “scenes.” The latter two are Judges 11:29–31 (“Final Preparations Under YHWH’s Spirit”) and Judges 11:32–33 (“The Battle Outcome”). Outcomes then include the negotiations between Yiphtach and Bat-Yiphtach (Judges 11:34–38), the daughter’s memorial (Judges 11:39–40), and Yiphtach’s confrontation with the Ephraimites (Judges 12:1–7). Mercedes L. Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, Wisdom Commentary, ed. Barbara E. Reid, OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 113–151. When scholars focus on the daughter as subject, rather than on Yiphtach, Judges 11:29–40 is commonly designated as the narrative’s limits. Thus, YHWH’s spirit on Yiphtach and the utterance of

narrative is concise. Briefly, the spirit of YHWH is upon Yiphtach, the Gileadite, who has been recruited to lead the Israelites in a battle against the Ammonites. Yiphtach vows to offer up, as a burnt offering to YHWH, whatever or whoever first greets him going out from the doors of his house (והיה היוצא אשר יצא מדלת ביתי לקראתי)³ as he returns home, victorious, from the battle with the Ammonites. Bat-Yiphtach, his daughter, emerges through the doors. Yiphtach is distraught. Bat-Yiphtach comforts him and affirms that he must follow through on what went out from his mouth (עשה לי כאשר יצא מפִיךָ). She seems to ask only for a reprieve to go down to the mountains with her companions for two moons/months so as to mourn her בתולים, often translated virginity (NRSV, KJV) or maidenhood (NJPS). After she returns, Yiphtach does according to his vow. The narrator states that Bat-Yiphtach has not known a man, and that it or she was a custom or statute in Yisrael (ותהי חק בישראל).⁴ The narrator adds that the daughters of Yisrael continue to go

Yiphtach's vow, both of which are part of Frolov's "Cycle Proper" and Bachmann's "confrontation with the Ammonites," bear on Bat-Yiphtach and interpretations of her narrative.

³ Interpreters have often noted the ambiguities in the construction of Yiphtach's "faithless, foolish, and shameful" vow (Richard Nelson, *Judges: A Critical and Rhetorical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 220), including in this phrase. Some have asked questions about what Yiphtach meant to sacrifice to YHWH: "Did he really expect it to be a human?" Robert Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, AB 6A (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 209. Some interpreters want to absolve Yiphtach by suggesting that he perhaps expected an animal or slave to greet him. Rabbinic midrash has YHWH angry over the possibility of an inappropriate sacrifice. The masculine subject of יצא is seen as indicating that Yiphtach never intended to have to sacrifice his daughter, although Jack Sasson suggests not reading too much into the masculine ending. Jack Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 438. Note that all Hebrew text in this project is drawn from the Masoretic text (MT), the dominant Hebrew text for study of the Hebrew Bible, as presented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS). *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed. (1967/1977; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997).

⁴ Again, scholars have interpreted this phrase in a number of ways. The feminine subject was or became a masculine noun with a wide range of meanings, including statute, custom, convention, and law. In some translations, "it became a custom" (KJV) or "there arose a custom" (NRSV). Susan Niditch opts for "it became a rule." See Niditch, *Judges*, 129. Exum suggests, "she became an example" to emphasize "her value to the patriarchal system." See J. Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 139. Pamela Tarmarkin Reis points out that the phrase has been misapplied to Judges 11:40 by many interpreters; instead, the referent of the feminine pronoun is בתוליה, the daughter's "obligatory virginity," which was a statute for "redeemed women" for whom the labor of childbirth was proscribed. Pamela Tarmarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," *Proof* 17, no. 3 (1997): 290.

to remember or lament (לתנוּת)⁵ Bat-Yiphtach, daughter of Yiphtach the Gileadite, for four days each year. The woman who bore her is absent from the narrative.

As I noted, interpreters struggle with the story and with its ambiguities and gaps. For example, the vow and its meaning have been laboriously examined. Common questions with which scholars and readers have wrestled include: What did Yiphtach know about vows? What did he intend? Was the vow necessary to win the battle against the Ammonites? What did the daughter know about the vow and intend by exiting the house? What was her sexual status? Did Yiphtach actually sacrifice his daughter? Other questions are derived from the daughter's reprieve and the related or unrelated custom or ritual: What did she do on the mountain with her companions? What did the companions do four days every year after Yiphtach did according to his vow? What did the ritual involve? And finally, some interpreters wonder: Where was YHWH the deity in all this mess? I examine some of these ambiguities and how scholars have addressed them in this chapter.

For my project, I focus on the text's ambiguity regarding Bat-Yiphtach's age and its implications, which has led to varying interpretations of how she might be characterized.

Readers have interpreted her as a child, as a young woman, and as a woman, as I reveal in this

⁵ The translation of לתנוּת offers a range of possibilities that scholars have then used to understand the character of the custom, ritual, or statute. Day relies on Judges commentaries by C.F. Burney and J. Alberto Soggin to opt for a meaning of "recount or repeat." Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 73. See also C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivington, 1918), 129; and J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 87. Similarly, Everett Fox says, "the daughters of Israel go to retell [the tale]..." Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings*, The Schocken Bible, Vol. 2 (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 205. Garcia Bachmann also has opted for recounting or retelling because "recounting her decision" is active, while "lamenting her fate" is passive. Bachmann, *Judges*, 144. Sasson translates the lexeme to indicate the action of "commemorating" the daughter. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 435. Nelson suggests commemoration "by reciting or singing antiphonally." Nelson, *Judges*, 208, 211. "Lament" (reflecting Bat-Yiphtach's own weeping) also has been a common translation. For example, the NRSV has "The daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite"; and the JPS has "...the maidens of Israel... chant dirges for the daughter...."

chapter. In the text, readers are told only that she is the daughter of Yiphtach (בתו). The narrative includes no specification of her age. In Judges 11:34, the MT also provides this description of Bat-Yiphtach: ורק היא יחידה (and only she alone).⁶ The phrase might indicate that she alone is the only (living?) offspring/child of her father, Yiphtach. Even with this added information, the MT does not make clear—readers cannot know—what sort of daughter she was. For example, was she *always* the only daughter or the only child/offspring of Yiphtach? Did she have any other relational roles, in addition to being one who has companions and a father? Are readers to conclude she was neither a wife nor a mother? Who was her mother? Did she have any half-sisters or half-brothers? In short, very little information is given here about Bat-Yiphtach.

In this study, I focus in particular on the characterization of Bat-Yiphtach. My concern is with children and with child characters in the Hebrew Bible, relying on the relatively new lens in biblical scholarship of childist and child-oriented interpretations.⁷ Recognizing that Bat-Yiphtach has not yet been read as a child in transition, I argue in this project that she can be constructed as

⁶ Again, the text is problematic. Sasson translates, “There was only her, a beloved child.” Sasson, *Judges*, 439. In calling her “beloved,” Sasson draws on the narrative’s parallel to Yitschaq, the beloved son, who in Genesis 22:2 is יחידך אשר־אהבתָ—your (Avraham’s) only or favored child who you loved. In Genesis the action of love is explicit, and Yitschaq is not Avraham’s only son. Although the MT does not say that Bat-Yiphtach is loved, LXX translates יחידה as αγαπητη, thus ascribing love to the relationship. My translation accounts for a lack of evidence of such love. In fact, I question whether יחידה in this case might derive from the root חוד and allude to חידה, meaning riddle or problem (as in Judges 14:12–19). Interpretive choices for ורק היא יחידה tend to rely on the phrase that follows, ממנו בן ארבת אין־לו (there was not for him, from him, a son or daughter), which also has caused challenges in translations. The pronominal suffix on ממנו is clearly masculine, rather than feminine. Sasson corrects, along with Greek versions, to a feminine suffix, “from her,” and translates the phrase as “beside her, he had no son or daughter.” Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 435, 439. Despite the challenges, the scholarly consensus is that the phrases, ורק היא יחידה and אין־לו ממנו בן ארבת, are repetitive and indicate that Bat-Yiphtach is, at least at present, Yiphtach’s only child. Without correction, the MT “from him” presents interesting possibilities for considering Yiphtach’s capacity for procreation and the literal and figurative possibilities for this relationship of “father” and “daughter.” The question of why Yiphtach has no more offspring in his remaining years is not asked.

⁷ Childist/child-oriented biblical scholarship is a relatively new lens, methodology, and scholarly concern in the discipline. I examine the terms and their meanings in detail in Chapter 2. I position myself as a child-oriented scholar for this project because I have been attentive to and interested in children throughout my life. I began participating in the childcare economy in 1975 at the age of 11. My attentiveness to children thus preceded the birth of my two children in 1997 and 2000. My long-term empirical observations of child–adult relationality motivate and inform my research in this project.

such.⁸ Through this project, I offer a childist reading of Bat-Yiphtach, adding both to the extant literature's offerings of interpretive possibilities for the narrative and to the expanding field of childist and child-oriented biblical scholarship. In arguing for this interpretation, I bring Bat-Yiphtach's transitioning body and her agency in the narrative into view by constructing a lens based on childhood studies and on its use in biblical scholarship. Interpretations relying on a gender binary have dominated Bat-Yiphtach's interpretation and characterization since the 1980s. However, a child–adult binary, including its presuppositions, also has shaped interpretations of her narrative. Emphasizing her transitional status provides an important corrective to static or rigid, age-related categorizing of children and adults. I see the questioning of the child–adult binary and of its underlying presuppositions as a reflection and natural extension of the interrogation of the binary that has been used to enforce rigid gender categories. This gender interrogation has had far-reaching implications not just for biblical studies but for a wide range of academic disciplines. Feminist, womanist, queer, and masculinity biblical scholarship has revealed the appropriateness of continuums rather than categories in constructions of gender and has affected gender relationality in the interpretation and reception of the biblical texts. Similarly, my goal in interpreting Bat-Yiphtach's narrative as an interrogation of the child–adult binary is to contribute to child-oriented biblical scholarship and to influence positively child–adult relationality.

Movements in the History of Scholarship on Judges

In the rest of this chapter, I locate my argument and my reading in relation to previous interpretations of Judges and of Bat-Yiphtach, noting that Bat-Yiphtach has not yet been

⁸ By “child in transition” I refer to her temporary developmental status as a young person. When the genitive, “child of,” indicating offspring, is intended, I use the term “offspring.”

characterized in the scholarship or by other interpreters as a child in transition.⁹ Interpreters of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative primarily characterize her as a child, woman, or young woman, sometimes using terms like adolescent or teenager. Some readings explicitly rely on a child–adult binary, with Bat-Yiphtach as child. Other readings are explicitly structured according to a gender binary, with Bat-Yiphtach as (adult) woman. Here, the term *daughter* has effectively been elided or merged with the term *woman*, in keeping with the gender binary: She is woman because she is not man. The logical corollary to this view is that she is not or cannot be characterized as a child (as young person) because she's already an adult woman. In seeing Bat-Yiphtach as woman, interpreters gloss over the diachronic process that happens on the way to womanhood—almost as if a girl, at some identifiable and instantaneous moment, shifts to woman. In sum, interpreters fail to recognize or fully account for how the woman–man gender binary and the child–adult age binary inadequately characterize Bat-Yiphtach's diachronic transitioning.

History, Historiography, Heroes: Little Interest in the Female Characters in Judges

Judges is a bizarre and ghastly collection of narratives.¹⁰ It is “dialogically rich and complex.... Indeterminacy precludes closure in reading.”¹¹ Robin Baker articulates the

⁹ Bat-Yiphtach's status as relational child/offspring is clearly relevant to the narrative and influences my interpretations of it. However, in relation to her transitional status and to an interpretation from her perspective, an understanding of her character as young person is prioritized in my use of the term, “child.” Thus, by “child in transition” I refer to her temporary developmental status as a young person.

¹⁰ Fox, *The Early Prophets*, 127; and T. Rhondda Williams, cited in David Gunn, *Judges*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 9.

¹¹ Dennis T. Olson, “Dialogues of Life and Monologues of Death: Jephthah and Jephthah's Daughter in Judges 10:6–12:7,” *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible—A Reader*, ed. A.K.M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 43.

challenges of the narratives: “The book of Judges is about judges who do not appear to judge, a community which ceases to be a community, who choose[s] gods which are not gods, in a land that is ostensibly theirs but which they cannot fully possess.”¹² In light of its indeterminacy, Judges at times has frustrated scholars’ desires to make a coherent argument about its content and purpose. The repeated themes of doing the evil in YHWH’s eyes and, in the days without a king, doing the good in the Israelites’ own eyes have been interpreted as one of the dominant messages of Judges, justifying the need for a (Davidic) monarchy. The narratives’ disclosure of a downward spiral into tribal conflict and social chaos is clear. Baker’s description of the paradox and ambiguity in the book’s subject matter aptly characterizes the challenges that scholars have faced in their analysis of its stories and, in previous eras of biblical scholarship, in reconstructing the Israelite history it purports to convey.

The position of Judges among the early prophets in the Hebrew Bible—sandwiched between the historiographies of Joshua, Samuel, and Kings—inspired readings and critical analyses that were deemed to convey Israelite history and Jewish religious history during the period of the judges.¹³ Historical–critical scholars tended to assume the historicity of the book

¹² Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges*, BibInt, ed. Paul Anderson and Yvonne Sherwood (Leiden: Brill, 2016), ix. Baker’s analysis and argument suggest the coding in the book is quite intentionally used to conceal what it actually is saying.

¹³ In this chapter, I primarily situate my work on Judges 11:29–40 within the trajectory spurred by the historical–critical turn of the seventeenth century. In 1670 Baruch Spinoza, “the father of historical-critical biblical interpretation,” published *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the work seen as initiating the historical-critical turn in biblical interpretation. See Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 199–200. Male Protestant German Christians dominated the field of literary–historical biblical scholarship through most of the twentieth century, and they tended to neglect the long history of rabbinic interpretation. More recently in the trajectory of the field, biblical scholars have recognized the necessity and value of studying rabbinic and Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and incorporating these perspectives into their work. For an analysis of German Jewish scholars’ reception of and relationship with the work of German literary–historical scholars in the German context, see Ran HaCohen, *Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible: German-Jewish Reception of Biblical Criticism*, SJ 56, trans. Michelle Engel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

and sought to understand the historical facts (about both text and context) that could be revealed in it. For example, in Julius Wellhausen's 1881 article in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "the judges within the book are taken as historical figures, the stories are understood to be organized in chronological order, and the numbers in the text are seen as accurate."¹⁴ In 1975 Robert Boling discussed the then-current scholarly shifts in the literary–historical methods and scholarship, assessing their value in accessing historical data for "the two centuries preceding the tenth-century establishment of monarchy in the empire-building reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon."¹⁵ In addition, at the time of Boling's writing, George Mendenhall's theory of a peasant revolt held sway as explanation for "Israel's establishment in Canaan," based on archaeological theories about the "famous Merneptah stele" and the "famous Amarna letters."¹⁶ The methods and lenses that scholars created and developed for literary–historical research and analysis, including the toolbox of form, redaction, source, and tradition criticism and archaeological and sociological research methods, have had a lasting influence on Judges scholarship, even as biblical scholars' subsequent work with these tools, methods, and lenses has resulted in modifications, refinement, and dissatisfaction. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, a perception of Judges as representation of an early period in Israelite history and a view of biblical scholarship as predominantly focused on historical reconstruction dominated modern

¹⁴ Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3. Brettler's review of Judges scholarship that preceded the literary turn, which began in the 1970s, emphasizes the assumed historicity in historical-critical scholars' approach.

¹⁵ Boling, *Judges*, 3–45.

¹⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 12–13. Also useful in interpretations of Judges and providing comparative historical data was the twentieth century recovery of the Mari archives (1933) and of the Ugaritic tablets (1929). Small fragments of Judges also were found in Qumran caves 1 and 4.

biblical scholarship on Judges. However, scholars focusing on these concerns have found little reason to consider Bat-Yiphtach's characterization or her relevance to this period of history.

Recognition of the form and thematic interests of Judges led to another scholarly trajectory for Judges in the twentieth century, based on its place in a Deuteronomistic history (DtrH). In 1918, Burney suggested potential problems with scholars' assertions of historicity: "The Book of Judges occupies a position on the borderland between history and legend."¹⁷ Rather than presenting a historical record in the modern sense, "the purpose with which the book was put into shape [was] the inculcation of the religious truths which were to be deduced from Israel's past history."¹⁸ In 1943 Martin Noth's proposal of the DtrH then offered an opportunity for modifications and fresh interpretive and theological perspectives: In Noth's view, the DtrH stretched from Deuteronomy through Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The "previously independent units were joined and unified by a distinctive theology and philosophy of history."¹⁹ In light of Noth's proposal, some biblical scholars shifted boundaries to make sense of the stories in Judges about the post-settlement, pre-monarchic period in Israel's history through the presumed Deuteronomistic lens.²⁰ The dominance of Noth's analysis and of his proposal that the

¹⁷ Burney, *The Book of Judges*, vi.

¹⁸ Burney, *The Book of Judges*, xxxiv.

¹⁹ Michael V. Fox, "Noth, Martin," *EncJud*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 15 (Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 315. Gale Virtual Reference Library, [library.tcu.edu/PURL/EZproxy_link.asp?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=txshracd2573&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CCX2587514927&it=r&asid=4da14bf509f5b391019e846e4af08938](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=txshracd2573&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CCX2587514927&it=r&asid=4da14bf509f5b391019e846e4af08938) (accessed August 16, 2017).)

²⁰ "Noth's 1943 study, which 'created' the Deuteronomistic history (Noth 1981), has been extremely influential (McKenzie and Graham 1994), and quickly led to the demise of the older source-critical theories." Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 103. Noth himself was more interested in looking at the literary whole of the DtrH ("the Deuteronomistic work and the traditional material it absorbed," without which "our knowledge of Israelite history would be pitifully small"). He was "less interested in examining once again which separate elements are 'Deuteronomistic' and which are not." Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 15, trans. Jane Doull, John Barton, Michael Rutter, and D.R. Ap-Thomas (Sheffield, UK: University of Sheffield, 1961), 2.

period of the judges (the period after the conquest) runs textually from Judg 2:6 to 1 Sam 12 (in light of Shemuel's speech) led to "intense scholarly interest in the style and theology of the deuteronomist(s)" and a desire to distinguish deuteronomic material from non-deuteronomic material in Judges.²¹

As scholars have continued to work with Noth's proposal, modifications and refinements of the DtrH have resulted. Scholars' redaction and source hypotheses and interests led to increasingly fragmented perspectives of the DtrH and its parts.²² In light of such interests and in scholars' continuing interest in its oral and written composition history, Judges was interpreted "as a pastiche, not a unified composition; a pastiche of myths and historical tales that have little stylistic unity apart from a geographical and possibly artificial, temporal context within an overall composite work of 'Deuteronomic history.'" ²³ Again, until the last quarter of the

²¹ Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, JSOTSup 46 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 207. Bat-Yiphtach's narrative holds some relevance for scholars with such questions. See, e.g., Thomas Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter?" *JSOT* 77, no. 1 (1998), 27–38; and David Janzen's rebuttal, "Why the Deuteronomist Told About the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter," *JSOT* 29, no. 3 (2005): 339–57. Römer states that much scholarship has focused on Jephthah and that "therefore we should pay more attention to the daughter." However, Römer then reveals the limitations in his attention span: He considers the story's redaction, the folk literature genre, intertextuality, and Greek literary influences to conclude that the post-Deuteronomic author of the story is "a colleague of [the] Qohelet" who critiques the standard retributive theodicy of the Deuteronomists." Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell...?," 38. In his response to Römer, Janzen argues that the story of Jephthah's sacrifice "actually fits quite well into Deuteronomistic theology or ideology, as well as into the Deuteronomistic structuring of the book of Judges and the story of Jephthah as a whole." Janzen, "Why the Deuteronomist Told...," 340. I find Römer's argument more compelling.

²² Scholars' perspectives on the DtrH hypothesis, and on the text of Judges in light of it, have continued to shift, and scholars have generated an increasing number of textual layers (e.g., Cross's Dtr1 and Dtr2, Smend's DtrN, and Dietrich's DtrP). For a characterization of the more recent perspectives on the DtrH and Judges, see Gregory T.K. Wong, *Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1–10. See also Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi, ed., *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, JSOTSup 306 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and Gary Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000). Contributions in the latter work synthesize historical-critical and literary approaches and question whether "history" as a label for the DtrH is problematic.

²³ Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women*, 1. Boling states that "The structure of the Book of Judges is primitive by modern literary standards; blocks of successive editorial remodeling are piled around the edges of the nuclear stories." Boling, *Judges*, 29. Because my interest in this project is on Bat-Yiphtach as child in transition, I provide a broader review of the scholarship on Judges as a means to show and argue that interest on young characters in Judges narratives has been overlooked. For a more detailed review of form-critical analysis, see Frolov,

twentieth century, scholars were “strongly disposed against giving serious consideration to Judges as a literary unit in its own right.”²⁴ However, questions about the historicity of Judges and some scholars’ dissatisfaction with literary–historical methods of scholarship intensified, and changes ensued.

Scholars’ interest in literary–historical criticism, Deuteronomic literature, and historical reconstruction focused on the political and religious leaders in Judges. With the exception of Deborah, neglect of the women and children in Judges was the norm.²⁵ Female characters, including Bat-Yiphtach, were not deemed relevant to the history, politics, leaders, and power relations in the stories. They also had little to do with the human efforts that producing the final form of the book entailed and little effect on the environment in which the primarily Western white male Protestant scholars produced literary–historical and Deuteronomic theological and stylistic hypotheses. However, as the last quarter of the twentieth century began, the confluence of questionable historical reliability, dissatisfaction with historical–literary fragmentation, and interest in literary approaches by which the biblical texts became appreciated as literature engendered new interpretations of Judges and its narratives. Scholarship on Judges in the dramatically changing context of the late twentieth century enlarged the texts’ interpretive

Judges. To see how Judges has been analyzed in light of dramatic shifts in biblical scholarship since 1975, compare Boling, *Judges*, with Sasson, *Judges 1–12* and Niditch, *Judges*.

²⁴ Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, 207. Only the “market demand for commentaries... kept scholarly interest [in the actual book of Judges] alive,” Webb lamented.

²⁵ For a reception history of Deborah’s narrative and its use in gender debates, see Joy Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199991044.001.0001. Schroeder identifies prevalent issues in the history of Jewish and Christian interpretations, including Deborah’s designation as “wife of Lappidoth,” the meaning of her name, the nature of her prophetic and judging role. Questions often focused on gender issues: “Why does the text not talk about Deborah’s husband Lappidoth? Why did God choose a female judge instead of a man? Why were the Israelites willing to be led by a woman?” Says Schroeder, “[g]ender concerns permeated the exegetical tradition.”

possibilities, even as questions related to the text's context, production, purpose, and meaning continued to influence these possibilities.

Literary/Narratological Interpretations of Judges

Dissatisfaction with the dominance and explanatory possibilities of the DtrH theory gave rise to literary scholarship on Judges. In 1975 Robert Alter expressed astonishment that “at this late date there exists virtually no serious literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible.”²⁶ As biblical scholars wrestled with the validity of historical vs. literary approaches and diachronic vs. synchronic readings, Robert Polzin identified a “crisis” in biblical studies: Nearly two centuries of historical-critical work on Deuteronomy and the DtrH (from de Wette’s “groundbreaking work” in 1805 to Noth’s “modern classic” in 1967) had “produced no hypothesis that can be described as historically or literarily adequate.”²⁷ Polzin thus redefined the goal: He described his use of the DtrH as heuristic, stating that his emphasis was on reading—and not on arguing for a reading.²⁸ He also sought an appreciative and complementary stance for both historical/diachronic and literary/synchronic perspectives. Polzin affirmed the value and

²⁶ Robert Alter, “A Literary Approach to the Bible,” <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/a-literary-approach-to-the-bible/> (accessed January 17, 2018). The cause of Alter’s astonishment has since been rectified. In the 30 years between the 1981 publication of *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and the 2011 update and revision, Alter notes “some excellent literary work” (e.g., by Ilana Pardes, Yair Zakovitch, Robert Kawashima, and Jean-Pierre Sonnet). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (1981; New York: Basic Books, 2011), x. However, Alter also laments the literary analyses that fail to prioritize text-critical concerns and philological precision and the “supposed interest” in a literary understanding that prioritizes the application of “fashionable academic ideolog[ies]” onto the narratives. He states, “[m]y own position remains what it was 30 years ago—that the best way to get a handle on the bible’s literary vehicle is to avoid imposing on it a grid external to it but instead to patiently attend to its minute workings and through such attention inferentially build a picture of its distinctive conventions and techniques.” Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*., x-xi.

²⁷ Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 13. Chapter 1 in Polzin’s monograph is titled “Criticism and Crisis Within Biblical Studies.”

²⁸ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, ix.

necessity of the historical-critical analysis “for an adequate scholarly understanding” while calling for a “competent literary analysis of biblical material” because of its necessity “for even a preliminary scholarly understanding of what this ancient text means.”²⁹

The development of literary and narratological competency in biblical scholarship was aided by the attention to the biblical texts of scholars already engaged in non-biblical literary and narratological disciplines. In addition to Alter’s work, the expertise of Mieke Bal and Susan Niditch, as well as Jan Fokkelman and Meir Sternberg, helped to influence the development of narratological and literary readings of Judges.³⁰ Webb’s 1987 “integrated reading” reflected the shift toward synchronic readings and a belief in and search for the book’s coherence.³¹ Lillian Klein, like Webb, turned away from the dominant “pastiche” perception, examining irony’s unifying role in the narratives: “In spite of tradition to the contrary, my basic premise is that the book of Judges is a structured entity in which elements are shaped to contribute to the integrity

²⁹ Robert Alter, “A Literary Approach to the Bible,” *Commentary* 60 (1975), 70, cited in Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 5.

³⁰ For a survey of the rise both of literary criticism and of reading the Bible as literature in the 1970s and 1980s and their developments in the decades that followed (in particular as interests in reception history and cultural criticism have become prominent), see Steve Wietzman, “Before and After *The Art of Biblical Narrative*,” *Proof* 27, no. 2 (2007): 191–210. See also Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*; Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, ISBL (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985). On Judges, see Niditch, *Judges*; and Richard Bowman, “Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Gale Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 19–45.

³¹ See Alan J. Hauser, “Judging Judges Scholarship,” in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J.A. Clines*, ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M.S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013), 436–7. Brettler seeks a middle ground between pastiche and coherence: “I do not believe that there is *very* strong coherence in the book. Yet, I also do not believe that the book is a result of a haphazard collection of texts, or a random set of additions to an original core.” Instead, Brettler argues that the book coheres, “but on an editorial rather than a compositional level... connected to political issues in ancient Israel.” Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 104, 105.

and significance of the whole.”³² Scholars also have found productive interpretive keys by reading Judges in its literary and literary/religious Mesopotamian context.³³

The changing literary perspectives in biblical scholarship resulted in an abundance of scholarly attention to Judges. Brettler noted in 2002 that “Judges has become a ‘hot’ book... a focus of intense interest in the [p]ast two decades.”³⁴ The interest resulted both from the fundamental questions of “the Copenhagen school” (under the influence of Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas Thompson³⁵) and its minimalist understandings of historicity in the biblical texts and from the synchronic literary turn,³⁶ which “evolved out of the shortcomings” of the historical–literary methodologies.³⁷ The degree to which scholars already working in the discipline experienced the last quarter of the twentieth century as “crisis” (as Polzin suggested it was), viewed previous literary–historical work as inadequate or dissatisfying, or reveled in the excitement of shifting and expanding literary and narratological boundaries and perspectives

³² Lillian Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1988), 11.

³³ See, e.g., Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women*. Baker interprets Judges in light of its relationship to the Assyrian imperial cult and its use of “the best traditions of literary composition existing in the ancient Near East.” Baker, 9. He proposes that Judges is an integrated, carefully constructed, and strong but veiled critique of those who would abandon the Yahwistic cult in favor of that of their Assyrian sovereign.

³⁴ Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, ix. Interesting to juxtapose with Brettler’s observation about scholarly attention is Burney’s 1918 view that “[t]he Book of Judges is not a book which has suffered from neglect on the part of scholars in the past.” Burney, *The Book of Judges*, v.

³⁵ See, e.g., Niels Peter Lemche, “The Origin of the Israelite State—A Copenhagen Perspective on the Emergence of Critical Historical Studies of Ancient Israel in Recent Times,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12, no. 1 (1998): 44–63. Developments in the scholarship of Lemche and Thomas Thompson can be seen in two volumes of collections: Niels Peter Lemche, *Biblical Studies and the Failure of History: Changing Perspectives 3*, Copenhagen International Seminar (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013); and Thomas L. Thompson, *Biblical Narrative and Palestine’s History: Changing Perspectives 2*, Copenhagen International Seminar 2013 (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2013).

³⁶ Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, ix.

³⁷ Ellen J. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 3.

were contingent on their rhetorical, ideological, and personal perspectives about the biblical texts. That female characters played important roles in the historiographical literature of Judges became clear as literary scholarship expanded. Bat-Yiphtach became more visible, but not as a child in transition.

Judges and Feminist, Womanist, Masculinity, and Queer Criticism

The turn to synchronic literary analysis piqued scholars' interests in enticing narratives in Judges, as Brettler notes, and the stories particularly piqued the interests of feminist scholars.³⁸ As a leading narratological voice, Mieke Bal's analysis bridged feminist and literary concerns; she critiqued the previous focus on historical reconstructions and male leaders in Judges and helped to reorient the focus in the book to the prominence of female characters:

Stripped of the chronological fallacy, the political, military, and religious theme of going astray stands out as [only] one of the many themes the book "is about." This theme is the other side of the attempt of the Israelites to establish their specificity through monotheism, endogamy, and the conquest of the land. But the book is also about lineage, fatherhood, and the lives of young girls. It is about virginity, motherhood, and violence. It is also about sex, obedience, and death. And finally, it is about power and its dissymmetrical distribution, the conflicts and

³⁸ Works on Judges narratives published during this period, some of which have become part of the Judges and Bat-Yiphtach feminist canon, include Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*; Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Athalya Brenner, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993); Exum, "On Judges 11"; Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, Athalya Brenner, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 116–30; and J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993). See also Anne Michele Tapp, "An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19:1–11, Judges 11:30–39 and 19:22–26," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 157–74; Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 67–77; Adele Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist," *JSOT* 17, no. 55 (1992): 25–37; Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 65–90; and Gale Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17–21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995): 146–70.

competition it generates, its consequences for those who have it and for those who lack it. These themes are related but must be assessed in their plurality and differences.³⁹

Bal expanded the view and reoriented interpreters to the political, social, and cultural elements of Judges narratives, insisting that politics always only happens within a social domain.

Feminist scholars have been concerned not just with the ancient social world and what the texts reveal about women's places in it, but also with the bible's influence on contemporary women. These concerns of feminist scholars served as an important shift toward addressing one aspect of the crisis in the biblical studies discipline that Polzin had sought to correct. This correction involved *application* "in Gadamer's sense" of the term.⁴⁰ According to Gadamer, application joins understanding and explication as an element of the hermeneutical exercise, as "a constitutive element in all understanding."⁴¹ For Polzin, Gadamer's inclusion of application affirms the involvement of the recognized presuppositions of the interpreting self in the interpretive task. When presuppositions are recognized and deemed relevant, the relevance of the hermeneutical task to the present moment is amplified. Polzin asserts that scholarship resulting in interpretations of the texts but in which the interpretive product and interpreter remain "objective" and uninvolved fails to acknowledge that the biblical texts—and in Polzin's case the DtrH in particular—possibly tell a story "important for Men's lives" (ironically).⁴² Feminist

³⁹ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 16–7.

⁴⁰ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 11.

⁴¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 1 (2006): 44–45; trans. Richard E. Palmer from *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, 92–117.

⁴² Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 11.

literary criticism from its inception recognized the impossibility of disinterested readings of the biblical texts—and of the stories’ importance for human lives.⁴³

With an eye toward the treatment of female characters and their bodies in the narratives of Judges, feminist scholars were interested in answering new questions. J. Cheryl Exum records some of these questions:

How are women portrayed in this text? Do they speak? Are we given access to their point of view? Who has the power in this text? How is power distributed? How do women get what they want (if they do)?... How does the text represent uniquely female experiences, such as childbearing, or traditionally female experiences, such as child rearing? How have women’s lives and voices been suppressed by this text? Are women made to speak and act against their own interests? What hidden gender assumptions lie behind this text...?⁴⁴

In asking these questions, feminist scholars shaped the literary turn in biblical studies and Judges scholarship. Female characters were seen as playing important roles in the social world depicted in the political stories: “Although ostensibly about the military and political adventures of male heroes, the Book of Judges is studded from beginning to end with the stories of *women*,” says Yee.⁴⁵ Bal saw earlier commentators as lacking awareness of the socio-cultural background (“especially the male–female relations therein”) because of their interest in the “religious–political background”⁴⁶:

The political background has been overemphasized in preceding exegeses; therefore, I have chosen to ignore it as much as I could... to gain access to the

⁴³ J. Cheryl Exum, “Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 68. As I discuss below, second wave feminist scholarship also has been critiqued for its attentiveness only to European and Euro-American human lives.

⁴⁴ Exum, “Feminist Criticism,” 69.

⁴⁵ Emphasis added. Gale Yee, introduction to *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 3.

⁴⁶ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 237. With a view of the social and not just political, religious, or military settings, “[t]he characters can come to life as real people, defending real stakes, and standing for real issues.” In addition, “[i]n order to *see* these women properly, we must see with them, be sensitive to their focalization, and try to grasp what happens to them and why.” Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 237.

other elements of the background, the social and cultural habits, institutions, and rituals that made the stories and song meaningful. I did that not only to compensate for former neglect, but also because the political can in principle never be meaningfully seen without the background it arises from. Without the social domain, there is no politics.⁴⁷

Thus, what previous scholarship on Judges had neglected became abundantly clear: “*Women* are unusually prominent throughout the book and play a wide range of roles in it.”⁴⁸ In some narratives, violence is enacted on female bodies,⁴⁹ while in others, female characters show, or can be read as showing, strength, courage, and agency.⁵⁰ Bat-Yiphtach is variously constructed by interpreters as both agent and victim. As feminist scholars expanded the questions asked of Judges, they also used a wide range of theoretical and methodological tools to answer them. They drew on the social sciences, including anthropology, sociology, and archaeology,⁵¹ as well as narratological, philological, and structuralist tools, espousing interdisciplinarity as a fundamental aspect of feminist theory. However, in bringing female characters into view, scholars’ interests and questions were structured along a gender binary. The possibility that

⁴⁷ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 236.

⁴⁸ Emphasis added. Brettler, *Judges*, ix.

⁴⁹ Bat-Yiphtach’s is a particularly problematic narrative, as is the unnamed raped and slaughtered daughter (Judges 19); and the virgins of Yabesh-Gilad and Shilo (Judges 20–21). See, e.g., Trible, *Texts of Terror*; Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*; and Exum, “Feminist Criticism.”

⁵⁰ Aksah (Judges 1), Devorah and Yael (Judges 4–5), Samson’s unnamed mother (Judges 13–14), and Delilah (Judges 16) have at times been read with a view of their agency. See, e.g., Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, ABRL, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1998). However, as characters in narratives constructed by males for males, a recognition of the limits of agency also is noted. About Devorah and Sisera’s mother (Judges 5), Exum states that both are “appropriated to advocate the male ideology of war in which rape is taken for granted as a weapon of terror and revenge.... This is male ideology.” Exum, “Feminist Criticism,” 73. Fuchs also problematizes what she calls feminist neoliberal perspectives that settle for finding evidence in the biblical texts of equality for women among the same patriarchal power structures the texts represent. Esther Fuchs, “Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible for Women: The Neoliberal Turn in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship,” *JFSR* 24, no. 2 (2008): 45–65.

⁵¹ Exum, “Feminist Criticism,” 68.

female characters in Judges might be characterized as children or transitioning children was not considered.

The expanded perspectives offered by Western feminist biblical scholars led to recognition of a failure to account for perspectives of non-European and non-Euro–American feminist scholars. Interpretations of Judges by African American, Asian, African, and Latin American scholars emerged. Gale Yee notes the rise of “provocative readings by diverse racial, ethnic, and non-Western groups, who have asserted their voices in the primarily white Euro-American academic guild.”⁵² In addition, masculinity studies and queer theory have attended to the construction and treatment of complexified male bodies in Judges and have further troubled binary views of gender and normative views of social worlds.⁵³ A phenomenological interest in human (and nonhuman) bodies, affects, and emotions recently has revealed the inadequacy of Cartesian categories to capture the multiple forces that impinge on and affect embodied scholars

⁵² Yee, *Judges and Method*, 12. See, e.g., Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017); Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, SemeiaSt 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); Jione Havea, Margaret Aymer, and Steed Vernyl Davidson, eds., *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible*, SemeiaSt 77 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); Elizabeth J. A. Siwo-Okundi, “Judges 19 and the Virgin Daughter’s Trauma: ‘Small Voice’ Implications for African Women and Girls,” *Unraveling and Reweaving Sacred Canon in Africana Womanhood*, ed. Rosetta E. Ross and Rose Mary Amenga-Etego (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 139–52; Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, BW (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 21–119; Craig Keener and M. Daniel Carroll Rodas, ed., *Global Voices: Reading the Bible in the Majority World* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); and Madipoane J. Masenya, “African Womanist Hermeneutics: A Suppressed Voice from South Africa Speaks,” *JFSR* 11, no. 1 (1995): 149–55.

⁵³ See, e.g., Kelly J. Murphy, *Rewriting Masculinity: Gideon, Men, and Might* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2019), doi:10.1093/oso/9780190619398.001.0001; Kelly Murphy, “Masculinity, Moral Agency, and Memory: The Spirit of the Deity in Judges, Samuel, and Beyond,” *JBR* 2, no. 2 (2015): 175–96; Stephen Wilson, “Samson the Man-Child: Failing to Come of Age in the Deuteronomistic History,” *JBL* 133, no. 1 (2014): 43–60; Meir Bar Mymon, “This Season You’ll Be Wearing God: On the Manning of Israel and the Undressing of the Israelites (Judges 6:1–8:32),” in *Joshua and Judges*, Texts@Contexts, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 191–208; Ken Stone, “What Happens When Achsah Gets Off Her Ass? Queer Reading and Judges 1:11–15,” in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sterman Sabbath, *BibInt* 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 409–20; and Marco Derks, “‘If I Be Shaven, Then My Strength Will Go from Me’: A Queer Reading of the Samson Narrative,” *BibInt* 23, nos. 4–5 (2004): 553–73.

and readers and their understandings of biblical texts.⁵⁴ And, as already noted, previous neglect of the long history of Jewish interpretations of Judges by mainstream biblical scholarship also now influences the work of non-Jewish scholars in the discipline.⁵⁵ Each of these moves to expand the perspectives offered by a broad range of the bible's readers and interpreters has had the potential to reveal previously unrecognized presuppositions of interpreters.⁵⁶ Still, the expanded perspectives have not yet considered the possible perspectives of children (either subjectively or objectively) in the narratives of Judges or attended to how presuppositions underlying a child–adult binary influence readers' interpretations.

⁵⁴ To my knowledge, only Amy Cottrill has offered an affect theory reading of a Judges narrative; see Amy Cottrill, "A Reading of Ehud and Jael Through the Lens of Affect Theory," *BibInt* 22, no. 4–5 (2014), 430–49. What Cottrill points to is the capacity of Judges to affect readers and engender emotional and visceral reactions. On affect theory, see also Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchall, and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018); Maia Kotrosits, *How Things Feel: Biblical Studies, Affect Theory, and the (Im)Personal*, Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Jennifer Koosed and Stephen D. Moore, "From Affect to Exegesis," *BibInt* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 381–87; Jennifer Koosed, "Moses: The Face of Fear," *BibInt* 22, no. 4–5 (2014), 414–29; and Erin Runion, "From Humor to Disgust: Rahab's Queer Affect," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 45–74. Scholars have analyzed emotions in the Hebrew Bible. See, e.g., Ellen van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible," *BibInt* 16, no. 1 (2008): 1–24, doi: <https://doi-org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1163/156851508X247602>. Biblical scholars also have noted the emotional effects that Bat-Yiphtach's narrative can engender. See, e.g., Valerie Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, SemeiaSt 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 181–91; and Ron Bruner, "Weeping in the Hills: Hearing Children Dwelling as Outsiders Among Us," *RQ* 53, no. 2 (2011): 81–95. However, these interpretations and attention to emotions do not rely on the theoretical grounding provided by developments in affect theory.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Rabbi Avrohom Fishelis and Rabbi Shmuel Fishelis, *Judges: A New English Translation of Text, Rashi, and Commentary*, ed. Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg (New York: The Judaica Press, 1979). In the following section of this chapter, I review early and medieval rabbinic readings of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and their particular concern with Yiphtach's vow.

⁵⁶ "With the development in biblical studies of gender and postcolonial studies at about the same time, a growing awareness of the limited Western, white, male, heterosexual perspective on biblical texts led to the final decline and fall of the claim to objectivity in diachronic and synchronic literary studies and in all kinds of research dealing with meaning." van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies*, 4. Still, overcoming the discipline's interest in and reliance on objectivity remains a challenge. Says Gadamer, "[h]ermeneutical experience... realizes how deeply rooted pre-judgments can be and how little even our becoming conscious of them is able to free [us] from their power.... As philosophy, hermeneutical reflection includes the point that in all understanding of a matter, or of another person, the critique of oneself should also be happening." Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," 44–45, 51; trans. Richard E. Palmer from *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, 92–117.

Interpretations of the many female characters in Judges often construct the characters as women. Scholars' concerns with these characters according to a gender binary seem to obscure the possibility of interpreting female characters in Judges as children. Bat-Yiphtach's narrative emphasizes scholars' tendency to overlook children in the biblical texts and raises questions about the reasons for this oversight. It also underscores the inadequacy of a child–adult binary for more nuanced interpretations of biblical characters in light of the realities of diachronic human development. In the next section, I review the literature on Bat-Yiphtach's narrative to show how interpreters have not yet characterized her as a transitioning child.

Review of Bat-Yiphtach Scholarship

The attention to Judges and methodological expansions in biblical scholarship in the past thirty years, as well as the ambiguities and gaps in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, contribute to scholars' fascination with the narrative, and a significant proportion of recent scholarship focuses on it. In Kelly Murphy's review of Judges scholarship produced between 2003 and 2017, Bat-Yiphtach and her narrative account for more than forty articles, chapters, and monographs. Reception history approaches are most common among the works produced on Judges 11:29–40 during this period.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Some of the works listed here apply an eclectic methodological and interdisciplinary lens and thus are not easily categorized. Reception scholarship on Bat-Yiphtach since 2003 has included the following: Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana de Groot, eds., *Women of War, Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges Through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 155–202; Susanna Bede Caroselli, "The Dissemination of Jephthah's Daughter," in *From the Margins 1: Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, *Bible in the Modern World* 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2009), 86–101; Joy Schroeder, "Envy of Jephthah's Daughter: Judges 11 in the Thought of Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–1652)," in *Strangely Familiar: Protofeminist Interpretations of Patriarchal Biblical Texts*, ed. Nancy Calvert-Koyzis and Heather Weir (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 75–91; Marion Ann Taylor, "The Resurrection of Jephthah's Daughter: Reading Judges 11 with Nineteenth-Century Women," in *Strangely Familiar: Protofeminist Interpretations of Patriarchal Biblical Texts*, ed. Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, and Heather Weir (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 57–73; Elisheva Baumgarten, "'Remember That Glorious Girl': Jephthah's Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture," *JQR* 97, no. 2 (2007): 180–209; Mikael Sjöberg, "Jephthah's Daughter as Object of Desire or Feminist Icon," *BibInt* 15, no. 4–5 (2007): 377–94; Gerald West, "The Bible and the Female Body in Ibandla

Additional methodologies and lenses include cultural criticism,⁵⁸ womanist criticism,⁵⁹ feminist criticism,⁶⁰ literary and literary comparative criticism,⁶¹ and masculinity, queer, nonhuman, and animal criticism.⁶² As I noted previously, the many ambiguities and gaps and the troubling nature of the narrative provide scholars with many points of entry.

Many interpreters have addressed questions about other aspects of the narrative of Bat-Yiphtach and her father, including historical–literary facets. Scholars’ questions might lead to text critical, form, or source analyses, or to examinations of Yiphtach, the vow, and how

lamaNazaretha: Isaiah Shembe and Jephthah’s Daughter,” *OTE* 20, no. 2 (2007): 489–509; Nicholas Cranfeld, “Moral Tales at the Hearth: Jephthah’s Daughter in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England*, ed. Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene (London: Routledge, 2006); Deborah Rooke, “Sex and Death, or, the Death of Sex: Three Versions of Jephthah’s Daughter (Judges 11:29–40),” in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb*, ed. Charlotte Hempel and Judith Lieu, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 249–71; Joshua Berman, “Medieval Monasticism and the Evolution of Jewish Interpretation to the Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” *JQR* 95, no. 2 (2005): 228–56; Gunn, *Judges*; Cornelis Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story: The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter in Some Examples of Christian Devotional Literature,” *BibInt* 13, no. 2 (2005): 167–90;

⁵⁸ See, e.g., David Gunn, “Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale Yee, 2nd ed. (1995; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 202–36; and Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Cooper, “Some Place to Cry”; and Vanessa Lovelace, “‘We Don’t Give Birth to Thugs’: Family Values, Respectability Politics, and Jephthah’s Mother,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 239–61.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Pamela Milne, “From the Margins to the Margins: Jephthah’s Daughter and Her Father,” in *Joshua and Judges*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Gale Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), 209–34; Monroe, “Disembodied Women”; and Barbara Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain: The Daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

⁶¹ See, e.g., Peter Sabo, “The Lot Complex: The Use and Abuse of Daughters in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD Diss., University of Alberta, 2017); Mary Ann Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel: Celebrating Bat Jephthah (Judg. 11:39d–40),” *Feminist Theology* 13, no. 1 (2004): 11–25; Bernard Robinson, “The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter: Then and Now,” *Bib* 85, no. 3 (2004): 331–48; and Samuel Cheon, “Reconsidering Jephthah’s Story in Asian Perspective,” *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 6 (2003): 30–45.

⁶² See, e.g., Ken Stone, “Animal Difference, Sexual Difference, and the Daughter of Jephthah,” *BibInt* 24, no. 1 (2016): 1–16. Masculinity lenses have focused only on Yiphtach; see, e.g., Murphy, “Masculinity, Moral Agency, and Memory.” Although queer theory and interpretation have been used for other narratives in Judges, as noted previously, queer readings of Bat-Yiphtach have not yet been offered.

Yiphtach fulfilled it.⁶³ When interpreters focus on these questions, interest in Bat-Yiphtach, whether as woman, young woman, or child, is secondary or non-existent. Bat-Yiphtach is not the subject of the narrative. I briefly review this scholarship below.

Three additional interpretive moves have obscured the characterization of Bat-Yiphtach as transitional child, and I examine each of them in turn. First, interpreters see Bat-Yiphtach and characterize her as an unchanging, perpetual child (young person), rather than as a child in transition.⁶⁴ These characterizations, based on a child–adult binary, construct her as a model offspring whose primary trait is obedience. When interpreters’ interest is in child sacrifice in biblical Israel, the focus is on her death. In both cases, her status as a child in transition is obscured by other interests.

Second, in contrast to the child characterizations, some scholars see Bat-Yiphtach as a woman or young woman.⁶⁵ Using the gender binary as a structuring element, scholars characterize Bat-Yiphtach as a woman because she is not a man. When she is recognized as adolescent or young woman, she most often has already completed the transition to womanhood. I discuss two facets of the narrative that are relevant in scholarship that has obscured her characterization as transitioning child: (1) the terminology of בתולה and בתולים understood in light

⁶³ See, e.g., Christopher Begg, “The Josephan Judge Jephthah,” *SJOT* 20, no. 2 (2006): 161–88; L. Julie Claassens, “Notes on Characterisation in the Jephthah Narrative,” *JNSL* 22 (1996): 107–15; T. M. Willis, “The Nature of Jephthah’s Authority,” *CBQ* 59 (1996): 33–44; and David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1986).

⁶⁴ That she is an offspring also is relevant to these interpretations and their intended use, particularly in children’s bibles. However, her status as obedient young person is the primary emphasis. See, e.g., Gunn, *Judges*; and Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story.”

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Day, “From the Child”; Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*; and Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*.

of a gender binary, and (2) focus on the ritual alluded to after Yiphtach does according to his vow.

Third, although Bat-Yiphtach has been included in recent scholarship that focuses on daughters in the Hebrew bible, the daughters still primarily are characterized according to a gender binary.⁶⁶ Bat-Yiphtach in this case is female offspring. Read as daughter, Bat-Yiphtach is not characterized by scholars as transitioning child.

I focus on the narrative of Bat-Yiphtach (Judg 11:29–40) in this project because a review of the literature exposes how presuppositions underlying a child–adult binary and a gender binary can influence her characterization. In addition, a review of the literature reveals potential challenges in identifying biblical child characters, interpreting their narratives and roles, and constructing their agency. The following sections reveal how scholars have obscured Bat-Yiphtach’s status as a child in transition.

Interpretations Concerned with Politics, Battles, Vows, and Other Narrative Facets

As I noted, modern scholarship on Judges emphasized the leadership of pre-monarchic Israel, the Israelites’ relationship with YHWH, the Deuteronomists’ purposes, Yiphtach’s piety, and a wide range of other questions as the narratives’ primary concerns.⁶⁷ Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative is embedded within the longer story of Yiphtach (Judg 11:1–12:7), making him—and not her—the subject of the narrative’s two primary concerns.⁶⁸ These two concerns or plot

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Kimberly Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018); and Joanna Stiebert, *Fathers & Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ My review of this scholarship is limited because a lack of interest in Bat-Yiphtach already indicates neglect in characterizing her as a transitioning child.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Fuchs, “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing,” 117, 126–7; Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 43; and Nelson, *Judges*, 211.

problems involve the Israelites' oppression by and battle with the Ammonites, for which Yiphtach is designated as leader, and the rash or improper vow, of which Yiphtach is the initiator.⁶⁹ Even in narrowing the pericope to Judges 11:29–40, where the vow is made and then the daughter enters the scene, her role is only a supporting one. For example, Boling still notes the priority of the vow to the broader context: “The fact of human sacrifice in Jephthah’s story is secondary to the theme of the irrevocability of the vow.”⁷⁰ Fuchs also summarizes the tendency to subordinate the daughter: “The brief narrative on Jephthah’s daughter in Judg 11:34–40 has usually been understood as a tragic story about the fatal results of a rash vow.”⁷¹ Many commentators ignore the significance of the daughter “because of their one-sided focus on the basic events of the story, in which, as they correctly observe, she plays a minor part,” says Sjöberg.⁷² In many cases, interpreters with other interests justifiably overlook the possibility of seeing Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition.

Rabbinic and medieval Jewish interpretations often focus on the vow and its consequences, looking particularly at its implications for relationship with YHWH. Thus, Bat-Yiphtach is relevant as one who is in relationship with YHWH. However, her status and characterization as child in transition are not pertinent details. In *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, the daughter is named Seila, and she is constructed as heroic. Still, the author’s primary concern remains the vow: The deity is offended by the vow and the potential for inappropriate sacrifices,

⁶⁹ The latter should be seen as a subplot, according to Nelson. Nelson, *Judges*, 217.

⁷⁰ Boling, *Judges*, 209.

⁷¹ Fuchs, “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing,” 116.

⁷² Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 64.

and Seila becomes the deity's (willing) pawn, used as a means for punishing her father.⁷³ Other early Jewish interpreters (e.g., Josephus, Targum Jonathan) and medieval Jewish scholars (e.g., Rashi) also rejected the sacrifice of Bat-Yiphtach, seeing it as inappropriate and unacceptable.⁷⁴ In *Legends of the Jews*, Ginsberg weaves together Jewish commentary and legends to reconstruct a more complete story, in which blame for "the loss of a young life" is assigned to "the rivalry between Jephthah and Phineas."⁷⁵ Bat-Yiphtach also searches for a reprieve from death by consulting with scholarly readers of Torah.⁷⁶ "Overall, the rabbis have very little patience with Jephthah for making and carrying out his vow," says Miller.⁷⁷ Medieval Jewish scholar Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra proposed the interpretation that Bat-Yiphtach was not actually sacrificed but was consecrated to YHWH.⁷⁸ Although the interpretation gained wide acceptance for several centuries, current biblical scholarship most often discounts it.⁷⁹ The ambiguity that allows for both possibilities characterizes the narrative. In addition, in either case, the future effect of the vow on Bat-Yiphtach obscures interpreters' ability to characterize her as a child in transition.

⁷³ Pseudo-Philo, LAB 40, cited in D.J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo (First Century A.D.)," 353–4.

⁷⁴ Gunn, *Judges*, 134–35.

⁷⁵ Louis Ginzberg and David Stern, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003), 876.

⁷⁶ Ginzberg and Stern, *Legends of the Jews*, 876.

⁷⁷ Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 63. For Miller's summary of rabbinic concerns with the narrative, see 62–76. Miller's rabbinic commentaries and midrash include a range of interpretive genres, including *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Pseudo-Philo), *Jewish Antiquities* (Josephus), *Midrash Rabbah*, and *Targum Jonathan*, as well as the medieval writings of David Kimchi. Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 62–3.

⁷⁸ Moshe Reiss, "Jephthah's Daughter," *JBQ* 37, no. 1 (2009), 60. An interpretation by which Yiphtach consecrates Bat-Yiphtach to YHWH, rather than sacrificing her, also is attributed to Rabbi David Kimchi. See Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 132. See also Gunn, *Judges*, 141. Gunn notes that the reading from Ibn Ezra is based on a disjunctive Hebrew connective (vav as "or") in Judges 11:30, rather than the more common conjunctive reading (vav as "and").

⁷⁹ Reiss provides one exception. See Reiss, "Spoiled Child."

Morality, Children, Reception Histories, and Bat-Yiphtach as Child

Bat-Yiphtach has been characterized as a child, both young person and offspring, in some interpretations and creative rewritings of the narrative. In this section, I examine the work of interpreters who construct Bat-Yiphtach as child but not as a transitioning child. The interpretations—some made visible through reception histories of children’s bibles—reveal that the narrative has been used to demand obedience of young people and young offspring. Underlying the interpretations is a child–adult binary, with Bat-Yiphtach falling into the child category. Problems with unarticulated presuppositions used to construct the child according to a child–adult binary become clear around issues of obedience. These characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach as child contrast with characterizations of her as woman and young woman but also fail to identify her as a child in transition.

Much of the scholarship on Bat-Yiphtach in the past two decades has involved research on the narrative’s reception history. In reception histories, scholars examine how biblical narratives have been interpreted, adapted, illustrated, and retold.⁸⁰ The scholarly work on reception histories sheds light on contemporary norms at the time of the interpretation and cultural changes in relationships with the biblical texts. Reception histories “help us understand how cultures work in the lives of individuals and communities, how culture is connected to other aspects of social life such as economics and technology, and how much we simply accept or assume ideas, practices, and values that are cultural ‘givens.’”⁸¹ Reception histories show a

⁸⁰ Note that Brennan Breed questions what qualifies as “reception,” troubling an easy acceptance of established categories and borderlines because biblical texts themselves can be found “on both sides of the borderline of original and reception.” Brennan Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 2. As a result, Breed “began to wonder about the line itself. Often, common-sense acceptance of this line functions as a natural starting point for scholarly studies in reception history.... [T]o keep things orderly, biblical scholars take turns volunteering for the border patrol.” Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 2.

⁸¹ Gunn, “Cultural Criticism,” 204.

varied view of characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach, and for purposes of this project, her characterizations as child are important.

Bat-Yiphtach and her father have inspired many retellings by readers and interpreters through the centuries. Wilbur Sypherd identifies “hundreds of treatments of the [Bat-Yiphtach] story in literature, drama, music and visual art for the period from the sixteenth century down to the 1940s when he compiled his catalogue.”⁸² Baron catalogues the nature of some of these retellings: “Ballets, cantatas, operas, oratorios, paintings, pantomimes, plays, poems, and sculptures” have been inspired by “a vast Hebrew and Christian literature on this story.”⁸³ Constructing all of these rewritings as receptions of the biblical narrative might be problematic. The reason is that, in many cases, medieval readings and customs inspired by the story, as revealed in this reception scholarship on the narrative, involve mash-ups of the Judges version of the story, of the first-century *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* retelling attributed to Pseudo-Philo, and of other ancient versions of the rash vow/sacrificed child type-scene.⁸⁴

⁸² Rooke, “Sex and Death,” 250. See W. O. Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter. A Study in Comparative Literature* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware, 1948).

⁸³ Jeremy Hugh Baron, “Did Jephtha Sacrifice His Daughter?,” *Fifty Synagogue Seminars* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2010), n.p. ProQuest Ebook Central (accessed October 16, 2017). Baron notes the popularity of the rash vow/sacrificed child theme. His list of similar tales of child sacrifice is extensive: “Theodor Gaster reviewed many Northern European folk tales of vows made in mortal danger by travelers and kings who promised to sacrifice the first object they saw. Grimm’s tale #88 from Hesse described a merchant, about to be eaten by a lion, who vowed to sacrifice the first object he saw. It was his daughter, but the lion was a bewitched prince who was freed by her from the spell. There is a similar story from Lorraine of a merchant, a white wolf (prince) and a daughter; from Hanover of a black poodle (prince) and a daughter; and from the Tyrol of a serpent (youth) and a daughter. In Lithuania it is a king, a daughter and a wolf (prince); in Sweden the tale is a king, a son and a mermaid; in Denmark a son and a dwarf, and in Arabic the victim is a favourite.”

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Lois Drewer, “Jephthah and his Daughter in Medieval Art: Ambiguities of Heroism and Sacrifice,” *Insights and Interpretations. Studies in Celebration of the Eighty-Fifth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 35–59; Berman, “Medieval Monasticism and the Evolution of Jewish Interpretation”; and Baumgarten, “Remember That Glorious Girl.” Robinson states, “The story of Jephthah’s daughter is... a ‘type-scene,’ in this instance a type-scene that occurs over a number of cultures.” Robinson, “The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter,” 347.

Reception histories that examine children's bibles, which most definitively draw only from the biblical narrative, reveal that Bat-Yiphtach has been characterized as a child as youth and child as offspring. For these interpreters' purposes, she is firmly ensconced in the category of child, with underlying presuppositions about a child's role of submission and obedience. She is not viewed as a transitioning child and generally is not granted agency to question the norms of the social world in which the interpretations were generated. Ruth Bottigheimer notes that children's bibles, primarily the work of "parents, teachers, and preachers," were first produced for Catholic children, from the sixteenth century onward were created for Protestants, and from the nineteenth century for Jewish children.⁸⁵ The images and interpretations of child characters in children's bibles tend to serve adult retellers' needs: "[C]hildren's Bible stories teach far more than Bible content... [they are] an important part of the transmission of cultural norms and values from one generation to the next."⁸⁶ In the following section, I show how rituals and rites of passage have played a role in constructions of Bat-Yiphtach, serving as one way to transmit social norms. In these receptions of the narrative, a rite of passage turns Bat-Yiphtach immediately into a woman. In children's bibles, interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach convey the social demand for children's obedience. In neither case is Bat-Yiphtach recognized as a transitioning child.

⁸⁵ Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), xii. For example, Russell Dalton reviews the reception of biblical stories in children's bibles and changes in their cultural messaging in the United States in Russell Dalton, "The American Children's Bible," *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190258849.013.6

⁸⁶ Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children*, xi–xii. In his review of Bottigheimer's book, Nicholas Tucker comments on several rewritings of Judges stories that Bottigheimer examines and then notes that "with Bible reading itself generally having gone out of fashion, Classic Comics and the biblical films of Hollywood may be the most common way in which recent generations of young readers have become acquainted with Old Testament stories." Nicholas Tucker, "The Bad Book: For Hundreds of Years, Children Have Had to Be Protected from the Bible," *New York Times Book Review* (1923–Current file), December 8, 1996: BR66.

In a reception history of Judges by David Gunn, numerous examples of interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative construct her as child. This use of the biblical texts for children instructs them on proper behavior in the social world sustained by adults, including their parents.⁸⁷ "In children's Bibles, parents' relationships with their children and children's with their parents loom disproportionately large."⁸⁸ The focus tends to be the "promotion of values such as filial obedience at all costs."⁸⁹ Thus, Bat-Yiphtach is "lauded for unhesitatingly performing her duty to religion (even if mistakenly), her country, and her father.... For many, her filial devotion defines her," says Gunn.⁹⁰ The narrative social world and the outcome of Bat-Yiphtach's obedience are deemphasized, and Bat-Yiphtach as child is held up as a model obedient daughter. Joseph Hall (1615) comments on Bat-Yiphtach's model behavior: "How obsequious should children be to the will of their careful parents, even in their final disposition in the world, when they see this holy maid willing to abandon the world upon the rash vow of a father! They are the living goods of their parents, and must therefore wait upon the bestowing of their owners."⁹¹ Another interpretation, acknowledging the ambiguity in the text regarding the

⁸⁷ In James Janeway's 1679 *A token for children*—one of the earliest children's books published and held in the British Library—the pastor's direction to parents is this: "O pray, pray, pray, and live holily before them, and take some time daily to speak a little to your children, one by one, about their miserable condition by Nature." In his "Preface containing directions to the children," Janeway asks, "And are you willing to go to Hell to be burned with the Devil and his Angels?" James Janeway, *A Token for Children, being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives, and joyful deaths of several young children*, (London, Kings Arm's, 1679), A5. Gunn reports the British Library's "laconic" summary of Janeway's work: "Thirteen model children die in its pages." Gunn, *Judges*, 8. The description suggests that childist and child-oriented interpretation might be extended to examine other characters in Judges.

⁸⁸ Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children*, 71.

⁸⁹ Gillian Adams, "Sacred Texts and Secular Values," review of *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* by Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Children's Literature* 27 (1999): 202.

⁹⁰ Gunn, *Judges*, 161.

⁹¹ Gunn, *Judges*, 161. Calvin critiques Yiphtach's rash vow, pointing in his *Institutes* (iv.12.3) "to Jephthah's 'hasty fervor' when arguing that celibacy, among rash vows, 'holds the first place for insane boldness.'" Gunn, *Judges*, 142.

nature of her sacrifice, is that “[w]hatever her precise fate, she is an example of the most exalted filial piety, to be admired by every dutiful child.”⁹² In Mrs. (Sarah) Trimmer’s *Sacred History* (1783), Bat-Yiphtach inspires the observation that children who are “unmindful of their parents’ happiness, and unthankful for the blessings which paternal love dispenses, ought to blush with shame and confusion” when comparing themselves to her.⁹³ These interpretations characterize Bat-Yiphtach as child and contrast with interpretations that have constructed her as woman.

In some creative retellings of the narrative, the characterization of Bat-Yiphtach as child is more fluid, as is scholars’ analysis of the narrative’s reception. For example, Cornelis Houtman examines literary works by four Christian novelists and poets writing from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹⁴ In the devotional literature surveyed, the authors (novelists Bruinses and Zapletal, and poets Bilderdijk and Tollens) “all do away with the simplicity and ‘neutrality’ found in the biblical story of Jephthah and his daughter and turn it into high drama with sharply drawn and distinct protagonists and a sometimes exuberant depiction of atmosphere.”⁹⁵ The four retellings offer varying interpretations and characterizations of Yiphtach. For example, Bruinses makes him honorable, noble, pious, and worthy; his wife died in childbirth, and he has since been a devoted father. Meanwhile, Tollens is particularly critical of Yiphtach. In all four writings, Bat-Yiphtach is portrayed as a pious, devout, and obedient “model child.”⁹⁶ In her review of the literature, Houtman displays the

⁹² Gunn, *Judges*, 163.

⁹³ Gunn, *Judges*, 163.

⁹⁴ Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story.” Three of the works are by Dutch writers and one is by a German writer.

⁹⁵ Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story,” 190.

⁹⁶ Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story,” 189.

ambiguity of “child” language, shifting from Bat-Yiphtach as offspring and woman to Bat-Yiphtach as young person. One heading reads: “*The Daughter: A Woman who Trusts in God.*”⁹⁷ Houtman then notes the discomfort that [some] modern westerners face in the authors’ effusive praise of the daughter for her obedience to father and service to country: “To them it seems impossible that young people could identify with the daughter of Jephthah, as envisioned by the writers.”⁹⁸

Such difficulties were experienced by other earlier interpreters as well. Some interpreters, in rewriting the narrative, avoid characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach as model, pious, obedient child, drawing on similar ancient tales to correct the narrative. For example, Canadian Charles Heavyside (1865) retains a young Bat-Yiphtach in his interpretation and creates a mother for her who condemns Yiphtach: “All men are robbers, like the Ammonite—even thou, for thou wouldst rob me of my child.”⁹⁹ Gunn suggests that Heavyside would have been familiar with the ancient Greek stories by Aeschylus (458 BCE) and Euripides (410 BCE) about Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia. In the former, the mother, Clytemnestra, murders Agamemnon following the sacrifice, and in the latter, she works fervently to save her daughter.¹⁰⁰ Heavyside’s rewriting offers an alternative to interpretations that demand children’s obedience.

⁹⁷ Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story,” 168.

⁹⁸ Houtman also notes that “today’s parents do not want self-effacing children, but rather would feel embarrassed by them.” Houtman, “Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story,” 189. Underlying Houtman’s characterization of “today’s parents” are presuppositions about the generalizability of her own cultural and social parenting norms.

⁹⁹ Gunn, *Judges*, 164.

¹⁰⁰ Gunn, “Cultural Criticism,” 221–2. Comparison between the Bat-Yiphtach story and other ancient works that involve the child/offspring sacrifice type-scene have been widely noted. See, e.g., Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomist?”; Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel”; Rooke, “Sex and Death, or, the Death of Sex”; and Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman.”

However, neither his retelling of the story nor Houtman's retellers of the story characterize Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition.

Children in transition are in view in the reception of Bat-Yiphtach's story in early twentieth century KwaZulu-Natal. Gerald West analyzes how Isaiah Shembe established rituals in the founding of his *ibandla lamaNazaretha* (Nazarite congregation) by interweaving biblical stories, including Bat-Yiphtach's narrative; Nguni traditional and religious beliefs; and mission Christianity.¹⁰¹ Drawing on Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, Shembe constructed a ritual for virgin girls, in which adults would bring newly menstruating virgin girls together for a rite of passage, commemorating the courage and obedience of Bat-Yiphtach.¹⁰² Shembe combined Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and the older individual Nguni puberty rituals expressing beliefs about the power of virgin girls to "reconstitute a sense of order, religious sanctuary, and ritual power" for the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* community:

Political struggle assumed form as spiritual and moral warfare, with the virgin girls as the frontline warriors.... In this context, sacrifice was reinvented in terms of an innovative combination of Old Testament and Nguni traditional practice, and located in the purity of young women's bodies.¹⁰³

L. Juliana Claassens notes that, in the interwoven interpretation of the narrative, "for the Nazarite community to be [morally and spiritually] victorious, the virgin girls are required to offer their bodies up in obedience to the will of the prophet/God."¹⁰⁴ This reception of Bat-Yiphtach's

¹⁰¹ Gerald West, "The Bible and the Female Body in Ibandla lamaNazaretha: Isaiah Shembe and Jephthah's Daughter," *OTE* 20, no. 2 (2007): 494.

¹⁰² West, "The Bible and the Female Body," 498–503.

¹⁰³ Carol Ann Muller, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xix.

¹⁰⁴ L. Juliana Claassens notes that "for the Nazarite community to be [morally and spiritually] victorious, the virgin girls are required to offer their bodies up in obedience to the will of the prophet/God." L. Juliana Claassens, "'Give Me That Strength of Jephthah's Daughter': Reading the Story of Jephthah's Daughter in Africa," in Mercedes Bachman, *Judges, Wisdom Commentary 7*, ed. Barbara Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press,

narrative, particularly of Judges 11:39–40, serves as biblical exemplar of a rite of passage for virgin girls experiencing menarche. The custom or statute in Judges 11:40 has been associated with menstruation by other interpreters as well.¹⁰⁵ However, in these cases, the focus is on socially imposed rituals and how they might be reflected in the narrative. Bat-Yiphtach's characterization as a transitioning child herself and details regarding her own experience of menstruation during this transitioning process have not yet influenced interpretations of the narrative.

I have shown that reception histories of the narrative, including West's, reveal when and how Bat-Yiphtach has been characterized as a child or young person, by whom, and for what purposes. Reception scholarship also reveals that the narrative's usefulness for social ends has repressed a view of Bat-Yiphtach as a transitioning child and the transitioning child's perspective. In the following section, I examine how feminist scholarship changed scholars' capacities to attend to Bat-Yiphtach. However, the predominance of scholars' concern with a gender binary again neglects a characterization of Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child. She is a woman or young woman whose transition is already completed.

Feminist Scholarship and the Gender Binary

The perspectives and views of female characters in feminist scholarship on Judges have been invaluable in ushering in changes in the narrative's interpretation. The ability of feminist scholars to see not just Bat-Yiphtach but all the female characters in Judges was a crucial step

2018), 136. Claassen also notes that Nguni tradition and myth assigned virgin daughters the mythical power to cure their father of HIV and AIDS. Claassens, "Give Me That Strength," 139.

¹⁰⁵ Day also ties the ritual to menstruation, as I discuss below. See Day, "From the Child Is Born," 68. In addition, Miller applies van Gennep's construction of rites of passage and Leviticus 15 to suggest that the narrative implies separation of menstruating women. Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 86–7. I expand on Miller's suggestion using research with post-menarcheal subjects in Chapter 3.

away from a history of biblical scholarship on Judges in which the females were neglected. Thus, feminist scholars have productively questioned the gender binary, with the goal of revealing and countering the effects of male-only scholarship and patriarchal systems and habits of thought. Such scholarship also has invited further explorations of what has not yet been seen. I suggest that visions of *women* in the narratives in Judges, based on the gender binary, have obscured scholars' capacity to see *children* in the texts—especially children in transition. In feminist readings of Bat-Yiphtach, she is referred to as a woman, or a young woman. Despite the use of the adjective *young* by feminist scholars and the consensus that she is not yet married,¹⁰⁶ Bat-Yiphtach remains first and foremost a woman in most feminist interpretations.¹⁰⁷ She has not been characterized as a child in transition.

Mieke Bal, Athalya Brenner, and J. Cheryl Exum provide early examples of feminist scholarship's focus on women, with an emphasis on a gender binary. Bal states that in Judges, in a dissymmetry of power, "[m]en, mighty men, kill innocent young daughters."¹⁰⁸ However, she characterizes these innocent young daughters this way: "[It] was first and foremost the *women*, the daughters, who were thus objectified and turned into the pleasurable or unpleasurable object of desire and murder."¹⁰⁹ Bal's hypothesis in *Death & Dissymmetry* is that "the murders of young women in the book are caused by uncertainty about fatherhood," and that underlying the

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., Niditch, *Judges*, 134; Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 7; and Exum, "Feminist Criticism," 75.

¹⁰⁷ Tribble states in *Texts of Terror* that "my task is to tell sad stories as I hear them. Indeed, they are tales of terror with women as victims." Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 1. Women are Tribble's overarching concern. In her chapter on Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, the terminology of daughter dominates. Tribble also uses woman and child vocabulary. Her use of child terminology can be interpreted as either predominantly relational (daughter as offspring) or a combination of offspring and of a social understanding of young human. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 93–109.

¹⁰⁸ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 235.

book's political-religious concerns is "a social revolution that concerns the institution of marriage."¹¹⁰ She suggests that, in this changing socio-cultural world, the ownership of daughters, who were seen as property, was being transferred to the husband's household instead of remaining with the father's house.¹¹¹ Nolan Fewell, describing Bal's work, says that "the book [Judges] is about murder and, in particular, about the dissymmetry between the murder of men by *women* and the murder of *women* by men."¹¹² Athalya Brenner, also taking a broader view of Judges, states that "on closer scrutiny, the sheer volume of *women's* stories, in the sense of 'stories about *women*,' does not void the realization that strong androcentric premises underlie these texts."¹¹³ The language of women and men indicates that the gender binary is prioritized in the reading of Bat-Yiphtach, and the sense that Bat-Yiphtach, or other female characters in Judges, might be read as a transitioning child is absent from these perspectives.

To illustrate, in Bal's analysis of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, the daughter's state of being in transition is in view throughout, but this transitional state is not conceived as a *child* in transition. Her careful narratological analysis to establish a socio-historical setting of Judges and the argument she constructs about the meaning of בתולים/בתולה as having a future orientation might account for her disinterest in Bat-Yiphtach's character as child and the embodied effects of

¹¹⁰ Emphasis added. Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 6, 5.

¹¹¹ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 6. Some scholars have questioned the evidence for this proposal. See, e.g., Sabo, "The Lot Complex," 174.

¹¹² Emphasis added. Danna Nolan Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing," in *Judges and Method*, ed. Gale Yee, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 128. Nolan Fewell constructs Bat-Yiphtach's status as child in Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003). I review this work in Chapter 2.

¹¹³ Emphasis added. Athalya Brenner, introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 9.

transition.¹¹⁴ Bal constructs *נערה*, *בתולה*, and *עלמה* as terms that indicate three categories of female life stages; she thus argues that *בתולה* and *היא לא־יִדָּאָה אִישׁ* are not synonymous: They do not both convey Bat-Yiphtach’s virgin status. The earliest of the three stages is not the primary focus of her attention.

Scholars recognizing Bat-Yiphtach as a young woman generally also prioritize a gender binary. For example, Exum recognizes Bat-Yiphtach as a young woman and argues that “words make potent murder weapons in this narrative. Not only are the words spoken by the male protagonist deadly instruments of power over a *woman*, but the storyteller also uses the young woman’s own words against her.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Miller aligns young woman with woman: “[*b*]etulah indicates a broader category of *women*, most likely young women who have reached puberty and can bear a child.”¹¹⁶ When Bat-Yiphtach is described as a *young woman*, the emphasis tends to fall on *woman*, and the *young* modifier’s embodied and relational details are deemphasized. With an emphasis on Bat-Yiphtach’s status as woman, even as a young woman she is not recognized as a child in transition.

Bat-Yiphtach’s transitional state as *young* (woman) deserves more attention than it has thus far received. The boundaries between child, young woman, and woman and the way these boundaries shift in varied readings of the Bat-Yiphtach narrative are worth considering. The inadequacy of the gender binary to deal with the representation of Bat-Yiphtach and to construct an interpretation in which she is the transitioning subject—neither woman nor child—becomes clear. Two elements of the narrative provide additional support for noting the oversight of Bat-

¹¹⁴ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 48–50. I discuss *בתולה*, *בתולים*, and *בתולי* and their varied interpretations below and in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁵ Exum, “On Judges 11,” 137.

¹¹⁶ Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 12.

Yiphtach as transitioning child. They include the challenges in translating the confusing terms, בתולה and בתולים, and a focus on the custom or statute in Judges 11:40. I discuss each of these in turn.

Bat-Yiphtach, a Gender Binary, and בתולי

Designated a בת in Judges 11:29–40, Bat-Yiphtach’s age is ambiguous. This ambiguity contributes to the multiple ways she has been interpreted in Judges 11:34–40. For some biblical scholars reading the MT, Bat-Yiphtach’s concern with בתולי in Judges 11:37 (and the narrator’s concern with בתוליה in 11:38) has provided justification for characterizing Bat-Yiphtach’s status as woman. The ambiguity in and challenges of the terms בתולה and בתולים are central in the history of interpretation in this narrative. The lexeme in Judges 11:37 often has been translated *virginity* in English bibles (e.g., NRSV, KJV).¹¹⁷ Eng identifies 51 occurrences of the term in the Hebrew Bible, which he places in the semantic field of “the young”; he identifies the meaning both as virgin and as young woman.¹¹⁸ Commentators have opted for either meaning, with more recent commentaries generally choosing the latter.¹¹⁹ However, a gender binary and the social

¹¹⁷ Scholars have pointed to the term in Joel 1:8 to question translations as “virginity”; the addressee here is told to wail as a בתולה for the husband or lord of her youth. Day cites Joel 1:8, as well as Esther 2, to support rejecting the translation of בתולים as virginity in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative: “Marriage and intercourse do not terminate young women’s inclusion in the category of *betulim*.” Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman,” 59, 69. Day notes that בתולים can mean virginity in the “strictly legal material,” but “this is a specialized meaning.” Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman,” 69. See also Schneider, *Judges*, 180.

¹¹⁸ Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel* LHBOTS 464 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 58. DCH identifies the term in Judges 11:37 as בתול, with a pronominal suffix and thus with meaning ranging from virginity to young womanhood. See David Clines, ed., “בתול,” “בתולה,” *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* vol. 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 289–90. HALOT cites Judges 11:37ff under בתולים, thus restricting the meaning to the state or evidence of virginity. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “בתולים,” HALOT vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 167. I examine in depth the lexemes בתולה and בתולים, their occurrences, and the expansion of what they signify in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁹ For example, *maidenhood* is the translation offered by Sasson and Niditch. See Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 435; and Niditch, *Judges*, 128. Boling translates the term *virginity*, as does Webb. See Boling, *Judges*, 206; and Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 331. Nelson suggests *status as a virgin*. Nelson, *Judges*, 208. Fox opts for *womanhood*. Fox, *The Early Prophets*, 203.

roles assigned according to it dominate the interpretations; a composite understanding of Bat-Yiphtach as a young, transitioning (virgin) child is lacking.

Momentum among biblical scholars for questioning and shifting the long-held interpretation of בתולה as virginity in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative developed in the 1980s.¹²⁰ Bal and Day both followed Karlheinz Keuken, for example, who states that “Das Wort macht keine Angabe über die Unberhurtheit des Mädchen [The word makes no specification about the untouched nature of the girl].”¹²¹ Instead, the daughter is at a point of transition into marriageable age, and בתולה conveys this point of transition.¹²² Bal's work helped to popularize the proposal: “Keukens (1982) argues that *bethulah* expresses the *nubile state of a grown-up girl*.”¹²³ The length of the conversion from *grown-up girl* to *woman* is constructed as a “point” of transition, occurring in relation to a rite of passage.¹²⁴ As such, a sense of transition as a diachronic process, from Bat-Yiphtach's perspective as child, is lacking.

Following Bal, some scholars have used the term *nubile* to describe Bat-Yiphtach.¹²⁵ *Nubile* can mean “of marriageable condition or age” and can also describe a “sexually

¹²⁰ See Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 59–60. See also J. Cheryl Exum, “Feminist Criticism,” 75.

¹²¹ Karlheinz Keuken, “Richter 11.37f: Rite de Passage und Übersetzungsprobleme,” *BN* 19 (1982): 41–2. Other scholars contributing to the shift and cited by Day include B. Landsberger, “Jungfräulichkeit: ein Beitrag zum Thema Beilager und Eheschliessung,” [Virginity: A Contribution to the Themes of Nuptials and Marriage] in *Symbole Iuridicae et Historicae Martino David Dedicatae*, ed., J. A. Ankum et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 57–8; M. Tsevat, “*bēthūlāh; bēthūlīm*,” *TDOT*, 338–43; and Gordon Wenham, “*bētūlāh* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” *VT* 22 (1972): 326–48. Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 69. Wenham in 1972 stated that בתולה's “semantic field roughly corresponds with that of the English word ‘teenager.’” Wenham, *bētūlāh*, 326.

¹²² Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 48; and Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 59–60.

¹²³ Emphasis added. Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 48.

¹²⁴ I examine below how a focus on the presumed ritual has drawn attention away from Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child.

¹²⁵ See, e.g., Dolores Kamrada “Stranger to One Another: The Motif of Strangeness in the Jephthah Cycle,” in *The Stranger in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Tradition: Papers Read at the First Meeting of the Society of*

attractive... young woman.”¹²⁶ The latter aspects of the term are underemphasized as scholars tend to focus on social roles of females of marriageable age. For example, Kamrada repeats *nubile* multiple times in her interpretation of the narrative, addressing strangeness and the other in the narrative in light of its Deuteronomistic connections. She notes that בתולה means “of marriageable age” and is a period of “extreme danger” between two life stages: that of the daughter and that of the wife.¹²⁷ Bat-Yiphtach “has just become a nubile woman. She runs an extremely great risk by coming out of her father’s house. Nevertheless, it is possibly a usual ritual performed by (nubile) women to go out to greet them ritually as warriors.”¹²⁸ Kamrada also suggests that as a (nubile) woman, Bat-Yiphtach’s adherence to the homecoming ritual outweighs her self-preservation: “To undertake her new position, her new status as a nubile woman, it may be even essential to go out to greet them ritually as women generally do even if she might be aware of the vow of her father.”¹²⁹ Social roles of women are prioritized in her

Jewish and Biblical Studies in Central Europe, Piliscsaba, 2009, ed. Geza Xeravits and Jan Dusek (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 30; Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 18; and Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 227.

¹²⁶ https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nubile?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld (accessed March 23, 2019).

¹²⁷ Kamrada, “Stranger to One Another,” 28–9. Kamrada characterizes the danger in two ways and in light of two perceived rituals: the ritual of greeting warriors after battle and “a kind of ritual (exclusively female) retreat to an outside [dangerous] location, namely the mountains.” Kamrada, 30–1. Bal similarly describes the stage as one of danger. Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 49.

¹²⁸ Kamrada, “Stranger to One Another,” 30. Scholars have recognized a “homecoming custom” or ritual in ancient Israel when women would come out to greet warriors returning from the battlefield. “The role of women as musical celebrants of their men’s victory is a common biblical motif.” Niditch, *Judges*, 134. Susan Ackerman cites Bat-Yiphtach as evidence of this practice, but in her work, women broadly defined, rather than nubile women, are in view. See, e.g., Susan Ackerman, “Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2016). doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.45. Kamrada’s modifier of “nubile” likely is included only as a description of Bat-Yiphtach and is not intended to suggest that only nubile women participated in the ritual practice. See also Jo Ann Hackett, “In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel,” in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan, and Margaret Miles (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 30; and Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* JSOTSup 453 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 105.

¹²⁹ Kamrada, “Stranger to One Another,” 30.

construction of meaning, ignoring the perspectives of children. Furthermore, Bat-Yiphtach is interpreted as already a woman and not as a child in transition.

What Bat-Yiphtach might be weeping about in relation to her בתולים (ואבצה על בתולי) has influenced the way the lexeme is understood. Russaw calls the daughter's "enigmatic declaration... one of the most confusing statements in the biblical text."¹³⁰ What Bat-Yiphtach is seen as mourning primarily depends on understandings of her social role or personal status; on whether interpreters construct her as looking forward or looking back; and on the weeping's relationship to the ritual. The ambiguity in the narrative gives breadth to the term's conceptualizations. Thus, looking forward based on social roles, she mourns that she will die without having had children, according to some interpreters—without having been a wife and mother.¹³¹ Some interpretations look forward and, in retaining the personal embodied status implied in בתולים's meaning of virginity, broaden the conceptualization to assign her concern and weeping to her missing out on sexual experience.¹³² She mourns that she will die without having had heterosexual intercourse, as the narrator points out: She did not "know" a man.¹³³ Or resisting male domination over female sexuality, Bat-Yiphtach does weep over her virginity; and yet her time in the hills with companions (and the ritual she inspired) allows for sexual initiation among friends.¹³⁴ In Reis's reading, she is an adolescent who weeps over her virginity as a

¹³⁰ Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 88. Russaw does not see enough textual evidence to identify the inspiration for the wailing and rejects interpretations that require a ritual or rite of passage.

¹³¹ Boling states that בתולי "presumably [is] a shorthand for 'my childlessness.'" Boling, *Judges*, 209. See also Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, 142.

¹³² Schneider, *Judges*, 181; Victor Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); 127–8.

¹³³ Russaw suggests she does weep for her virginity but does so to direct her father's attention to it. Russaw, *Daughters*, 152.

¹³⁴ Mercedes Navarro Puerto, *Violencia, sexism, silencio. In-conclusiones en el libro de los Jueces* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 2013), 58–9, cited in Bachman, *Judges*, 143.

shrewdly calculating way to get what she wants from her overindulgent father, including time to seek intervention from other gods.¹³⁵

With בתולה as a life stage, and with a future perspective, Bat-Yiphtach “is lamenting that her present place in the social-life cycle will not move on to the next appropriate stage.”¹³⁶

Nelson explains בחולים as “an abstract plural of a state or condition” and offers a breadth of conceptualizations from which interpreters tend to draw: “She will not experience the social role of being married. This *batûlâ* social status is not essentially a matter of not having had sex, but of being of marriageable age and not yet married, of being fertile but not having birthed a first child.”¹³⁷ Although not “essentially” about sexuality and thus virginity, a conceptualization of בתולה and בחולים as related to a “marriageable age” is not so easily compartmentalized. Bal notes a relationship between sexuality and marriageability in that, for ancient Israelites (and in many contemporary cultures), virginity is an “important value” that determines “marriageability.”¹³⁸ In addition, Day suggests that menarche and menstruation are part of an understanding of marriageability: Through ritual and social recognition of menarche, a “woman is (socially) ready

¹³⁵ Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 286. Bat-Yiphtach’s going “down” on the mountains is characterized by Reis as a spiritual descent, not just a physical one. In going down, Bat-Yiphtach leaves not just her father’s house, but also her father’s religion and “the one God” (the one requiring fulfillment of the vow). Ibid. Reis sees Bat-Yiphtach as a “girl” between 13 and 15 years of age. She argues that the vow did not involve child sacrifice, and she constructs Bat-Yiphtach as a spoiled child of an indulgent father. She bases her descriptions on contemporary stereotypes of adolescents as ones who displace blame and respond insolently to their father’s “careful and considerate” communication. Bat-Yiphtach is a willful teenager who does not show her father his due respect. Meanwhile, Ackerman sees her as “one who is loyal to the standards of the Israelite covenant community.” Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer*, 62.

¹³⁶ Nelson, *Judges*, 220.

¹³⁷ Nelson, *Judges*, 220.

¹³⁸ Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, 48. As such, Garcia Bachmann suggests that “[p]hysical virginity not be discarded as an asset for *women*, since it gave the girl’s family one extra element at the time of negotiating an advantageous marriage.” Emphasis added. Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, 143.

for marriage.”¹³⁹ Based on the presumed ritual and the social recognition of Bat-Yiphtach’s assumed physical maturity and sexual maturity, Day constructs her as a woman who has completed the transition: “By physical maturity I mean menarche, a *woman’s* first menstruation.”¹⁴⁰ In this case, one menstruation cycle brings Bat-Yiphtach into the category of woman. Bachmann has Bat-Yiphtach looking to the past and mourning: Focusing on Bat-Yiphtach’s request for a delay in her sacrifice, she suggests, “[t]he teenager was asking for a time to mourn her childhood, with all that entails, leaving it behind and becoming an adult.”¹⁴¹ Counter to interpretations that rely on either past or future orientations to Bat-Yiphtach’s mourning, the transition might be visualized from the child’s perspective as a lengthier process. However, Bat-Yiphtach has not yet been characterized as a child in transition; her transitional status continues to be ignored.

The ambiguity in בתולה fails to provide interpretive stability in Judges 11:37–38 and consensus about how to characterize Bat-Yiphtach. The term can be seen as conveying a range of concepts involved in being female and a youth.¹⁴² Consequently, scholars’ exegetical perspectives and purposes influence how בתולה—more specifically, how Bat-Yiphtach’s weeping upon her בתולים (אבכה על בתול’)—shapes their perceptions of Bat-Yiphtach and interpretations of her narrative. Since the shift to seeing בתולה as a life stage related to puberty and marriageability, interpreters have focused on sociological conceptions and etic perceptions of this life stage. A

¹³⁹ Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 68.

¹⁴⁰ Emphasis added. Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 68.

¹⁴¹ Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, 142.

¹⁴² Sabo rightly notes that “daughters who are of marriageable age *are* [generally] virgins. So the gap between בתולה/בתולים and virginity is not that wide and they clearly become intertwined in this passage.” Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 231, n. 102.

gender binary and social construction have obscured the specifics of Bat-Yiphtach's embodiedness, including her virginity, in interpretations of בתולי. She has not been characterized as a transitioning child, taking into account emic perceptions. In addition, although interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative by biblical scholars now tend to understand בתולה as describing a female of marriageable age or condition, the construction of this period of transition and the prioritizing of a gender binary often neglect the entrypoint of this transition for Bat-Yiphtach and the effects of menstruation as what makes her body "marriageable."¹⁴³ The lexeme בתולה has come to be associated with a stage of life, but the diachronic process of transition has been deemphasized as interpreters have focused on the arrival at the endpoint of the stage—Bat-Yiphtach as nubile *woman*. In addition, interpretations that have a process of transition in view primarily have deemphasized Bat-Yiphtach's physical transitioning body. She has not been interpreted as a child in transition.

Focus on the Ritual

In some interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, the apparent ritual (custom or statute) seen in Judges 11:40 draws attention away from Bat-Yiphtach as a transitioning child. A commonly held view is that the custom serves as a rite of passage, but as Fuchs has noted, attention to a ritual tends to draw attention toward broader social practices and away from Bat-

¹⁴³ As a "marriageable object," she is simply "no longer a girl." See Schneider, *Judges*, 180. See also Nelson, *Judges*, 220. In referring to Bal and her assertion that Bat-Yiphtach is not a girl, Schneider notes that "one should bear in mind, when evaluating Bal's treatment, that the biblical text never records the females' [Achsah or Bat-Yiphtach's] ages nor what their bodies were or were not doing at any time." Schneider, *Judges*, 180. As illustrated, the narrative's economy, its ambiguity, and its gaps have invited many different considerations of the narrative's implications by interpreters. What is not recorded does not preclude consideration of what Bat-Yiphtach's body might or might not be doing.

Yiphtach.¹⁴⁴ No evidence exists for such a ritual apart from Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, focusing on the ritual has drawn scholars' attention toward the practice of the ritual in the social worlds both behind the text and in front of it using sociological, anthropological, and comparative literature lenses. Mikael Sjöberg makes the connection of daughter and ritual explicit: "The choice of a centre is a matter of perspective, which has consequences for the function of the other actors.... Many feminist exegetes have understood the daughter to be the subject of the story. The object would then be the establishment of the yearly women's rite, with the female companions and Jephthah as helpers."¹⁴⁶ However, as Fuchs appropriately recognizes, the object in this case—the ritual—becomes the subject of interest: This focus on the ritual takes the focus off of Bat-Yiphtach.¹⁴⁷

Peggy Day focuses on the "annual festival" that Bat-Yiphtach becomes or initiates and proposes that the ritual serves as "the *social recognition* of her transition to physical maturity," understood as "puberty" or "adolescence."¹⁴⁸ Day defines physical maturity as the first menstruation.¹⁴⁹ Her 1989 proposal that the four-day annual event referenced in Judges 11:40 represents a rite of passage or puberty ritual has remained a common understanding for some

¹⁴⁴ Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 129.

¹⁴⁵ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 33; Reis, "Spoiled Child," 287.

¹⁴⁶ Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 31.

¹⁴⁷ Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 129.

¹⁴⁸ Emphasis added. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman," 58–9. Day calls Bat-Yiphtach the archetype of female adolescence: "If women today wish to appropriate the story of Jephthah's daughter and contextualize it in their own lives, they would do well to hear [Carol] Gilligan's voice as it resonates with the words of Jephthah's daughter who, as archetype of female adolescence, resolved a moral dilemma by completely ignoring her own well-being.... Adolescent morality [total self-sacrifice] must be abandoned along the road to full maturity." Day, 66–7. This vision of adolescent morality is diametrically opposite the view crafted by Reis, whose adolescent Bat-Yiphtach is spoiled and self-interested. See Reis, "Spoiled Child."

¹⁴⁹ Day, "From the Child," 68.

scholars who address the question of what the reference in the verse to a custom or statute indicates.¹⁵⁰ Day poses questions about the nature of the festival or rite of passage and states that “[t]he participants [in the festival] likely would have understood the rite to be the repetition/commemoration of an actual first-time event...”¹⁵¹ She notes that לתנוח is “the crux” of the question and interprets the ritual festival as recounting or repeating the original mountain experience of Bat-Yiphtach and her companions.¹⁵²

Day’s interest in proposing a plausible, socio-historical reconstruction of the ritual or custom as a rite of passage relies on other ancient literature: the stories of Iphigenia and the goddess Kore/Persephone.¹⁵³ Each of these stories is said to “‘tell the story’ of leaving immaturity behind.”¹⁵⁴ Day’s work on the ritual as a rite of passage has been widely cited. In doing so, Niditch states that “the tale of Jephthah’s daughter has wider significance for the rites of passage experienced by all young women of marriageable age in traditional cultures.”¹⁵⁵ Susan Ackerman also focuses on the ritual-related etiology in the story: Bat-Yiphtach initiates “a coming-of-age ritual of weeping and lamentation that all young Israelite women are compelled to

¹⁵⁰ Exum suggests that the daughter became an example. Exum, “Judges 11,” 76. Meanwhile, Reis critiques interpreters’ linking of חק to the action of the daughters of Israel. She suggests instead that the feminine verb, “it was” refers back to בתוליה as a feminine noun and that the work of childbirth was prohibited to women consecrated to YHWH. Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 289–90.

¹⁵¹ Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 58–9. Scholarly terminology would call the story “an etiology or foundation legend, and... speak of Jephthah’s daughter as a culture heroine.” Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman,” 59.

¹⁵² Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 67, n.4.

¹⁵³ Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 60–66.

¹⁵⁴ Day, “From the Child Is Born,” 65. The similarity between Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative and Iphigenia narratives is widely noted by biblical scholars.

¹⁵⁵ Niditch, *Judges*, 134. In folklore, the tale’s resemblance to “Beauty and the Beast” and other tales about “girls in passage” is relevant, says Niditch. “On some level, the woman is to be sacrificed to the ‘beast,’ the male to whom she is given in exchange by her own men, fathers or brothers. Her ‘sacrifice’ confirms the relationship between these men. In Judges the males involved in the exchange are the deity and the hero.” Niditch, *Judges*, 134.

enact to mark their movement out of childhood and into adolescence and thus, according to the Israelite life-cycle calendar, into the age of marriageability.”¹⁵⁶ Day, Niditch, and Ackerman focus on the ritual at the end of the story. The focus on the ritual as a rite of passage has been important in the narrative’s history of scholarship. The rite of passage interpretation recognizes Bat-Yiphtach as being in transition, but the focus on the social practice draws attention away from an emic perspective of the child in transition.

Mary Ann Beavis’s focus on the ritual has a similar effect but shifts the ritual’s focus from a rite of passage to Bat-Yiphtach’s sacrifice. In contrast to Day’s proposal, she emphasizes the ritual event as commemoration of the sacrifice. Relating the initial event too closely with the annual festival ignores the lamenting or bewailing that Bat-Yiphtach herself does (ואבכה) on the mountain, Beavis asserts. Only the latter event, the festival, thus should be treated as a celebration.¹⁵⁷ With this shift, Beavis focuses on other ancient rituals rather than on rituals related to rites of passage. Like Day, she turns to contemporary literary influences in the ancient Near East and uses them to support her argument about the ritual. In light of these influences, she draws a connection between the narrative’s military association and the sacrifice: “The similarities between the Greek sacrificial virgins and Jephthah's daughter are patent. *Bat* is the daughter of the chieftain Jephthah; she voluntarily allows herself to be sacrificed to fulfill a vow

¹⁵⁶ Susan Ackerman, “Women’s Rites of Passage in Ancient Israel: Three Case Studies (Birth, Coming of Age, and Death),” in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies*, ed. Rainer Albertz, Beth Alpert Nakhai, Saul M. Olyan, and Rüdiger Schmitt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 2014), 15. Ackerman calls the story “a coming-of-age ritual for young women analogous to the young men’s ritual to which the Isaac story hints” (14). See also Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman,” 58–74.

¹⁵⁷ Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 20–21. Again, note the various characterizations of לתורה as retelling, recounting, lamenting, and singing dirges.

associated with a military triumph; a festival is established in her honour.”¹⁵⁸ Beavis thus suggests that “the celebration of Jephthah's daughter was the ancient Israelite equivalent of a heroine cult.”¹⁵⁹ Bat-Yiphtach’s sacrifice reflects a widely seen pattern of daughter (and son) sacrifices in its contemporary ancient literature. It follows a common three-fold pattern: “(1) a virgin’s life is traded for a military victory or the end of a plague; (2) the victim is willing; (3) the sacrifice is carried out and the victim is honoured as a saviour (*soteira*).”¹⁶⁰

The shift from Day’s interpretation of the ritual as a rite of passage gives renewed emphasis to Bat-Yiphtach’s sacrifice and to the practice of virgin sacrifice. Beavis sees her shift in the interpretation of the rite or festival as difficult for feminist interpreters to accept, however, because it implicates the woman celebrants in glorifying Bat-Yiphtach’s victimization. The cult “was dedicated to a woman, and participated in by women,” she notes, and “[t]he point of the celebration would have been to arouse patriotism and the willingness to die for the nation among the daughters (*binot*), as well as the sons (*bene*), of Israel.”¹⁶¹ Despite the shift in the ritual’s focus, a shift from *woman* terminology to *child* terminology is absent in Beavis’s analysis.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 22. The voluntary nature of Bat-Yiphtach’s sacrifice is taken from Danna Nolan Fewell’s reading. See Nolan Fewell, “Judges,” 71.

¹⁵⁹ Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 22.

¹⁶⁰ Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 21. For this description, Beavis draws on Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Heroine Cults* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 105, n.59.

¹⁶¹ Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 24. Exum, noting the androcentrism of the narrated ritual, questions, “Is this really the kind of ritual women would hold, or simply a male version of a women's ritual?” Exum, “Murder They Wrote,” 31. Beavis’s reading suggests that the answer to Exum’s question is yes, the ritual is the kind of ritual women would hold.

¹⁶² Beavis’s only reference to בתולה defines the term as “girl.” The meaning is provided in a paragraph on interpretations of the narrative when the favored view of Yiphtach’s vow had him dedicate his virgin daughter to YHWH, rather than sacrifice her. Transition and life stage are absent in the term’s assigned meaning here, although the context in which Beavis uses it does refer to a period before marriage, before sexual activity, and before bearing children. Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel,” 16.

Beavis's focus on the ritual shifts Day's construction of the ritual as a rite of passage but still draws attention away from Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, like Beavis, sees that the narrative's concern is with sacrifice. The narrative in Judges 11 "go[es] to the heart of biblical ideas about child sacrifice."¹⁶³ As a result, the narrative is not concerned with puberty rituals or providing sacred archetypes for girls.¹⁶⁴ However, for reception purposes, recognizing the narrative's ritual as a rite of passage into puberty enhances its usefulness: As pubescent girl, Bat-Yiphtach becomes the pious model child in a patriarchal society for the daughters of Israel who appear in Judges 11:40.¹⁶⁵ In this reading, Bat-Yiphtach's story is framed as a source of strength for girls undergoing a puberty ritual. The unnamed daughter becomes their heroine and role model, alleviating their anxiety about puberty. This interpretation focuses foremost on the textual ritual and characterizes the daughter as a "mistress of piety and devotion to God" to be emulated.¹⁶⁶ In her reading of the narrative and her concern with the ritual and its participants, Frymer-Kensky focuses on reception of the text, similar to the narrative's reception in Isaiah Shembe's *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, discussed above. In Frymer-Kensky's case, Bat-Yiphtach's own transitioning body is deemphasized to allow for her archetypal, timeless, nameless status.

¹⁶³ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 115.

¹⁶⁴ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, n.p.

¹⁶⁵ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 113. "In ancient societies, the advent of puberty must have been terrifying to girls," says Frymer-Kensky; these terrified daughters face patriarchal, violent cultures (in wartime); uncertainty about their transfer to a father-chosen husband "who might abuse or exploit her"; and high maternal mortality rates. Through a puberty ritual, the daughters of Israel "might themselves mark the 'death' of a girl child, their own prepubescent selves, as they relive [Bat-Yiphtach's] experience."

¹⁶⁶ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 114.

Beginning in the last quarter of the twentieth century, feminist readings of Bat-Yiphtach (and of Judges more broadly) were crucial in revealing what was repressed or veiled in earlier readings, which focused on the male leaders. My review of the scholarship reveals that some of the recent characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach repress and veil her status as transitioning child. Focusing both on the lexemes בתולה and בתולים and their implications and on the presumed ritual reveals that many interpreters have constructed a social status of Bat-Yiphtach as a woman or young woman. These interpretations fail to read her, from her perspective, as a child in transition.

Bat-Yiphtach as Daughter in Father–Daughter Scholarship

Scholars recently have surveyed and focused on daughters and father–daughter relationships in the Hebrew Bible, seeking to balance the predominance of the texts’ interest in sons and father–son relationships¹⁶⁷ and to question some scholars’ assertions that daughters are depicted in the Hebrew Bible as expendable.¹⁶⁸ “There is no daughter story in the Hebrew Bible that does not also feature a father, for the biblical text assumes that a woman must always be defined in subordinate position to a patriarch,” says Sabo.¹⁶⁹ While some scholars, such as Joanna Stiebert, heighten the relational component, others, such as Kimberly Russaw,

¹⁶⁷ Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, viii. Scholars recognize that very few mother–daughter relationships are depicted in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁶⁸ Stiebert, *Fathers & Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 7–8. Stiebert seeks additional nuance to interpretations and recognition of the diversity of biblical father–daughter relationships. Daughters have been characterized as “expendable” (e.g., by Anne Michele Tapp and Esther Fuchs) and fathers as tyrannical and violent (e.g., by Hildegunde Wöller).

¹⁶⁹ Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 2. The daughter–mother relationship in Song of Songs seems to be an exception to Sabo’s rule.

deemphasize it. However, in neither case is Bat-Yiphtach characterized as a child in transition. She is recognized as a daughter and thus an offspring (and a child only in this sense).

Russaw focuses on daughters as “unmarried *women* who are not yet mothers and reside under the authoritative gaze and protective arm of the father; and on how they negotiate systems of power in the world of the HB’s narratives.”¹⁷⁰ In Russaw’s reading of Bat-Yiphtach, the daughter shows resistance by going to the all-female space on the mountain. However, her father is a rogue and an outlaw, and without community support, she has no choice: The daughter’s “only option is to align with her father’s agenda.”¹⁷¹

Stiebert’s research on father–daughter relationships in the Hebrew Bible appropriately retains a relational sense of Bat-Yiphtach as offspring of Yiphtach. Stiebert is attentive to both the gender and the age differentials in father–daughter relationships. Against her feminist conversation partners, she argues that daughters are no more expendable than sons and are portrayed at times in the biblical texts as valued and cherished, including in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative: “[The daughter’s] youthful potential as an unmarried virgin girl and her status as a daughter, entitled to paternal protection, heighten not expendability but the tragedy and pathos of the sacrifice.”¹⁷² Stiebert’s analysis is that Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative shows that in the biblical texts both daughters and sons are deemed worthy of sacrifice in dire circumstances. Because of the structure of their arguments and their conversation partners, neither Stiebert nor Russaw construct a vision of Bat-Yiphtach as child in transition.

¹⁷⁰ Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, viii.

¹⁷¹ Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 163.

¹⁷² Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters*, 97. “The story makes best sense if the daughter is not expendable but, instead, highly valuable—a sacrifice *only* worth making to a God to whom devotion is owed.” Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters*, 93.

Sabo offers conceptual analyses of a wide range of biblical daughter–father pairs in his examination of the “biblical presentation of daughters and the pattern of desires, fears, and themes that surround it.”¹⁷³ He identifies numerous themes at work in Judges narratives more broadly, including ethnic boundaries; endogamous and exogamous marriage; religious infidelity; vows; dependence of men on women; and daughters’ place in the *בית אב* as a signifier of Israel’s ambiguous and unstable place in Canaan.¹⁷⁴ “The daughter, whose role is so important for the patriarchal ideology of Judges, also poses a genuine problem for it,” he notes.¹⁷⁵ In this case, transitions—more precisely, failed transitions to motherhood, including Bat-Yiphtach’s—are in full view. However, Sabo’s readings of the daughters emphasize their status as offspring/child, and not as child/young person. He focuses on transitions *to*, which do not happen, rather than on transitions *from*, which are happening. Bat-Yiphtach is not interpreted as a child in transition.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this review of scholarship, the ambiguity in this narrative and of Bat-Yiphtach’s status allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. Her characterization as child in transition has not yet been offered.¹⁷⁶ Contemporary interpreters often have cast Bat-Yiphtach as woman or young woman, structured along a gender binary. Interpretations by creators of

¹⁷³ Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 2.

¹⁷⁴ Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 193–264.

¹⁷⁵ Sabo, “The Lot Complex,” 193.

¹⁷⁶ Kristene Henriksen Garroay’s recently published chapter examines several narratives, including Bat-Yiphtach’s, in which the transition of daughters into marriage has failed. See Kristene Henriksen Garroay, “Failure to Marry: Girling Gone Wrong,” in *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, ed. Shawn Flynn (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 59–74. Henriksen Garroay has had significant influence in the development of childist and child-centered interpretation, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

children's bibles cast her as child whose most praiseworthy trait is obedience, based on a potentially problematic child–adult binary. In both cases, underlying presuppositions about both these binaries and interpreters' exegetical concerns influence the readings. My review of the scholarship on Bat-Yiphtach, in which she is viewed as woman, young woman, adolescent, and child, reveals the ambiguity of her status.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's description illustrates well how adult constructions of transitional children can simultaneously challenge easy categorizations: She sees "a high and lovely ideal of womanhood in the Judaeen girl"—the very picture "of calmness and high-mindedness."¹⁷⁷ This high and lovely ideal of girlish womanhood is characterized by submission and obedience—an ideal that contemporary feminist and childist biblical scholars both would question.

In the following chapter, I explain how the relatively new childist and child-oriented lens of biblical interpretation offers a productive methodology for seeing and interpreting children in biblical narratives, and in the social worlds behind and in the texts. Relying on research in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies, I construct the lens that I use in Chapters 3 and 4 to contribute an emic perspective of Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition.

¹⁷⁷ Sabo, "The Lot Complex," 164; Gunn, "Cultural Criticism," 216.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDHOOD STUDIES AND CHILD-ORIENTED BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP: METHODOLOGIES FOR A TRANSITIONING CHILD

As I revealed in the previous chapter, different interpreters categorize and characterize Bat-Yiphtach at different ages and different life stages. For some interpreters, she is a model child; for some, a sacrificed child. For one, she is a spoiled teen; for others, she's a pubescent, nubile young woman. For many scholars, she is a woman. But scholars have not yet recognized Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition and generated an interpretation of the narrative from a child-oriented or childist perspective.

Given the interpretive differences, then, what conceptualizations of childhood, adulthood, and human development have contributed to the varying views of Bat-Yiphtach? What presuppositions about children and childhood and a supposed journey to adulthood, the arrival into womanhood, lie behind interpreters' characterizations of her? The insights and perspectives of scholars in the multidisciplinary field of childhood studies help to provide answers to these questions.

In this chapter, I explain the research and perspectives of scholars contributing to the field of childhood studies, who first and foremost have an interest in children and their realities. The breadth of the field extends from contemporary children to ancient children in its historical trajectory; it extends through sociological, psychological, biological, philosophical, and theoretical perspectives of children and their realities, incorporating children's own perspectives on their lives and contexts. Childhood studies more fully accounts for developmental, diachronic

positionality in human being and becoming, beginning in the earlier stages of human lifespans. Childhood studies reveals presuppositions behind a child–adult binary that, once recognized, can lead to new interpretive possibilities for Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. In light of this work, I explain the heuristic that I use to read Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. Doing so requires an interrogation of the child–adult binary. My thesis in this chapter is that the research in childhood studies—on children, the sociology of childhood, and child–adult relationality—reveals some of the presuppositions related to the child–adult binary that shape interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, including interpretations of her life stage and agency.

Childhood Studies: An Overview

Although research on children is not new, an interdisciplinary interest in children is more recent. The distinction between discrete disciplinary approaches to research on children (e.g., in social psychology, cultural anthropology, developmental psychology, and educational ethnography) and an interdisciplinary view on children and childhood has led to the construction, beginning in the late twentieth century, of the multidisciplinary field of childhood studies.¹⁷⁸ The field “is designed to dismantle inaccurate and often destructive definitions of childhood,”¹⁷⁹ and its practitioners are a multidisciplinary mix of boundary-crossing scholars whose interest in children, and the tenacity with which they focus on children, bring them together. Such attention, interests, and perspectives can contribute to a reading of Judges 11:29–40 in which Bat-Yiphtach

¹⁷⁸ Alison James, “Interdisciplinarity – for Better or Worse,” *Children’s Geographies* 8, no. 2 (May 2010): 215.

¹⁷⁹ Anna Mae Duane, Introduction to *Children’s Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 20.

becomes a fully embodied child in transition—and one whose agency requires a complex, relational assessment.

Particularity in the Terminology of Child and Childhood

Defining the terms of “childhood,” “the child” (as an abstraction), and “children” can be difficult because their meanings and conceptualization lack stability in the field’s history, as well as across its disciplines, through time, and across cultures. As a result, scholars contributing to the field of childhood studies have to delineate what the terms indicate in their particular research. In this delineation, David Oswell notes four central and interrelated questions that those who study and research in childhood studies should address: What is a child? How is childhood differentiated from adulthood? How do we understand the process of growth of a child? And what freedoms or controls are appropriately placed on a child?¹⁸⁰ The responses to these questions, as well as the questions driving the research, affect how the meanings of childhood, the child, and children are constructed.

To illustrate, when, where, and how adult awareness of “childhood” as distinct from “adulthood” has existed historically has been fiercely debated in the field of childhood studies. The scholarly debate was sparked after Philippe Ariès posited in his seminal work, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, that despite no shortage of young people in medieval and post-medieval society, a sense of children as distinct from adults and a stage of life called

¹⁸⁰ David Oswell, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5. Oswell contributes to the perspective and trajectory of the sociology of childhood and, in particular, to questions related to children’s agency. The four questions thus reflect contemporary perspectives rather than reconstructions of historical perspectives on a child, childhood and adulthood, child development, and agency in light of structures of control.

childhood were not operative in child–adult relationality.¹⁸¹ Sarah Chinn calls Ariès’s work “the text that inaugurated scholarly study of childhood in the first place.”¹⁸² Ariès posited childhood as “an invention of modernity,” according to Susan Honeyman, and since then, “childhood studies has argued for recognizing the state of prolonged protection (and sometimes fetishization) generally ascribed to Western youth as relatively constructed, class bound, and historically varied.”¹⁸³ Jens Qvortrup identifies an “Arièsian” understanding of childhood as a social space conceptually constructed as severed from the social space of adulthood.¹⁸⁴ In contemporary scholarship, creating a socio-cultural space called childhood has stimulated the growth of the field of childhood studies, including sociology of childhood.

Biological distinctions and development across lifespans also influence definitions of childhood and children and the study of them. Childhood can have a temporal orientation, referring to a pre-adult and also non-adult life stage or lifeworld. With this orientation, social

¹⁸¹ See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). For a history of the debate that Ariès inspired about the existence of “childhood,” see, e.g., Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Elisha Cycle*, BJS 55 (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2013), 28–37.

¹⁸² Sarah Chinn, “‘I Was a Lesbian Child’: Queer Thoughts about Childhood Studies,” in *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 122.

¹⁸³ Susan Honeyman, “Trans(cending)gender Through Childhood,” in *Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 134 (134–145). Honeyman explains the need to recognize presuppositions based on Western understandings of “child”: “Most of the world’s young can’t afford what many in affluent nations take for granted as universal: early years of total dependence, security, innocence, extended play, and compulsory education.” Honeyman, “Trans(cending)gender,” 134.

¹⁸⁴ Some scholars have interpreted Ariès as proposing that medieval parents, because they did not account for “childhood,” were not caring, affectionate, or protective, says Qvortrup. Qvortrup’s interpretation of Ariès is that he had more to say about children’s participation (and thus visibility) in public/social life: “It is one of the paradoxes of Ariès’s work that children were much more visible when childhood did not exist. They were much more visible in the sense that fewer doors were closed to them and they had access to the same arenas as adults.” Jens Qvortrup, “Varieties of Childhood,” in *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, ed. Jens Qvortrup (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.

separation is not necessarily part of the definition¹⁸⁵; as a result, childhood can refer to a target or object of study even in times and in social arenas that involve less socially segregated and potentially more developmentally connected children and adults. For example, in discourses on childhood trauma, childhood and adulthood are more closely intertwined: Childhood has long-term effects that prevent characterization of childhood as a time left behind. Use of chronologically delineated categories to define childhood rely on distinctions formulated by adults and also must be recognized as socio-culturally dependent.¹⁸⁶ Scholars in the field of childhood studies thus recognize that spatial, temporal/developmental, and relational aspects of human being influence conceptualizations of childhood as distinct from adulthood. As Laurel Koepf-Taylor notes, childhood indicates “a set of cultural assumptions placed on children.”¹⁸⁷ These assumptions, often based on an uninterrogated perspective of “adulthood,” can be examined, problematized, and reconfigured, thus affecting definitions of childhood.

Scholars in childhood studies also have made distinctions between “the child” and “a child” or “children.” “The child” is an object of study (e.g., initially by developmental psychologists in the twentieth century) about which generalizations can be made—the “universal child,” de-spatialized and de-contextualized, as Qvortrup notes.¹⁸⁸ Assumptions about the capacity and desire to make generalizations about “the child” (e.g., the ancient Near Eastern child) vary among scholars, their disciplines, and their research methods. Defining “the child” or

¹⁸⁵ See, e.g., Qvortrup, “Varieties of Childhood,” 2.

¹⁸⁶ “Chronological age is among the axes of human variability that have been linked to the social distribution of dignity and respect.” Nick Lee, *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Open University Press), 1.

¹⁸⁷ Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁸⁸ Qvortrup, “Varieties of Childhood,” 3.

“a child” thus depends on explicit articulations of disciplinary and methodological assumptions and desires. In addition, understandings and definitions of “the child” and “a child” or “children,” as well as childhood, tend to begin from the presupposition of a biological or social distinction from what “the adult,” “an adult,” and adulthood are. “We know what a child is in the context of how that child is different from an adult and how they might be seen to progress from one stage of being to another,” says Oswell.¹⁸⁹ However, the presuppositions underlying the “adult” side of the child–adult binary are less often articulated.

As my review of the literature on Bat-Yiphtach has revealed, the questions at hand and issues related to perspectival differences and to whose interests are being served can influence how the terms of child, children, and childhood are understood and applied.¹⁹⁰ Koepf-Taylor makes the distinction between “the child” and a child or children, seeing the latter as “individuals with their own subjectivities.”¹⁹¹ Contextualization of “the child” is what offers the possibility of “a child,” with her own subjectivity. In this light, my reading constructs Bat-Yiphtach as a transitional child with her own subjectivity. She is an individual child, in contrast to a generalized, universal child. In addition, I accentuate her *process* of growth. She does not go from child to adult in the blink of an eye. Instead, Bat-Yiphtach is a transitioning, post-menarcheal child. Conceptualizations based on a child–adult binary are inadequate for expressing the fullness of her characterization. Questioning the child–adult binary, with both poles in sight, becomes necessary because her interpretation has relied on uninterrogated

¹⁸⁹ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 5.

¹⁹⁰ I survey how scholars in the discipline of biblical studies have addressed issues of child, children, and childhood terminology below.

¹⁹¹ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 7.

presuppositions and non-process orientations of the distinctions between childhood and adulthood.

Tenets and Mantras in Childhood Studies

Several tenets have helped to guide contextualized and generalized research on children and childhood in the past three decades, even as the field of childhood studies and the contributing disciplines more recently have begun to see where new views and corrections could be useful. The work was initially undergirded by “a common intellectual agenda, fuelled by shared assumptions about the ontological status of both children and childhood.”¹⁹² These assumptions, which represented a paradigm shift in scholars’ research on children, are succinctly summarized by Allison James: Research in childhood studies has been based on “agreement, first, that children could—and should—be regarded as social actors; second, that childhood, as a biological moment in the life course, should nonetheless be understood as a social construction; and finally, there was methodological agreement about the need to access children’s views first hand.”¹⁹³ Children’s agency, changes across time in perceptions of childhood (and thus constructions of a history of “childhood”), and giving voice to children and their perspectives have been critical tenets in the early decades of childhood studies. Each arose in response to perceived inadequacies in existing perspectives and research on children: Concern with agency corrected views that emphasized children’s dependence, vulnerability, and passivity; the social

¹⁹² James, “Interdisciplinarity,” 16. Note that in direct quotations where British spellings are used, I retain the original spelling rather than correcting to the U.S. English spelling.

¹⁹³ James, “Interdisciplinarity,” 16. The shift is generally seen as stemming from Alan Prout and Allison James, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems,” in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Falmer, 1990).

constructedness of childhood combatted erroneous assumptions about and excessive focus on presumed norms of child development that were overgeneralized; and giving voice to children from their perspective was intended to correct for their silence amidst adult-centric research on children. Childhood studies thus “critiques the ‘adultist’ tendencies of research and offers more child-centered approaches.”¹⁹⁴ These tenets have led to significant research affirming the social constructedness of childhoods, children’s agency and rights, and children’s perceptions.

In more recent work, scholars have offered further nuance in the questions that these tenets raise about childhood and children.¹⁹⁵ For example, questions about what might have been missed or underemphasized in childhood studies have focused on theoretical critiques, including an absence of relationally adequate theoretical underpinnings; on the imbalance of research on Minority World (i.e., first-world) children and childhood versus Majority World (i.e., third-world) children and childhood¹⁹⁶; on the value of a reconceived developmental psychology; and on the inadequate attention paid to macro factors that affect children’s capacity to act and exercise agency.¹⁹⁷ In the following paragraphs, I first describe multidisciplinary in the field of childhood studies and then survey tenets and paradigms in the field and the correctives they seek to engender in adults’ perceptions of children and childhood.

¹⁹⁴ Lynne Vallone, “Doing Childhood Studies: The View from Within,” in *Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 198.

¹⁹⁵ As my review of scholarship on Judges and Bat-Yiptach in Chapter 1 showed, subsequent scholarship often reveals something that has been overlooked in previous research.

¹⁹⁶ In disciplines contributing to the field of childhood studies, “majority world” signifies third-world countries, where the majority of the world’s children reside, and “minority world” signifies first-world countries. “The terms highlight that First World children are the minority while Third World children are the majority of the world’s child population.” Samantha Punch, “Childhoods in the Majority World: Miniature Adults or Tribal Children?” *Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2003): 278.

¹⁹⁷ E. Kay Tisdall and Samantha Punch, “Not So ‘New’? Looking Critically at Childhood Studies,” *Children’s Geographies* 10, no. 3 (August 2012): 249–264.

Multidisciplinary Perspective

For scholars contributing to childhood studies and addressing the “ontological status” of children, interdisciplinarity allows them to draw on research across the humanities and social sciences, as well as the natural sciences.¹⁹⁸ Duane has suggested that multi-disciplinarity is essential to childhood studies, and that as a result, scholars in the humanities “must accept and respect the social sciences—if not the sciences,” and similarly, scholars in the social sciences “must accept and welcome some of the insights and theoretical models of literature, history, and philosophy (to name a few germane fields).”¹⁹⁹ In coming together over an interest in children, scholars have seen the necessity of at least climbing, if not breaking down, disciplinary walls.

Vallone cites disciplines that have contributed to the field of childhood studies:

Childhood studies, like American studies and women’s studies, draws on the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, political science, religion, literature, philosophy, and psychology, among other fields, for methodologies, theories, texts, and research questions that help it explore and understand its object of inquiry, in this case, children and childhoods.²⁰⁰

Additional home disciplines for scholars engaging in child-centered research include education, gender studies, cultural studies, neuroscience, health and medicine, communications, business and marketing, law, ethics, theology, and biblical studies. In conversation with one another,

¹⁹⁸ Addressing the long history of the varying methods and often antagonistic relationships of these areas of study and research in the academy since the Enlightenment is beyond the scope of this project. Duane addresses some of the issues specific to childhood studies disciplines in the humanities and the sciences in Duane, “Introduction,” 9–11. She states that “[a] brief history of the evolution of childhood studies reveals that the field does not just function as a corrective to scientific essentialism but that it also reveals how profoundly interdependent scientific and humanistic knowledge are in the first place. As an endeavor that focuses on children with the intent of locating and studying their agency, childhood studies defies the easy divisions of biology and culture, body and book.” Duane, “Introduction,” 10.

¹⁹⁹ Vallone, “Doing Childhood Studies,” 189.

²⁰⁰ Vallone, “Doing Childhood Studies,” 189–90.

scholars from diverse fields seek to bridge the gap between the abstract theoretical child and historically situated embodied children and their varied childhoods. Such bridging gives way to varying perspectives on the objects of study: the child, childhood, and actual children, as Mary Jane Kehily notes:

Disciplines have developed different ways of approaching the study of children, often using different research methods driven by a far from coherent set of research questions. For some disciplines (such as sociology and cultural studies), childhood as a concept is specifically addressed, while for other disciplines (such as psychology and education), the focus has been upon the child or children.²⁰¹

Kehily implies that such multi- and interdisciplinarity also creates a path for scholars to learn different methods and processes to effect the research task at hand and to influence its findings.²⁰² Adult scholars and scientists conducting research in transdisciplinary contexts are forced to cope with the messiness of porous borders and boundaries among disciplines and have varying capacities and desires for doing so. However, as the twenty-first century has progressed, scholars and administrators in academia increasingly have affirmed the significance and necessity of interdisciplinarity in higher education and also articulated the challenges.²⁰³ In light

²⁰¹ Mary Jane Kehily, *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, 3rd ed. (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 1.

²⁰² Scholars have suggested several models and metaphors for imagining the interdisciplinarity of childhood studies. For a discussion of these models, see Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 8–9. Koepf Taylor suggests the appropriateness of a “coffeehouse” metaphor: “a conversation space in which the many disciplines that have historically studied children and childhood come together, joined by disciplines that have not traditionally given significant attention to children and childhood. Each discipline brings and shares its own ideas, questions and methodologies.” Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 9. As a fan of coffeehouses and conversation, I appreciate Koepf Taylor’s suggestion. For scholars interested in researching and accessing the perspectives and experiences of children, I also like the metaphor of “playground” as a multidisciplinary space. This image takes seriously the value of movement to access different perspectives (running), relationality (playing well with others), exercise of varying mental and physical muscles (adaptability to different “equipment”), and freedom from the seriousness of being “the expert” (playful self-awareness).

²⁰³ Vallone describes the benefits in and challenges for multidisciplinary childhood studies programs. See Vallone, “Doing Childhood Studies,” 188–200. Noting the increasing presence of childhood studies as a multidisciplinary field on college campuses and in academic publishing, she states that “[t]here are American programs and departments of childhood studies (Brooklyn College and Eastern Washington University offer BA degrees in childhood studies and children’s studies, respectively), as well as European centers and departments (such as the Norwegian Centre for Child Research at the University of Trondheim and the Department of Child Studies at

of this evolution in disciplinary structures, childhood studies and its focus on children offers a particularly fertile field for educating more territorially minded disciplines and their participants about how such interdisciplinarity might be accomplished.

Social Construction of Childhood

Scholars have engaged the question of childhood's conceptualization and its existence and history by acknowledging the social and cultural constructedness of childhood. After acknowledging childhood as a social construction, historians then seek to reconstruct what "childhood" was actually like in a variety of historical contexts, even though childhood as such might not have existed in the minds of the adults in that context. Reconstructing a history of childhood has been a dominant thrust in much of the scholarship on childhood and children, including in the discipline of biblical studies.²⁰⁴ As a result of the historical focus, questions and conversations in a portion of the field of childhood studies have centered on diachronic changes in the public/private visibility of children, in how children have been valued, and in what their

Linköping, Sweden). In addition, various recent conferences (such as the biannual conferences sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth at Sheffield University), journals (such as *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research*, published by Sage Publications since 1993), and proliferating articles and books... on the topic of childhood studies make it abundantly clear that the field enjoys both a history and an identity. However, the field's potential as an urgent and relevant critical discourse that cuts across disciplines is as yet untapped—particularly in the United States." Vallone, "Doing Childhood Studies," 188. The first doctoral program in childhood studies was instituted at Rutgers University, Vallone's institution, in 2007. See also Karri A. Holley, *Understanding Interdisciplinary Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education*, ASHE Higher Education Report 35, no. 2. (San Francisco, CA: JosseyBass, 2009).

²⁰⁴ See, e.g., Reidar Aasgaard and Cornelia Horn, eds., *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018); Shawn Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel: The Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts*, ABS 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); Heath Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel*, EANEC 5 (Winona Park, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017); and Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, EANEC 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

social roles and functions have been.²⁰⁵ Scholars also have focused on recognizing the partiality and inadequacy of contemporary Western, Minority Country, adult characterizations of children as innocent, protected, and passive members of society.²⁰⁶ Each of these strands has helped to emphasize the social constructedness of childhood. As a result, those who research and write about the ontological and socio-historical constructions of childhoods that have existed in various times and places can avoid anachronistic characterizations based on their own contemporary views of what “childhood” signifies.

Developmental Perspectives of “The Child”

Another essential aspect of childhood studies in the first few decades of the field has been to question what “childhood” means by interrogating the existing “dominant framework,” which offered prescriptions of what healthy development into adulthood entails. Such conceptions of children’s development and child–adult relationality have been and continue to be heavily influenced by the sociological and psychological development models of Talcott Parsons and Jean Piaget, respectively, who sought to “offer... solutions to the deep philosophical question of what it means to be human.”²⁰⁷ Their theories provide:

...a picture of what normal growing up is or should be like. In each case, growing up is a movement away from dependency, and the path away from dependency leads to individual confidence in one’s possession of either a particular

²⁰⁵ Questions regarding how adults and social institutions have valued ancient children and children’s functions in ancient households and ancient Near Eastern societies have been particularly relevant to biblical scholars. I survey this scholarship in the following section of this chapter.

²⁰⁶ Recall that “minority country” here refers to first-world countries. See Punch, “Childhoods in the Majority World,” 278.

²⁰⁷ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 42. See, e.g., Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951); and Jean Piaget, *The Child’s Construction of Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955).

knowledge base [for Parsons, social norms, values, and standards] or general thinking skills [for Piaget, rationality].”²⁰⁸

In this framework, children, as *tabula rasa*,²⁰⁹ are passive recipients of the social customs and cognitive content delivered by adult human beings, who have reached the teleological goal and norm for being human. As such, adults can ensure social, familial, and individual stability by developing children in their own image.

Under this framework, young humans—both socially and individually—are considered passive, dependent, and incomplete (i.e., characterized by lack). They are developmentally incomplete, in contrast to adults who have arrived at the developmental endpoint. Children in this case are not yet human *beings* themselves; only adults are characterized as such. Instead, children are categorized as “human *becomings*.”²¹⁰ Among other dichotomies (e.g., children as nature, adults as culture), seeing children as human *becomings*—rather than human *beings*—posits rational adulthood as the goal and endpoint of children’s becoming. Children are known

²⁰⁸ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 42.

²⁰⁹ The term stems from the Enlightenment perspectives of John Locke, who characterized children’s minds as *tabula rasa*, as “blank slates” ready to be written on. Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 29. Paul Rekret provides additional context and purpose for Locke’s position: “When he posed the mind as a *tabula rasa*, John Locke did so in order to ground a hypothetical process of building reason from experience (Locke, 2000) [rather than from innate principles]. On Locke’s formulation, epistemic innocence, for which he posited the child as a privileged vessel, offered direct access to objects in the real world, and thus evaded what was most problematic about accrued knowledge and language.” See Paul Rekret, “The Posthumanist *Tabula Rasa*,” *Research in Education* 101, no. 1 (2018): 26. Locke’s proposition had adult society in view, more than children’s minds. However, the image of children served a twofold purpose for him: They represented epistemic innocence, with critical distance and freedom from traditions, superstitions, and prejudice; and, their innocence also made children potentially corruptible, justifying the control and authority that more knowledgeable adults would exercise over them, and also over the adults the image of children represented. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Dublin: 1786), 14.
<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/ecco/infomark.do?docType=ECCOArticles&docLevel=FASCIMILE&pr odId=ECCO&tabID=T001&type=multipage&version=1.0&userGroupName=txshracd2573&docId=CW332235502 6&contentSet=ECCOArticles&source=gale>

²¹⁰ Jens Qvortrup, “Childhood Matters: An Introduction,” in *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice, and Politics*, ed. Jens Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, and H Wintersberger (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1994), 1–24. See also Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 42–6.

primarily by their differentiation from a standard adult human being, who “is (or should be), stable, complete, self-possessed, and self-controlling.”²¹¹ Children in this case are characterized primarily by potentiality: “Children’s lives and activities *in the present* are... envisaged, in the main, as a preparation for the future.”²¹² As such, children in the dominant framework are “a special case of humanity” and “sites of investment.”²¹³ With the proper investment by adults, whose status grants them the position of legitimate and ultimate authority, the (universal) child can be formed.

As Prout, James, and Lee point out, overemphasis on this developing universal child fails to notice children as individuals, each with his, her, or their own interests, skills, desires, and perspectives. “[*T*]he child of the dominant framework is problematic because it stands between us and actual children.”²¹⁴ An individual child’s voice is muted. As the field of childhood studies developed, seeing and attending to actual children and creating ethnographic research settings in which their voices could be heard and perspectives could be learned offered crucial correctives to the dominant developmental frameworks. Scholars in the field sought to shift the perspectives inherent in the dominant developmental frameworks to allow young people to be both encountered and recognized as equal “beings,” rather than “becomings.”²¹⁵

²¹¹ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 5. Lee raises the question of what happens when adults themselves don’t measure up to this image of the standard adult. Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 9. In doing so, he echoes questions inspired by feminist scholarship as to what happens when men fail to live up to the standard measures of masculinity. Questions regarding assumptions about “standard adulthood” and adults thus are intricately intertwined with questions of children and childhood.

²¹² Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 8. Emphasis in original.

²¹³ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 42–3. Lee points to the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the later UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 as illustration of “a widespread tendency to think of adults and children as fundamentally different types of humans.” *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹⁴ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 44. Emphasis in original. See also James and Prout, eds., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*.

²¹⁵ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 36–54.

A subsequent shift has begun to reveal for scholars in childhood studies that assumptions about stability and control in adulthood no longer are sustainable as a means to construct child–adult relationality. A sense of contextual and social stability had contributed to frameworks built on notions that, along the child–adult binary, development and becoming were linear and progressive and would be complete when adulthood had been reached. However, as the pace of social, technological, and environmental changes has increased in the twenty-first century, scholars focusing on the sociology of childhood, including Lee, have argued for recognition of the reality that development and change characterize womb-to-grave human existence.²¹⁶ Degrees and pace of change, then, can vary by socio-cultural setting and body. The requisite adaptability, which more often has been expected in and assigned to childhood, is part of all human becoming, particularly in unstable socio-cultural settings—including the setting of Judges 11.

Recognition of Children’s Agency and Children’s Rights

The notions of children’s agency and children’s rights are also two key concepts in childhood studies.²¹⁷ One of the primary shifts adopted in the field of childhood studies as it developed after the 1990s has been to recognize children’s agency and their status as social actors, with a capacity to influence their social settings. The shift occurred in response to long-

²¹⁶ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 7–20.

²¹⁷ Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, “Biblical Studies and Childhood Studies: A Fertile, Interdisciplinary Space for Feminists,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 148. See also Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255–59.

standing conceptualizations of children as passive and dependent humans in the making, as I noted in the previous section.²¹⁸

As scholars assert children's agency, they focus on children's capacities for action and influence before they reach adulthood, both individually and as a social collective. Numerous empirical studies have provided "examples of children and young people as competent actors and emphasise[d] their agency."²¹⁹ When they no longer are seen as merely passive, dependent, and vulnerable, young humans can be recognized as "active in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live," state James and Prout.²²⁰ Thus, the focus on young humans' agency has offered correctives of adult constructions of children as passive and powerless. Some of the child-oriented scholarship in biblical studies has relied on and contributed to this focus on children's agency, as I discuss below.

Simultaneous with the recognition of children's agency as a corrective to perceptions of children as passive, dependent, and less competent has been the discourse on and scholars' interest in children's rights. The 1989 United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) helped to engender and formalize a focus and discourse on children's rights.²²¹ The UNCRC confirms that children have the right to care, protection (e.g., from economic

²¹⁸ Tisdall and Punch also note the dominance of traditional theories of childhood advanced by Parson's socialization theory and Piaget's theories on child development. Tisdall and Punch, "Not So 'New,'" 250.

²¹⁹ Tisdall and Punch, "Not So 'New,'" 255.

²²⁰ This definition of agency was provided in James and Prout's paradigm-shifting work in 1990. See James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 8, cited in Tisdall and Punch, "Not So 'New,'" 255.

²²¹ The UNCRC defines child as a human being under the age of 18, unless a signatory's national legal status is granted at a different (younger) age. As a signatory to the UNCRC (as of June 2016), the United States has signed the treaty but has not expressed its consent to be bound by it. "Signature is a means of authentication and expresses the willingness of the signatory State to continue the treaty-making process. The signature qualifies the signatory State to proceed to ratification, acceptance or approval. It also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the treaty." See <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/MetadataRatificationStatus.pdf> (accessed July 11, 2019).

exploitation), and provision of basic needs. It also grants that in childhood, “children and young people [are] social actors and human beings with their own rights.”²²² With this broader perspective, children’s vulnerability, dependence, and bounded powers and capacities place responsibilities on states and institutions to protect their rights; but the UNCRC also tries to correct adult perceptions of children as incompetent victims.

Scholars in childhood studies face a challenge in adequately balancing between the calls to recognize both agency and rights. On the one hand, young people have the capacity to exercise agency and influence their context, and on the other, their dependence and vulnerability call for adult awareness and protection of their rights. If a both/and awareness is not sustained, isolating one without the other can result in an either/or line-up in scholarship of children’s vulnerability and innocence but resilience on the one hand (as adults fight to give them rights) and with children’s autonomy, self-determination, and ability on the other (to exercise their agency). As Gallagher Elkins points out, “children’s rights advocates sometimes neglect to mention children’s resilience and agency, while those who describe children’s autonomy may overlook children’s vulnerability and dependency.”²²³

To balance, adequately conceptualize, and address both realities, some scholars in childhood studies have suggested a need for more complex constructions of agency and its limits and variations. The shift to recognizing children as social actors, with capacities to affect and

²²² Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 257. Tisdall and Punch provide a brief overview of the UNCRC, its advantages and critiques of it. For example, the connection of the minority world discourse on rights with liberal democracy and its free, autonomous, rational, and individual citizens contrasts with views of children in the majority world, where children and young people are constructed as “having responsibilities, living relationally intergenerationally and in their communities.” The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child offered an alternative articulation to that of the UNCRC, stating that “every child shall have responsibilities towards his [sic] family and society, the State and other legally recognized communities and the international community.” Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 258.

²²³ Gallagher Elkins, “Biblical Studies and Childhood Studies,” 148.

influence their relationships and contexts, has neglected questions of “what such agency really means for different groups of children and young people.”²²⁴ Thus, in more recent research, scholars have focused on refining their definitions of agency—for example, by asking “what it means to act.”²²⁵ They also have focused on how to make quantifications of agency more complex—for example, recognizing agency as occurring on a continuum,²²⁶ as being ambiguous,²²⁷ and as needing theoretical groundings that don’t rely on autonomous and individualistic understandings of human being.²²⁸ What is needed instead is “a complex, recursive, multilayered, and topological sense of system, which may include different forms of materialities, cultural form, and social technology.”²²⁹ Lee, Oswell, and Michael Gallagher are interested in constructing agency with more relational and systemic underpinnings: They recognize the fruitfulness of relational assemblages for doing so.²³⁰ I explain relational assemblages and interpret Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative through the lens they create in Chapter 4.

²²⁴ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255.

²²⁵ Allison James, “Agency” in *Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, ed. Jens Qvortrup, W. Corsaro, and M. S. Honig (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 41; cited in Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255.

²²⁶ See, e.g., Elsbeth Robson, Stephen Bell, and Natascha Klocker, “Conceptualizing Agency in the Lives and Actions of Rural Young People,” *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*, ed. Ruth Panelli, Samantha Punch, and Elsbeth Robson (London: Routledge, 2007), 135–48, cited in Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255.

²²⁷ See, e.g., Natascha Klocker, “An Example of Thin Agency: Child Domestic Workers in Tanzania,” in *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*, ed. Ruth Panelli, Samantha Punch, and Elsbeth Robson (London: Routledge, 2007), 83–94, cited in Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255.

²²⁸ My use of the participle here is intentional. I refer to a human who is being, not a compound noun, human being.

²²⁹ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 50.

²³⁰ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 113–120; Oswell, *The Agency of Children*; and Michael Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency: Power, Assemblages, Freedom and Materiality,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 9, no. 3 (2019): 188–99. Says Oswell, “It is clear from the substance of this book that I am not so much considering children’s agency (as it might be thought of in the sociology of childhood) as thinking through the *agencement* or assemblages or arrangements within which children in some form or other find themselves.” Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 270. Relational assemblages come from theoretical conceptualizations of reality as complex assemblages or networks comprising relationality; process and movement; and multiplicity, based on the work of Gilles Deleuze

Children's Perceptions and Ethnographic Research Methods

Methodologically, childhood studies as a field has developed with the recognition that children's perspectives and voices need to be represented. Disciplines across the field, in both the social sciences and the humanities, have contributed empirical and child-oriented ethnographic research.²³¹ Tisdall and Punch observe that, "particularly in the United Kingdom, children and young people's voices" have been privileged and that methodologies have been developed for working directly with them.²³² They also identify several of the conversations and debates in the field related to ethnographic methodologies:

...the extent to which researching with children and young people is similar to or different from researching with adults (Punch 2002a, Lewis et al. 2004, Christensen and James 2008, Tisdall et al. 2009); ethical issues (Thomas and O'Kane 1998, Hopkins and Bell 2008, Alderson and Morrow 2011); the development of innovative methods and tools (Punch 2002b, 2007a, van Blerk and Kesby 2007, Thomson 2008); and the extent to which children and young people are active participants in the research process (Kirby et al. 2003, [Beazley] et al. 2009, Gallagher 2009, Tisdall et al. 2009).²³³

and Felix Guattari. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (1977; New York: Penguin Books, 2009); and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²³¹ Ethnographic research has been quite rare in the biblical studies discipline. For research analyzing children's and young people's biblical interpretations, see Pamela Milne, "From the Margins to the Margins: Jephthah's Daughter and Her Father," *Joshua and Judges*, Texts@contexts, ed. Brenner & Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), 209–34; and Melody R. Briggs, *How Children Read Biblical Narrative: An Investigation of Children's Readings of the Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017). In addition to these two works, Danna Nolan Fewell has included the voice of a child—her daughter—in Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003). Research contributing to childhood studies via biblical studies has primarily focused on constructions of ancient childhoods for purposes of contextualizing references to children in the biblical texts. I examine the contributions biblical scholars have made to childhood studies in the following section.

²³² Tisdall and Punch, "Not So 'New'?" 251.

²³³ Tisdall and Punch, "Not So 'New'?" 251. See also Samantha Punch, "Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?" *Childhood* 9, no. 3 (2002): 321–41; Vicky Lewis et al., *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People* (London: Sage, 2004; Pia Christensen and Allison James, eds., *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practice*, 2nd ed. (London: Falmer Press, 2008); E. Kay Tisdall, John

Caveats regarding the challenges in ethnographic research with children have been offered. For example, according to Barbro Johansson, “[p]rolonged fieldwork with participant observations, informal interviews and other qualitative methods demand other attitudes and a different researcher’s role than methods based on experiments or surveys.”²³⁴ In addition, Alison Gopnik acknowledges the ability of adult researchers to influence what child subjects see and do in the context of adult-constructed studies. Children proved likely to disregard their own ways of seeing or responding when researching adults already indicated a preferred or correct response.²³⁵ Thus, researchers seeking children’s voices and perspectives must be aware of how children’s preexisting relationality and relationships with authority figures might affect their capacities for seeing and for offering their authentic voice and perceptions.

Davis, and Michael Gallagher, *Research with Children and Young People: Research Design, Methods, and Analysis* (London: Sage, 2009); Nigel Thomas and Claire O’Kane, “The Ethics of Participatory Research with Children,” *Children & Society* 12, no. 5 (1998): 336–48; Peter Hopkins and Nancy Bell, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Ethical Issues and Child Research,” *Children’s Geographies* 6, no. 1 (2008): 1–6; Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow, *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook* (London: Sage, 2011); Samantha Punch, “Interviewing Strategies with Young People: The ‘Secret Box,’ Stimulus Material, and Task-Based Activities,” *Children & Society* 16 (2002): 45–56; Samantha Punch, “‘I Felt They Were Ganging Up on Me’: Interviewing Siblings at Home,” *Children’s Geographies* 5, no. 3 (2007): 219–34; Lorraine van Blerk and Mike Kesby, eds., *Doing Children’s Geographies: Methodological Issues in Research with Young People* (London: Routledge, 2007); Pat Thomson, *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People* (London: Routledge, 2008); Perpetua Kirby et al., *Building a Culture of Participation: Involving Children and Young People in Policy, Service Planning, Delivery and Evaluation* (London: Department for Education and Skills, 2003); Harriot Beazley et al., “The Right to Be Properly Researched: Research with Children in a Messy, Real World,” *Children’s Geographies* 7, no. 4 (2009): 365–78; and Michael Gallagher, “Rethinking Participatory Methods in Children’s Geographies,” in *Doing Children’s Geographies: Methodological Issues in Research with Young People*, ed. Lorraine van Blerk and Mike Kesby (London: Routledge, 2007), 84–97.

²³⁴ Barbro Johansson, “Doing Adulthood in Childhood Research,” *Childhood* 19, no. 1 (2011): 103. (101–114)

²³⁵ Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 158.

Theoretical Priorities and Changes

Scholars' research guided by the tenets and mantras in childhood studies have made important contributions to reorienting perceptions of children and childhood. Research in childhood studies has revealed changes across time and geographies in constructions and realities of childhood, problems with dominant developmental frameworks, complexity in children's agency, and the absence of children's voices in knowledge production. These moves have broadened adults' capacities to see children and potentially to question presuppositions regarding children and child–adult relationality. Each of these shifts and correctives also has engendered calls for additional shifts.

For example, scholars contributing to childhood studies identify theoretical underpinnings that rely on individualistic, linear developmental models and modernist dichotomies as inadequate.²³⁶ As a range of disciplines spent decades in late modernity theoretically decentering the subject, “the sociology of childhood was valorizing it through an intense focus on the subjectivity of children,” says Prout.²³⁷ Having recognized, argued for, and established the value of asserting the subjectivity of children, research in childhood studies now also needs to address in its theoretical underpinnings the “foundational fantasy,” which Teresa Brennan explains as the Western psychological fallacy of the self-contained, bounded individual.²³⁸ This foundational fantasy can be discounted through an emphasis on relationality. Tisdall and Punch point to the need in childhood studies for theoretical influences that prioritize

²³⁶ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New’?” 253.

²³⁷ Prout, “Taking a Step Away,” 6.

²³⁸ See, e.g., Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Brennan makes her case for the fantasy of bounded subjectivity by diverse means: “deductive argument from clinical findings and biological facts, some history (theology and philosophy) of the affects, and a little modern neuroscience.” Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 8.

“notions of relations, relationships, and reciprocity.”²³⁹ Spyros Spyrou also calls for “more relational understandings,” as well as “approaches which help [to] de-reify ‘the child’ and avoid the traps of closure.”²⁴⁰

Scholars in childhood studies also have called for theoretical shifts that take greater account of materiality and process, or change. Developmental models in childhood studies and other fields that have overemphasized both cognitive and linear, chronological constructions of development in human becoming are not always adequate. Regarding the former, Prout argues that “[a]ccounts of the socially constructed child always privilege discourse.... At best, there is an equivocal and uneasy evasiveness about materiality, whether this [materiality] is thought of as nature, bodies, technologies, artefacts, or architectures.”²⁴¹ Regarding the latter, Prout states that “[w]hilst sociology was searching for metaphors of mobility, fluidity and complexity, the sociology of childhood was raising the edifice of childhood as a structure.”²⁴² What Prout and others recognize is that children’s bodies and agency cannot be fully accounted for apart from theoretical underpinnings that account for materiality, relationality, and change. There is a need “to reclaim and consider ideas that incorporate change, transitions, contexts and relationships, moving beyond concepts that are unduly fixed and static, with unhelpful dichotomies and ignorant of cultural and contextual variations.”²⁴³ Says Prout, “the task is to see how different

²³⁹ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New’?” 249.

²⁴⁰ Spyros Spyrou, “What Next for Childhood Studies?” *Childhood* 25, no. 4 (2018): 420.

²⁴¹ Prout, “Taking a Step Away,” 7.

²⁴² Prout, “Taking a Step Away,” 7.

²⁴³ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New’?,” 254.

versions of child or adult emerge from the complex interplay, networking and orchestration of different natural, discursive, collective, and hybrid materials.”²⁴⁴

Prioritizing relationality, materiality, and change creates theoretical foundations going forward in childhood studies that offer ways to interrogate and complexify binary conceptualizations, just as postmodern and post-postmodern deconstructionist work has done in other fields, including biblical studies. Prout has called for additional theoretically robust work in childhood studies to diminish the effects of modernity’s reliance on conceptual dichotomies, such as nature/culture; agency/structure (i.e., control); and child becoming/child being.²⁴⁵ To break from conceptualizations relying on binaries in childhood studies, Prout’s theoretical shift calls for “attending to the excluded middle.”²⁴⁶ In constructing and interpreting children and childhoods, both ancient and contemporary, human realities require a recognition of both natural and cultural influences; both individual and relational agency and its constrictions; and development, stasis, and even breakdown and decay across the full chronological range of human being. Scholars in childhood studies are calling for and generating underlying theoretical and conceptual foundations that reflect these complexities.

²⁴⁴ Prout, “Taking a Step Away from Modernity,” 12.

²⁴⁵ Alan Prout, “Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Reconsidering the New Sociology of Childhood,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 1, no. 1 (2011): 4–14.

²⁴⁶ Prout, “Taking a Step Away from Modernity,” 8. Prout’s strategies for transcending the “excluded middle” of the dichotomies that have been operative in childhood studies are addressed in various ways through my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. Briefly, Prout’s strategies include interdisciplinarity, symmetry, networks and mediations, mobility, and relationality. Prout, “Taking a Step Away from Modernity,” 9–12. In Prout’s language, my reading of Bat-Yiphtach as child in transition relies on interdisciplinarity (e.g., biology, anthropology, classics, biblical studies) and mobility (“flows across boundaries”); my reading of agency in her narrative emphasizes symmetry, networks, and relationality.

Querying the Child–Adult Binary

A path for querying the child–adult binary has already been laid by feminist theory’s querying and by queer theory’s queering of the gender binary. Childhood, like gender, is a “social imaginary” defined by secondary lack (child is not adult, female is not male), says Honeyman. “Existing solely as relative negations, each [childhood and gender] has the potential to frustrate the very binary they bring into existence.”²⁴⁷ Importantly, questioning a child–adult binary does not minimize the appropriateness of “child” as a way to understand human being—any more than questioning a gender binary would eliminate “woman” as a way to understand human being. Instead, an unexamined binary, for child–adult as for woman–man, can involve presuppositions that influence the conceptualizations on both sides of the binary. An unexamined binary influences ethical possibilities for actual humans whose representations often are regulated by the more dominant category (adult and man) on the other side of the binary.

Although the child–adult binary might be the more robust of the two binaries in our context, it too calls for interrogation, as my review of the literature on Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative has shown.²⁴⁸ Different adults with different purposes in different contexts perceive Bat-Yiphtach differently. Parker points to the challenges in conceptualizing and categorizing children and childhood as distinct from adults and adulthood: “The same young person might be

²⁴⁷ Honeyman, “Trans(cending)gender Through Childhood,” 134.

²⁴⁸ I describe the child–adult binary as more robust for a few reasons. First, problematizing the gender binary is widely accepted in twenty-first century U.S. public discourse. Meanwhile, the child–adult binary retains its conceptual power as a way to developmentally categorize, label, and analyze, assess, or judge. It is widely used to structure conceptualizations of lived realities and relationalities. Second, the performative factors related to gender are more fluid in some twenty-first century contexts. Although chronological age also has performative elements, one side of the binary retains more power to judge and assess behavioral performativity on the other side. Adults who perform childishly are critiqued, while children who perform as adults are more often assessed positively (unless in doing so they offend the perceiving adult). Third, rites of passage establish socio-cultural borderlines that sustain the strength of the hyphen in the child–adult binary, whereas the hyphen in the female–male binary has all but disappeared in some contexts as the fluidity of gender has become recognized.

considered more of a child or an adult depending on a given situation or setting. How a society understands children says more about what is important to adults in a particular culture than it does about children themselves.”²⁴⁹ Her statement allows for several important observations: that different contexts and different perceivers already make the binary unstable; that an adult perceiving a usually chronologically younger human being(s) (both as individual and as part of a collective) is the one determining how to categorize; and in this way, adults have more power to categorize “child,” according to their own valuing of behavioral and cultural norms. However, both child and childhood and adult and adulthood are socially constructed categories, states Koepf-Taylor.²⁵⁰ As scholars in childhood studies have recognized, the social constructedness of childhood alone, without adulthood also in view, fails to account for the way constructions of childhood and adulthood in a binarial construction influence one another.

This project destabilizes the child–adult binary in four ways. First, it attends to the “excluded middle” in Prout’s sense. Interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach suggest she is transitioning through this excluded middle, in a stage that might be labeled (anachronistically but helpfully) as puberty or adolescence. Various scholars (e.g., Day, Reis, and Römer) have characterized her as such.²⁵¹ She is somehow both child and adult. However, the narrative suggests in various ways that her lived experiences, in the temporal setting of the narrative, are not yet those of adult woman, according to some historical and contemporary measures. I emphasize her status as

²⁴⁹ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 24.

²⁵⁰ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 10.

²⁵¹ See Peggy Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989); Tarmarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 279–98; and Thomas Römer “Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter?” *JSOT* 77, no. 1 (1998), 27–38; and David Janzen’s rebuttal, “Why the Deuteronomist Told About the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” *JSOT* 29, no. 3 (2005): 339–57.

transitioning child to resist the construction of a subjectivity that requires an either/or orientation (*either child or adult*) to her status.

Second, understandings of socially constructed childhoods and individual children include both socio-cultural components and biological ones (i.e., nature) that include an approximate chronology. In some cases, social conventions and cultural rituals assign the timing of a passage from one side of the binary to the other. Biological elements often influence these socio-cultural rites of passage.²⁵² However, the hyphen in the child–adult binary does not indicate a bright-line division between the temporality in being a child and achieving adulthood. A significant number of other factors, interacting with complex contexts and experiences, influence the passage of time and aspects of development. In this light, despite the culturally conditioned response by women to girls that a biological development—menarche—is the gateway to the land of womanhood, ones who have recently begun to have their monthly cycle tend to see things differently, as ethnographic research in childhood studies suggests.²⁵³

Questioning the binary can occur with exegetical work that recognizes both ancient (and

²⁵² The transition, labeled puberty in contemporary discourse, “is usually analyzed from positions that recognize cultural meanings as a superstructure interpreting corporeal effects.” Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Cultural and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 87.

²⁵³ Post-menarcheal children note that messaging around their first menstrual cycle conveys their arrival at “womanhood,” but some subjects question the value and effects of this understanding of “womanhood.” For example, post-menarcheal girls become sexualized at “womanhood,” according to the messaging they receive, but many subjects in the research report that they do not experience this etic imposition on their identity. Details of the research with post-menarcheal subjects are provided in Chapter 3. For example, I rely on contemporary studies that offer insight into transitioning children’s perspectives to construct my exegesis of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, including the following: Prabisha Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience of Menstrual Exiles (*Chhaupadi*) Among Adolescent Girls in Far-Western Nepal,” *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 12 (2018): e0208260. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208260>; Gun I. Rembeck, Margareta Moller, and Ronny K. Gunnarsson, “Attitudes and Feelings Towards Menstruation and Womanhood in Girls at Menarche,” *Acta Paediatrica* 95, no. 6 (2006): 707–14; and Kate Donmall, “What It Means to Bleed: An Exploration of Young Women’s Experiences of Menarche and Menstruation,” *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 29, no. 2 (2013): 202–16.

contemporary) cultural taboos, or markings, and embodied experiences of menarche and menstruation.²⁵⁴

Third, a theoretical shift toward relationality in childhood studies already begins to query (and queer) the child–adult binary and adult presuppositions underlying it. Mayall asserts that the study of children’s lives is essentially the study of child–adult relations.²⁵⁵ Retaining a distinction between child and adult is necessary primarily for questioning the relationality created by underlying presuppositions that sustain it. With an awareness of the categories and their differences, I adopt a relational view of agency. The agency of children, as suggested, has been an important consideration for childhood studies scholars. In my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, I rely on a relational view—a relational assemblage model, as drawn by Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher²⁵⁶—to consider how agency is exercised and constrained among the characters and by the narrative’s interpreters. Emphasizing relationality undercuts the distinctions in the child–adult binary by deemphasizing autonomy and independence as determinants of the binary’s categories.

Fourth, as an interpreter, I am influenced by scholars contributing to childhood studies, including biblical scholars. I also am influenced by many long years of empirically observing how adults and children interact. Revising understandings and perceptions of children and youth

²⁵⁴ For ancient perspectives, I draw on the following resources to construct my reading of Bat-Yiphtach: Melissa Raphael, “Menstruation,” *ER*, 2nd ed. (MacMillan Reference, 2005), 9:5866–68; Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003); Jonah Steinberg, “From ‘Pot of Filth’ to a ‘Hedge of Roses’ (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism,” *JFSR* 13, no. 2 (1997): 5–26; Rachel Adler, “In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theology of Purity,” *Tikkun* 8, no. 1 (1992): 38–41; and Wilma Ann Bailey, “Baby Becky, Menarche and Prepubescent Marriage in Ancient Israel,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 37, no. 1–2 (2011): 113–37.

²⁵⁵ Berry Mayall, *Towards a Sociology for Childhood* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 27; cited in Johansson, “Doing Adulthood in Childhood Research,” 102.

²⁵⁶ Again, I define and discuss relational assemblages in more detail in Chapter 4.

entails awareness that presuppositions about what *adult* is signifying, as difference, also plays a role in my work. I offer an exegetical interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach and her narrative that uses a particular understanding of transitioning child—as a human being who is more like me (as I transition through menopause) than not.²⁵⁷ I thus disrupt the binary by emphasizing similarities more than differences between child and adult. To illustrate, Lee identifies some of the contemporary presuppositions that tend to accompany use of the term *child* by explaining the way the term *adult*, with a focus on differences, influences these definitions. He points out that standard (adult) human “beings” are represented or perceived as “stable, complete, self-possessed and self-controlling.”²⁵⁸ The often underlying and accompanying presupposition is that children, who are (merely) “becoming,” are most simply whatever an adult being is not.²⁵⁹ They are “changeable and incomplete,” lacking self-possession and self-control.²⁶⁰ When the child–adult binary is operative, if adults are wise and knowledgeable, then children are often gullible, innocent, and ignorant. Adults are orderly; children are messy. Adults are rational; children are irrational or emotional. Adults are cultured and civilized; children are not. Adults see clearly; children lack perceptiveness. However, empirical observation and ethnographic research soon offer proof that all of the qualities assigned to the one (child) might be observed

²⁵⁷ As Lee’s work on stability and instability indicates, positing the character of adulthood as stable fails to account for the constancy of change both in human embodiment and in social and cultural changes that affect this embodiment. In querying the child–adult binary and the way it sustains differences, and in seeing that both childhood and adulthood are socially constructed and change from context to context, we can recognize that processes of transition and change are constant throughout lives. See Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 8–20.

²⁵⁸ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 5.

²⁵⁹ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 5.

²⁶⁰ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 5.

just as easily and frequently in the other (adult). Thus, these distinctions that sustain the binary might also be seen as similarities.

My review of research in childhood studies shows that the scholars I have encountered have sought to attend to children and correct (adult) perceptions that make them passive, innocent, and ignorant (i.e., of social norms and traditions and cognitive or intellectual content). To further query the child–adult binary, my understanding of a child and children draws heavily on the research of Alison Gopnik, a leading scholar in developmental psychology.²⁶¹ Gopnik’s research reconstructs a developmental psychology that, like Piaget’s, attends appreciatively to children, but unlike later adult interpretations of Piaget’s model, does not view children as lacking. Gopnik understands even very young children to be scientific observers and learners of cause and effect, to be empathetic, to be moral, and to be capable of generating counterfactuals.²⁶² Thus, her research corrects presuppositions underlying the child–adult binary that make children amoral and selfish, and she also provides nuance to overcome presuppositions about children’s ignorance, revealing a perceptiveness and a willingness to see their world that is analogous to scientific investigation. A developmental perspective by which adults are those who

²⁶¹ Gopnik’s research on children’s learning is extensive and technical. The features of her work to which I refer for purposes of this project are more basic, highly general, and easily understood. My encounters with her work have had long-lasting effects on my perceptions of children and how they see and interact with their world, as well as on my perceptions of how adults interact with children, particularly when such interactions are based on the damaging conventional perspectives articulated by Lee.

²⁶² In this case, *counterfactual* is the term that philosophers use to denote possible worlds of the past, present, and future. See Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby*, 19. Children’s counterfactuals (i.e., imaginings of different realities) are explained by Gopnik: “[C]hildren’s brains create causal theories of the world, maps of how the world works. And these theories allow children to envisage [to see] new possibilities, and to imagine and pretend that the world is different.” Ibid., 21. Thus, counterfactuals are not necessarily the result of being wrong because of limited perceptions of the here and now; babies and young children create counterfactuals out of a capacity to see, imagine, hypothesize, and test hypotheses. Recognizing that humans of all ages generate counterfactuals about the past, present, and future raises questions about the different ways in which imaginations of possible worlds intersect with or overlay considerations of agency and the exercise of power in child–adult relationality. That older humans often prefer their own counterfactuals to those of children and devalue children’s counterfactuals because of their inexperience or their assumed restriction to seeing “the here and now” both represent exercises of such power and limitations of children’s agency.

have arrived at journey's end, having left childhood behind, is "crucial in maintaining the authority that adults often have over children."²⁶³ Recognizing behaviors and characteristics that are potentially consistent throughout life emphasizes similarities more than differences and thus queries the child–adult binary as a means to structure adult thinking.

Querying (and queering) the presuppositions underlying and sustaining a child–adult binary is crucial in childhood studies. Lee suggests that "because the adult/child distinction is a product of history and changing social relations, it may not always be a reliable guide to our thinking."²⁶⁴ My understanding of child, following Gopnik, is intended to establish a more appreciative foundation for thinking of children, both ancient and contemporary, and their relationality. This perspective is operative in my exegesis of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.

Attention to and concern with children can change the perceptions of adults interpreting biblical texts and, more broadly, perceptions of the discipline and its interpretive categories. Anna Mae Duane states that "[b]ecause defining children is a means of defining and distributing power and obligations, studying childhood requires a radically altered approach to the questions of what constitutes knowledge and what animates the work of power and resistance."²⁶⁵ She further asserts that "...to include the child in any field of study is to realign the very structure of that field, changing the terms of inquiry and forcing a different set of questions."²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 9.

²⁶⁴ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 37.

²⁶⁵ Duane, Introduction to *The Children's Table*, 1.

²⁶⁶ Duane, Introduction to *The Children's Table*, 1.

Childhood Studies and Biblical Studies

What Duane proposes about children was already visible in what feminist and womanist biblical scholars began to achieve in the late twentieth century. These scholars have shifted the discipline as they attend to women in biblical texts, including in Judges. They brought questions to the discipline that were different from what primarily white male scholars and their students—those who were trained in their research patterns and methods—had previously asked; realigned the possibilities for producing valid biblical scholarship; and addressed issues of power and resistance in relation to the biblical texts. In doing so, feminist and womanist scholars made visible other perspectives that had not yet been represented in the biblical studies discipline.²⁶⁷ Child-oriented biblical scholarship is both a continuation of this expansion and a field in itself that has the potential to shift perspectives on knowledge production in the biblical studies discipline.

Child-oriented biblical scholars conduct research and develop methodologies with a greater intentionality to see children, both in the ancient social world and in the biblical texts.²⁶⁸ The resulting orientation puts the child, children, and childhood at the center of the research and investigation. References to children in the texts, both figurative and literal, are abundant. As Laurel Koepf-Taylor notes, children are ubiquitous both “as characters and as figures of speech.”²⁶⁹ “The Bible is teeming with direct references to children, childhood, and adult-child

²⁶⁷ As I noted in Chapter 1, such perspectives include queer, masculinity, Latinx, Asian, African, affect and emotion, nonhuman, and ecology lenses and hermeneutics, among others.

²⁶⁸ Before biblical scholars began attending to children, scholars of religion and theology recognized a need to attend to and account for children in their work. The American Academy of Religion established its Consultation on Childhood Studies and Religion in 2002. The Society of Biblical Literature’s section on Children in the Biblical World was established in 2008.

²⁶⁹ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 22.

relationships,” says Bunge.²⁷⁰ However, before child-oriented scholarship began to influence the discipline, children in the biblical texts and the ancient social world received little attention from biblical scholars.²⁷¹ Esther Menn notes that, “[p]erhaps because they are small, child characters are easy to dismiss or to stereotype as simple, innocent, and insignificant.”²⁷² Fighting this tendency to dismiss or neglect both textual children and ancient children, child-oriented biblical scholars recognize a wealth of opportunities to pose new questions. These questions influence historical reconstructions of the ancient Near East and the ancient communities shaped by the biblical texts. They also address the role of child characters in the stories and narratives. In the following sections, I survey child-oriented biblical scholarship and its questions, with particular attention to developments that influence my exegetical work on Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative.

Challenges and Priorities in Child-Oriented Biblical Scholarship

Although the field of child-oriented biblical scholarship has grown considerably since 2013, the field’s recent expansion relies on a slightly longer history of increasing attention to children in the biblical texts and in the ancient Near East.²⁷³ An interest in children among

²⁷⁰ Marcia J. Bunge, Introduction to *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), xiv–xv.

²⁷¹ For a thorough review of scholarship and research that peripherally included children before the recent growth in child-oriented work (e.g., on ancient Israelite society, women, and the family), see Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 1–8.

²⁷² Esther Menn, “Child Characters in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Sam 16-17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1-19),” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge, Terence E. Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 324.

²⁷³ Although biblical scholars generally have devoted limited attention to children in the biblical texts and the ancient social world until recently, scholars of Roman antiquity showed an earlier interest in the place of children in the Roman family. Christian Testament biblical scholars, picking up on this work, also have a slightly longer history of attending to children in their scholarship than Hebrew Bible scholars have. For a survey of this scholarship, see Reidar Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues,” *Familia* 33 (2006): 23–46. Additional extensive bibliographies include Reidar Aasgaard, “The Bible and Children,” in *Oxford Bibliographies*, ed. H. Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), doi:

biblical scholars began in the early 2000s, influenced both by new methodological and theoretical lenses in childhood studies and by an increasing number of feminist (and often female) scholars and their life experiences. Feminist work serves as the “mother field” for child-oriented biblical scholarship, says Gallagher Elkins, as it has done for other theories, methodologies, and lenses.²⁷⁴ As I noted in Chapter 1, feminist and womanist theories and lenses have led to and inspired ways to see what had not been seen previously in biblical scholarship. The expanded vision revealed the hegemonic views of primarily European (German) and Euro-American white male Protestant scholars. It dramatically increased the perspectives available for interpreting biblical texts in light of the fullness of *adult* human experience. Interpreting the ancient world and the biblical texts in light of *children’s* lived experiences offers still broader views.

Challenges

Child-oriented scholars recognize several challenges in scholarship’s current methods for incorporating perspectives on and of children in scholars’ and readers’ expanded vision. First, a scarcity of material data on ancient children’s lives presents challenges to historical reconstructions. Reidar Aasgaard, a leading scholar in the development of child-oriented biblical

10.1093/OBO/9780199791231-0163; and Julie Faith Parker, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” *CBR* 17, no. 2 (2019): 148–57.

²⁷⁴ Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, How does our field relate to feminist and gender studies? (paper presentation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, February 18, 2018). The development of childhood studies as an academic discipline in the late twentieth century followed the second wave of feminism and the emergence of feminist scholarship. Child-centered biblical scholars recognize both the UNCRC, first proposed in 1989, and childhood studies as motivating and influencing a desire to attend to children in the biblical texts and as providing foundations for doing so. See, e.g., Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 21; and Naomi Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 8–9. Steinberg writes in light of and in conversation with discussions of children’s rights, and in particular with the UNCRC. She notes that “critics of the UNCRC fear that to give rights to children is to diminish the authority of parents, neglect the interests of adults, and undermine the family as an institution.” Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, 130.

scholarship broadly speaking, as well as in the study of children and childhood in Antiquity and early Christianity, offers several caveats for scholarship on historical children. For example, the availability of written material is limited; in addition, the material that is available likely presents ideals rather than reality, has been generated primarily by elite men in the upper economic strata of society, and comes from a limited geographic area.²⁷⁵ The sources, including biblical texts, deal with children “in passing” and “in fragmentary ways.”²⁷⁶ Aasgaard offers these caveats in relation to Christian Testament²⁷⁷ historical scholarship on children, and as Kristine Henriksen Garroway affirms, they also apply to Hebrew Bible scholarship focusing on children in the ancient Near East.²⁷⁸

Second, a lack of ethnographic research methods in biblical scholarship means that contemporary scholarly literary readings represent adult concerns with the biblical texts, their production, and their interpretation. Children are not involved in generating valid knowledge about biblical texts and contexts via research.²⁷⁹ Moreover, as Römer illustrates in his attempt to focus on Bat-Yiphtach, paying sustained attention to children can be difficult.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity,” 24.

²⁷⁶ Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity,” 25.

²⁷⁷ I use “Christian Testament” to refer to the gospels, epistles, stories, and apocalyptic literature in the canon of Christian churches. I do so to avoid any implied supersessionism in Old Testament and New Testament vocabulary and to explicitly acknowledge implied hermeneutical differences in interpretations of the Jewish Hebrew Bible vs. the Christian Old Testament.

²⁷⁸ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing up in Ancient Israel*, 13.

²⁷⁹ I previously noted two exceptions. See, e.g., Briggs, *How Children Read Biblical Narrative*. See also Milne, “From the Margins to the Margins.” Milne captures her students’ perspectives on Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative in light of feminist concerns and notes negligible evidence of or progress in students’ ability to recognize feminist concerns in interpreting the narrative.

²⁸⁰ Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell,” 28.

Third, childist and child-oriented scholars recognize the challenge of defining the field and its terms in ways that lead to legitimation and validation by the academic guild and biblical studies colleagues.²⁸¹ In biblical scholarship, Western ways of thinking, characterized as wholly rational—and in some areas of biblical scholarship, wholly objective—are prioritized. However, as already noted, when rationality is held as “the ultimate goal of human development,” children by necessity “exhibit varying degrees of deficiency.”²⁸² That adult scholarship with interest in child-related research is perceived with a similar sense of deficiency has been a genuine risk. Early participants in the child-oriented conversation have seen its growth and continuation as important signifiers of the field’s legitimacy.²⁸³

Fourth, no stable, standard, and universal definition or delineation of child and childhood can be assigned, whether ancient or contemporary, as I noted above. Broadly and sociologically speaking, Henriksen Garroway states that, in antiquity, age categories rather than chronological age would have been meaningful, and she describes the challenges of categorizing children this way:

Children do not simply go from being “nonadults” one day to “adults” the next. This transition is “a gradual process of ‘growing up.’” Scholarship has used terms such as infant, toddler, youth, adolescent, juvenile, and so on to describe the stages or categories a child passes through on the journey to adulthood. But the

²⁸¹ Sharon Betsworth reported that during her attempts to form an SBL section on children in the ancient world, more seasoned scholars discouraged her from pursuing child-oriented scholarship because it would not be sustainable or remain (be) relevant. Conversation with Sharon Betsworth, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, November 20, 2017.

²⁸² Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 11. “Rationality is... not the child’s inherent goal into which she naturally grows, but a Western cultural goal. Any number of other social values might be substituted in differing contexts.” *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁸³ Two contributed volumes of childist and child-oriented scholarship were published in 2019. See Julie Faith Parker and Sharon Betsworth, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World* (London: T&T Clark, 2019); and Shawn Flynn, ed., *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, SHANE (London: Routledge, 2019). Another volume is forthcoming in 2020: Kristine Henrickson Garroway and John Martens, eds., *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World*, BSJS (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

use of these terms has been criticized, for they are often arbitrary and reflect no standardized correlation to chronological age groups. A lack of correlation between stages and chronological age leads to confusion, especially in archaeological reports, where physical anthropologists differ on what ages should be assigned to each stage.²⁸⁴

Henriksen Garroway's words nicely articulate the reason for my interest in Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition. In Henriksen Garroway's description of the definitional challenge, a gradual process of change is in view, as is adolescence as a stage "passed through" in the category of child. She also reveals the dominance of the framework by which (adult) scholars retain a sense of childhood as comprising a series of stages left behind and of adulthood as the end of the journey. This conceptual framework relies on an uninterrogated child–adult binary.

Given these four challenges, why are biblical scholars interested in child-centered and childist readings? Reidar Aasgaard poses questions about the relevance of such work: Why study children? Why study the history of children? Why study children in the Bible and the biblical world?²⁸⁵ The reasons he gives are multiple, not least because the Bible has shaped "the thinking and lives of all kinds of people throughout history."²⁸⁶ The influence that the biblical texts have had in the past and continue to have on children and child–adult relationality is significant.²⁸⁷ In

²⁸⁴ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 17. Henriksen Garroway also notes that marriage has been used as an indicator of arrival into adulthood, and that a boy or girl still living in a parent's house would be considered a "minor." See Amram Tropper, "The Economics of Jewish Childhood in Late Antiquity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 76 (2005): 227; and David Marcus, "Juvenile Delinquency in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *JANESCU* 13, no. 1 (1981): 32; as cited in Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 17. Understanding the correlations between chronological age and age categories presumably can be helpful both in reconstructing historical childhoods and in articulating contrasts between contemporary conceptualizations of children and ancient ones.

²⁸⁵ Reidar Aasgaard, "History of Research on Children in the Bible and the Biblical World: Past Developments, Present State—and Potential Future," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie Faith Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 13. doi: 10.5040/9780567672568.ch-002

²⁸⁶ Aasgaard, "History of Research," 13.

²⁸⁷ As I discuss in the next section, Laurel Koepf Taylor offers research showing how ancient children and child–adult relationality might have been affected by the influence of the biblical texts on their social world. In her

addition, with its continued cultural influence, it is read, interpreted, and used, both for ill and for good.²⁸⁸ Much of this ill and this good affects children, but their experiences of and perspectives on these effects often are not taken into account.

Priorities

Like feminist and womanist scholarship, child-oriented biblical scholarship—in its contribution to childhood studies—prioritizes interdisciplinarity, ethical advocacy, and seeing what scholars previously have tended to overlook. Parker, a leading childist scholar, identifies additional priorities for child-oriented scholars. She notes five key principles that should guide scholars conducting child-oriented research: 1) Be appreciative; 2) be playful; 3) be imaginative; 4) include respectful listening of children; and 5) be aware of the ethical implications of the work.²⁸⁹ Shawn Flynn identifies the “notable feature [of] a tone among colleagues that is one of appreciation for any insights into biblical passages on childhood regardless of the different approaches, tools, or methods used. As such, there is a notable collaboration and collegiality fostered in these discussions.”²⁹⁰ In addition, “the field maintains a cross-Testament dialog as it

work, she considers the communal uses for children as future bearers of communal identity. See Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*.

²⁸⁸ Aasgaard, “History of Research on Children in the Bible and the Biblical World,” 13.

²⁸⁹ Julie Faith Parker, Hebrew Bible Methods 2: Anthropology/social scientific (paper presentation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, February 18, 2018). Note that Parker’s principles for adult research and relationality in scholarship reflect in some ways the quality of child–adult relationality that I aim for in my interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach.

²⁹⁰ Shawn Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible: A Field in Growth,” *RC* 12, no. 8 (2018): 2. Flynn continues, “[t]he field is not yet at the stage where debates are rigorously split over the interpretation of specific passages.” *Ibid.*, 2. The possibility exists that having children in view can result in “a radically altered approach to the questions of what constitutes knowledge and what animates the work of power and resistance,” as Duane has suggested. Duane, Introduction to *The Children's Table*, 1.

develops.”²⁹¹ With these collegial and boundary-crossing principles undergirding the research and production of scholarship, child-oriented scholars potentially are generating a somewhat less antagonistic and agonistic space for work that attends to children in the biblical texts. Such principles of relationality have the potential to influence the ways in which scholars contribute to and shape the discipline of biblical studies.

Early Legitimacy for a Child-Oriented Lens

In 2008 *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia Bunge, helped to initiate and establish legitimacy for a child-oriented lens in biblical scholarship.²⁹² *The Child in the Bible* includes the works of established biblical scholars who had “a shared interest in strengthening biblical studies and childhood studies and common concern and compassion for children themselves.”²⁹³ The essays apply a wide range of theories and tools to various texts and genres, according to varied scholarly interests.²⁹⁴ The contributions were written by established scholars who produced fresh

²⁹¹ Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 2.

²⁹² Marcia Bunge, Terrence Fretheim, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). Bunge notes that before this volume, literature that saw a relation between biblical texts and children primarily was written “by scholars in the areas of religious education or children’s ministry.” *Ibid.*, xv. Meanwhile, the essays in this volume are “written by highly respected biblical scholars who use the lens of ‘the child’ to reexamine a selected number of biblical texts and themes.” Marcia Bunge, Introduction to *The Child in the Bible*, xviii-xix.

²⁹³ Bunge introduces the volume by noting the many enriching relationships with children in her life. All of its contributors and consultants, she says, “have held in mind, as they worked on the project, not only the children in their own immediate families but also children, near and far, who are our ‘neighbors’ but are often treated ‘as the least of these.’” Bunge, Introduction to *The Child in the Bible*, xiii. The volume was supported by a grant from the Lilly Foundation, which funded a larger project, “The Child in Religion and Ethics Project” housed at Valparaiso University. *Ibid.*, xii.

²⁹⁴ The volume includes contributions by six Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholars: Terrence Fretheim, “‘God Was with the Boy’ (Genesis 21:21): Children in the Book of Genesis”; Claire Mathews McGinnis, “Exodus as a ‘Text of Terror’ for Children”; Patrick Miller, “That the Children May Know: Children in Deuteronomy”; William Brown, “To Discipline Without Destruction: The Multifaceted Profile of the Child in Proverbs”; Jacqueline Lapsley, “‘Look! The Children and I Are as Signs and Portents in Israel’: Children in Isaiah”; and Brent Strawn, “‘Israel My Child’: The Ethics of a Biblical Metaphor.” In Part 2, the volume also includes contributions on children in the Christian Testament, including in Mark, Luke, John, and Acts; in Paul’s letters generally; in Colossians and

views of their familiar texts by considering questions related to children and childhood. The scholars attend to children and child metaphors in biblical texts, recognize effects of the biblical texts on children, look for biblical perspectives of children, and identify characteristics of children that can be gleaned from the texts. For example, Terence Fretheim interprets Genesis 1 as suggesting that children, like adults, are made in the image of God, particularly through their creativity and relationality: “With this creativity and relationality in every child, no matter how old, it is no wonder that this world is not a static state of affairs, but a dynamic, relational process of becoming.”²⁹⁵ Fretheim also notes the risks that children face, both in Genesis and elsewhere, as “[h]uman beings, including parents, certainly do their share in jeopardizing the life and health of children.”²⁹⁶ Brent Strawn notes that the parent–child metaphor, which is more abundant in the Christian Testament than in the Hebrew Bible, requires assessment because of a potential for its misuse against children.²⁹⁷ The contributions in the volume reveal varying capacities for paying sustained attention to children. In addition, although attention to biblical perspectives of children by adult scholars represents an important shift, presuppositions underlying the child–adult binary remain uninterrogated. Furthermore, the shift is not equivalent to incorporating children’s perspectives, for which later child-oriented scholars have called. As noted by

Ephesians; and on the rhetorical use of children in Paul’s letters. Part 3 comprises assorted essays categorized as “thematic” (e.g., children and the *imago dei*, child roles in biblical narratives, children and Jesus’s kingdom, adoption, and the text’s interest in sacramental nurture and defense of younger generations).

²⁹⁵ Fretheim, “God Was with the Boy,” 5.

²⁹⁶ Fretheim, “God Was with the Boy,” 11.

²⁹⁷ Strawn, “‘Israel My Child,’” 109. The volume includes only two citations to Judges. Strawn cites Judges 17:10 and Judges 18:19, in which priests are called fathers. *Ibid.*, 137 n.109.

Aasgaard, incorporating actual child perspectives into childist, child-centered, and child-oriented biblical scholarship is a challenge that remains unresolved.²⁹⁸

Two Trajectories: Historical and Literary/Narrative Child-Oriented Studies

Adopting a common understanding of the field's territory, trajectories, and terminology has increased in importance as the field has grown. Flynn offers a way to map the development of the field using two primary categories.²⁹⁹ One relies on historical and comparative methodological approaches to produce child-related knowledge in biblical studies. The other "claims a distinct methodology of 'childist' or 'child-centered' interpretation that intentionally mirrors aspects of feminist reading lenses."³⁰⁰ As the field has developed, scholars interested in historical research and scholars interested in literary exegetical treatment of the texts remain in close conversation and draw from one another's insights. I describe each of these categories in turn and then locate my approach in relation to this developing field.

In the first of the two approaches, scholars focus more intently on historical children in the ancient Near East. These scholars define and construct ancient children according to various forms of material and textual evidence, relying on historical and comparative methodological approaches to produce child-related knowledge in biblical studies. They "especially use archeological and comparative data from the ancient Near East to read and understand children

²⁹⁸ Reidar Aasgaard, *How Close Can We Get to the Roman Child: Methodological Potentials* (paper presentation, Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, November 20, 2017).

²⁹⁹ Flynn, "Children in the Hebrew Bible," 1–11. Flynn's framework for child-oriented scholarship is reflective of the trajectories in Hebrew Bible scholarship since the 1970s, when literary methodologies joined historical-critical methodologies and the two began to influence relationality with and interpretation of the biblical texts, as I noted in Chapter 1.

³⁰⁰ Flynn, "Children in the Hebrew Bible," 2.

in the Hebrew Bible.”³⁰¹ Children tend to be seen as worthy of attention as part of “a broader field [of study] that is historically inclined.”³⁰² Studying material and textual evidence of children and the lives they lived in the ancient Near East allows for a more comprehensive understanding of ancient contexts. The scholars working in this area of child-oriented biblical scholarship recognize that children certainly were present in and are relevant to historical reconstructions of the ancient Near East and the social worlds portrayed in the biblical texts. Scholars interested in research on children in the ancient social world differ from scholars who previously have focused on families and households in the ancient social world, in that they place children at the center of their investigation. In this case, children are treated as the primary focus, instead of as marginalized, minor, or lesser members of the larger social unit.

The other of the two forms has “a narrative and literary sensitivity to the approach,” says Flynn.³⁰³ In this childist or child-centered approach, the emphasis is on seeing children and young characters in the stories and on recognizing the variety of ways in which children are characterized, speak, act, and are acted upon. Scholars draw attention to the often voiceless child characters across both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Testament. They note the actions of young characters and the affections and values expressed through the roles that children serve in the narratives, as well as the neglect they suffer and the violence enacted upon them. Taking inspiration both from feminist perspectives and from the childhood studies discipline, the literary

³⁰¹ Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible, 3.

³⁰² Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible, 3.

³⁰³ Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible, 2.

approach generates “interpretation that focuses on the agency and action of children and youth in the biblical text, instead of seeing them primarily as passive, victimized, or marginalized.”³⁰⁴

The two general descriptors of child-oriented research should not be seen as comprehensively descriptive of or rigidly imposed on child-oriented scholarship for several reasons. First, as Flynn notes, “[c]lassifying (and inevitably generalizing) these two approaches does not represent any major division in this emerging field; it only helps to demonstrate that different approaches have emerged and are being discussed.”³⁰⁵

Second, not all biblical scholars who have written and published about children place themselves in one of these two trajectories.³⁰⁶ For example, womanist scholars have produced considerable work on children and mothers,³⁰⁷ but an explicit connection between child-oriented or childist scholarship and womanist scholarship has been rare. A womanist hermeneutic already prioritizes relationality so that groups and families, mothers and children often are the focus of womanist biblical scholarship and interpretation. Even as childist scholars attend to children in the ancient Near East and in biblical texts, womanist scholars already also greatly expanded the number of woman and child characters that readers might see in the text. They do so by explicitly attending to marginalized characters—to characters rendered almost but not quite

³⁰⁴ Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation,” in *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 425.

³⁰⁵ Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 4.

³⁰⁶ See, e.g., Margaret Murray Talbot, “Tsipporah, Her Son, and the Bridegroom of Blood: Attending to the Bodies in Ex 4:24–26,” *Religions* 8, no. 10 (2017). doi:10.3390/rel8100205. The article contributes to biblical scholarship concerned with affect theory, bodies, and their capacities to affect and be affected, and a child-oriented perspective motivates the work, although it is not recognized as a contribution to the field.

³⁰⁷ See, e.g., Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016); and Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Tina Pippin, eds., *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest: Biblical Mothers and Their Children*, SemeiaSt 61 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009).

invisible and that hover in the background.³⁰⁸ According to Wil Gafney, “[i]n womanist practice, the voice and perspective of the whole community is sought and valued.... Womanist discourse makes room at the table for the perspectives of the least privileged among the community and the honored guest of any background: the child who is invited into ‘adult’ conversation around the table with, ‘Baby, what do you think?’...”³⁰⁹ Valerie Bridgeman locates her work on child images in Isaiah as a contribution to “the body of literature regarding children” and echoes Nolan Fewell’s 2003 phrase, “for the sake of our children.”³¹⁰ She thus indicates a connection with the second, literary trajectory laid out by Flynn, but use of *childist* terminology is absent. As I discuss below, the relationship between child-oriented scholarship and its trajectories and womanist attention to children has not yet been explored.

Third, as Koepf Taylor’s work on the functions of children in the ancient texts and context reveals, child-oriented scholarship can draw from and contribute to both trajectories. Interdisciplinarity and eclectic mixes of methodologies and lenses mean that scholars can easily move between and generate interpretations that either contribute to or draw from both of the areas discussed here.³¹¹ Thus, an enforcement of rigid borders and settled distinctions does not seem necessary. Nevertheless, we can clearly say that some childist biblical scholars prioritize feminist-inspired childist or child-centered literary and reader-response orientations to the

³⁰⁸ See, e.g., Wil Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 3.

³⁰⁹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 7.

³¹⁰ Valerie Bridgeman, “‘I Will Make Boys Their Princes’: A Womanist Reading of Children in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 311–12.

³¹¹ For a discussion of interdisciplinarity and its relation to childhood studies and to child-oriented biblical studies, see Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 8–9.

biblical texts, and others prioritize historical reconstructions of the social worlds behind and reflected in the biblical texts. The distinction between these two categories therefore can be useful, and the research and scholarship in both trajectories make important contributions to the discipline of biblical studies as a whole. I appreciate the scholars who have attended to children, whether ancient, literary, or contemporary, as well as the variety of their research.

Terminology Concerns and Rationale for Child-Oriented Language

Scholars who have been instrumental in the formation and growth of the child-oriented approaches in biblical scholarship began by describing their lens or approach or interest in different ways. As the number of scholars interested in children in the biblical texts and the social world of the ancient Near East has grown, deliberations about what terms to use and how to refer to the work have come to the fore.

Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker prefer *childist* as a way to label the work of scholars who have an interest in children in the biblical texts, particularly for the literary approach.³¹² In contrast, Koepf-Taylor prefers the term *child-centered interpretation* to describe the way she attends to children in the text.³¹³ In the historical and comparative child-oriented work, scholars do not often claim to use a *childist* approach, as Flynn notes.³¹⁴ However, Henriksen Garroway, whose research draws on ancient material and textual remains, has used

³¹² Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 425. Parker offers a detailed review of the various terms and also argues for adopting *childist* terminology in biblical scholarship in Parker, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 135–39.

³¹³ See Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die*. In this work, Koepf Taylor makes use of ancient mortuary evidence to help define “child,” drawing from the historical trajectory of child-oriented work. According to Flynn, “Koepf-Taylor decidedly identifies as a child-centered approach, not a childist approach.” Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 2.

³¹⁴ Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 3.

childist in her work; she also uses the term *child-centered*.³¹⁵ Both *childist* and *child-centered* scholarship is seen by these scholars as attending to the children in the biblical texts and in the social world of the texts, and as having broader goals of influencing contemporary perceptions and treatment of children. I see both benefits and drawbacks to these terms and explain the issues in the following paragraphs.

Both *childist* and *child-centered* are influenced by the writings of childhood studies ethicist John Wall, who defines childism as “the effort to respond to the experiences of children by transforming understanding and practices for all.”³¹⁶ The experiences of children “need to become new lenses for interpreting what it means to exist, to live good lives, and to form just communities—for the sake of children and adults both,” he states.³¹⁷ Wall also offers several synonyms for his construction of the meanings of *childism* and its related adjective, *childist*, including *child-inclusive*, *child-responsive*, and *child-centered*.³¹⁸

The appropriateness of the terms *childist* and *child-centered* as modifiers of biblical interpretation and as a descriptive label for child-oriented readings is not fully resolved, and I recognize concerns about the use of both terms as germane. For example, with a replacement of one letter, *childist* becomes *childish*, which tends to indicate undesirable behaviors and has negative connotations, as Koepf Taylor has noted.³¹⁹ In addition, before Wall proposed his

³¹⁵ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 1–2.

³¹⁶ John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 3; as cited in Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 425. Wall also describes childism as a “self-critique” and as societal critique. Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 3.

³¹⁷ Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 1.

³¹⁸ Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 2, 3, 7.

³¹⁹ Conversation with Julie Faith Parker, March 22, 2019.

definition of *childism*, Elisabeth Young-Buehl used the term *childism* to name a harmful prejudice that discriminates against children, similar to terms like racism and sexism. Young-Buehl asserts that:

People as individuals and in societies mistreat children in order to fulfill certain needs through them, to project internal conflicts and self-hatreds outward, or to assert themselves when they feel their authority has been questioned. But regardless of their individual motivations, they all rely upon a societal prejudice against children to justify themselves and legitimate their behavior.³²⁰

Wall recognizes that “isms,” including childism, can be “blunt ideological tools,”³²¹ as Young-Buehl’s work asserts. He thus acknowledges that *childism* and *childist* can convey damaging or harmful perceptions. However, Wall’s use of the term *childist* is intended to counter these harmful views. He uses the term *childist*, then, in arguing that “considerations of childhood should not only have greater importance but fundamentally transform how morality is understood and practiced.”³²² Like feminist and womanist scholarship, *childist* scholarship can be understood to convey a desire for new views on ethics and relationality.

In my project, I primarily use the label of *child-oriented* to describe the work and the field. I appreciate the ease of expression offered by a childist label, as Parker notes. However, I intentionally use *child-oriented* because of my awareness of and concern about the prejudices against children that Young-Buehl describes. It seems critical to me to keep in play the questions of *how* and *why* childism (as akin to sexism and racism), as explained by Young-Buehl, continues to flourish. Young-Buehl notes that “[the] beliefs that children are dangerous and burdensome to society and that childhood is a time when discipline is the paramount adult

³²⁰ See Elisabeth Young-Buehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 1.

³²¹ Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 1.

³²² Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 3.

responsibility” reflects an “anti-child” prejudice; this prejudice “considers adult authority over children absolute, to the point of life and death.”³²³ Her observation is particularly relevant to Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative and adult interpretations of it, as my review of scholarship in Chapter 1 shows. Young-Bruehl sought to encourage “experts’ explorations of how and why adults fail to meet children’s needs and respect their rights; why children deemed antisocial are imprisoned...; why children remain in poverty; why adults feel justified in attacking children; and, in general, why American society fails to support the development and well-being of its children.”³²⁴ Her desire that scholars find answers to these questions reflects the desires of child-oriented biblical scholars who are driven to engender a “more hospitable world”³²⁵ for children. My own concerns regarding adult presuppositions underlying the child–adult binary are similarly motivated.

To summarize, then, I prefer to use *child-oriented* terminology to describe my work, in addition to using *childist* or *child-centered* terminology.³²⁶ *Childist* can be ambiguous and variously interpreted because of its similarity to words like *feminist*, which convey positive connotations, and words like *racist* and *sexist*, which convey harmful and destructive perspectives and relationalities. Both understandings are potentially accurate in describing statements and assumptions involving children. In addition, to my mind, *child-centered* retains a subject–object dichotomy, with children and childhood as the objects of research by child-interested adults. Such a description seems to allow less space for a decentering of the subject and a mutuality in child–adult relationality, which I rely on in constructing my reading of Bat-

³²³ Young-Bruehl, *Childism*, 3–4.

³²⁴ Young-Bruehl, *Childism*, 6.

³²⁵ Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 430.

³²⁶ I see this preference as analogous to Koepf Taylor’s preference for *child-centered* to describe her research.

Yiphtach. I do recognize that both *childist* and *child-centered* might be helpful for other biblical scholars who want to use them to describe their work. Overall, my guiding perspective on terminology is that a multiplicity of terms is most appropriate.

Complementarity in Historical and Literary Child-Oriented Scholarship

I value the ongoing scholarship in both the historical and literary approaches to child-oriented scholarship, as articulated by Flynn, and in this project, I primarily use a child-oriented literary approach to read Judges 11:29–40; a historical reconstruction of children in the ancient Near East is outside the purview of my project. Child-oriented scholars have made significant strides in bringing attention to ancient children’s lives, and in my exegetical work on Judges 11:29–40, I rely on the child-oriented scholarship that attends to historical reconstructions, including socio-historical research on the ancient Near East involving menarche and menstruation. However, in my contribution to the field of child-oriented biblical interpretation, I am primarily concerned with contemporary epistemologies that help to sustain indifference, oppression, and contempt in child–adult relationality and with the role of the biblical texts in sustaining this relationality. Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative provides a fertile text for raising questions about these concerns.

In the following section, I survey the work by Hebrew Bible child-oriented scholars that contributes to my exegesis of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative.³²⁷ As I have noted, a complementary and

³²⁷ A productive dialogue between Hebrew Bible and Christian Testament scholars characterizes the field. I focus on Hebrew Bible scholarship in my project. A limited sampling of Christian Testament child-oriented scholarship includes, for example, Amy Lindeman Allen, *For Theirs is the Kingdom: Inclusion and Participation of Children in the Gospel of Luke* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019); Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury/ T&T Clark, 2015); Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); A. James Murphy, *Kids and Kingdom: The Precarious Presence of Children in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Cornelia B. Horn and John W.

dependent relationship exists between the historical and literary areas of Hebrew Bible child-oriented scholarship. Historian biblical scholars study historical realia via archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence, as well as using social scientific historical and comparative methods, and they turn to the biblical texts to support or compare biblical contents with extra-biblical data. Scholars who start with the biblical texts for literary and narratological readings draw from historical evidence to inform their exegetical moves, as I do here. As Flynn's description of these two prioritizing schemas suggests, the latter movement—from text to ancient context rather than ancient context to text—more easily connects with contemporary ethical concerns about children and the effects of the biblical texts.³²⁸ An interest in children unites the scholars in the field as their varied perspectives and methodologies complement, support, and justify each other's work.

Bat-Yiphtach and Child-Oriented Research Priorities

Hebrew Bible child-oriented scholars have contributed to the conversation in childhood studies by offering perspectives on ancient Near Eastern childhoods and children's experiences, as well as by attending to young characters in biblical narratives.³²⁹ Although Bat-Yiphtach's

Martens, *“Let the Little Children Come to Me”*: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009); James M. M. Francis, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); and Peter Balla, *The Child–Parent Relationship in the New Testament and Its Environment* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

³²⁸ Says Flynn, “The overall content of the ‘childist’ method in Hebrew Bible studies is marked by an inner biblical focus. Then from the fruits of their reading method, they turn to the modern world to show tensions between different biblical and modern attitudes towards children (Fewell, 2003; Koepf Taylor, 2013; Parker, 2013; Steinberg, 2013) to challenge both.” Flynn, “Children in the Hebrew Bible,” 2. Literary childist readings also require that biblical scholars engage with the contexts of the ancient social world, so that a strictly “inner biblical focus” is not actually achievable.

³²⁹ As I have noted, consistent attention also has come from scholars whose work highlights ancient Greco-Roman children and childhood. Aasgaard notes a significant imbalance between the greater amount of historical work on children by Christian Testament and early Christianity scholars and the lesser amount of work by Hebrew Bible scholars. Aasgaard, “History of Research on Children in the Bible and the Biblical World,” 15. Aasgaard was

narrative has served various purposes in the work of some scholars, the implications of her status as (transitioning) child on her narrative, its interpretation, and child–adult relationality have not yet been considered. In the following sections, I survey questions that have influenced Hebrew Bible conversations on ancient (and contemporary) children and childhood thus far, look at historical reconstructions that touch on elements of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, and review child-oriented literary and narrative interpretations of and interactions with the story.

Social Constructedness of Childhood

Following a trajectory in the childhood studies field of disciplines, Hebrew Bible scholars have emphasized the social constructedness of childhood. As a result, one of the primary goals has been to recognize the dramatic differences between contemporary understandings of childhood and children in very different sociological settings. To illustrate, Koepf Taylor emphasizes the social constructedness of childhood (as well as adulthood), stating that “no understanding of what children are, how they behave, or how they develop and toward what goals can be assumed to be universal.”³³⁰ Parker, like Koepf Taylor, emphasizes the need to recognize and bracket contemporary presuppositions about childhood to consider children in the biblical texts. In particular, she notes that “concept[ualizations] of children as coddled innocents and romantic notions of childhood as a period of entitlement are anachronistic, ethnocentric, and inappropriate for biblical understanding.”³³¹ Parker’s historical and theoretical overview clearly

the director of a Norwegian research project, “Tiny Voices from the Past: New Perspectives on Childhood in Early Europe” from 2013 to 2017. A wide-ranging view of childhood is offered in one of the project’s outputs: Aasgaard and Horn, eds., *Childhood in History*, cited in n. 26. The volume provides research on children and childhood from Platonic, Aristotelian, Roman and Greco-Roman, ancient Jewish, patristic, Byzantine, premodern Muslim, Viking, and medieval European and English perspectives, among others.

³³⁰ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 12.

³³¹ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 199.

charts arguments about how understandings of children and childhood have changed through the centuries.³³² Thus, biblical scholars cannot apply contemporary presuppositions to the biblical narratives to understand or critique ancient perspectives about children and childhood.³³³

Similarly, Naomi Steinberg constructs theoretical tools and lenses to disrupt the “unexamined, ethnocentric notion of the universality of childhood”³³⁴ and argues that “there are no universals when it comes to conceptualizations of children or the experiences of children—either past or present.”³³⁵ Thus, she points to how understandings of childhood—in biblical Israel, as now—are multiple, and multiplicities of childhoods can arise even within a single family.³³⁶ Scholarship on biblical childhood has far too often been influenced by the Western model of “the child.” Steinberg troubles this perspective, noting that “childhood as a period of physical and emotional protected well-being and innocence” cannot be assumed of contemporary children and just as clearly should not be projected into the biblical worldview conveyed in the

³³² Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 21–39. Perspectives generated during the Enlightenment and Romantic eras (e.g., by Johann Amos Comenius, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) continue to influence some contemporary conceptualizations of children. Contemporary assumptions might define children according to “physical development, social immaturity, intellectual knowledge, sexual inexperience, legal status, economic dependence, rational abilities, familial roles, cultural expectations—or some combination” of these elements. *Ibid.*, 21. Some of these descriptive schema and the presuppositions they entail are apparent in interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. In particular, physical development, sexual inexperience, familial roles, cultural expectations, and social immaturity can be seen as shaping the narrative and its interpretation. Rarely, questions of economic dependence have surfaced. Some interpreters allude to her rational abilities and cognitive processing—for example, when Nolan Fewell suggests that no one knew what Bat-Yiphtach was thinking or what was in her mind that day. Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 78. Contemporary understandings of legal status and rights are not applicable, although ancient and biblical laws influence interpreters’ questioning of the vow and its outcome.

³³³ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 12.

³³⁴ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, xv.

³³⁵ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, xxi.

³³⁶ Steinberg problematizes the categorizations used for making distinctions between “child” and “adult.” Rejecting chronological age, she opts instead for understandings of childhood based on social responsibility within the structures of kinship and family. She constructs both etic (contemporary) and emic (ancient) perspectives on children in ancient Israelite family life and culture. Steinberg, *The World of the Child*.

texts.³³⁷ Bat-Yiphtach’s childhood certainly would fail to support such a view of childhood, whether her time as a child is imagined in the context of the Ammonites’ oppression of the Israelites or in the presence of Yiphtach and his community of אנשים ריקים (empty or worthless or valueless men).³³⁸ My interest in and focus on Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative is an intentional focus on a singular (transitioning) child, and drawing conclusions about ancient childhoods in a general sense is not my goal. However, the narrative certainly illustrates Steinberg’s point about the temporal and geographical variability of childhood experiences, and familial variability, too.

Biblical scholars have made strides in using available biblical and extrabiblical evidence to focus on ancient Near Eastern children and childhoods; their work contributes ancient Near Eastern perspectives to the history of socially constructed childhoods. Henriksen Garroway particularizes the variability in these childhoods.³³⁹ She uses material and archaeological perspectives to build a database of “child-centric texts [law codes, legal documents, and Hebrew Bible narratives] and archaeological realia.”³⁴⁰ From the database, she constructs a view of

³³⁷ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, xviii.

³³⁸ As already noted, the literary nature of the story offers limited content to support the reconstruction of some aspects of the history of ancient Israel. The shift in biblical scholarship away from the view of Judges as history and toward literary and feminist interpretations began in the 1970s, as I noted in Chapter 1.

³³⁹ Henriksen Garroway has been a prolific contributor to child-oriented Hebrew Bible scholarship in the past decade and to the historical reconstruction of children in the ancient social world. See, e.g., Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*; Kristine Henriksen Garroway, “Neither Slave Nor Free: Children Living on the Edge of Social Status,” in *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus*, ed. B. T. Arnold et al. (N. L. Erickson, and J. H. Walton) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 121–38; and “Methodology: Who Is a Child and Where Do We Find Children in the Ancient Near East?” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Sharon Betsworth and Julie Faith Parker (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 67–90. Articles include Kristine Henriksen Garroway, “Children and Religion in the Archaeological Record of Ancient Israel,” *JANER* 17 (2017): 116–39; and Kristine Henriksen Garroway, “2 Kings 6:24-30: A Case of Unintentional Elimination Killing,” *JBL* 137, no. 1 (2018): 53–70. Where men and women are, children also will be there, she notes. Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 1.

³⁴⁰ Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 2. Henriksen Garroway notes a similarity in questions raised by child-oriented biblical scholars and scholars in the field of childhood archaeology: “What is the relationship between the child, their world, and adults? What did it mean to be a child in the past? When do children become gendered? What role did children have in the household economic system? Can we talk of childhood in past societies?” See Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 4.

children in a household environment around questions of fluidity in both their membership and status in the household and, in doing so, deconstructs a monolithic sense of ancient children, breaking down anachronistic and simplistic understandings of households and the relationships they represent. To illustrate, Henriksen Garroway notes the distinctions among slave and debt-slave children, orphans and foundlings, adopted children, and hired (free) children, among others, focusing on how status and gender influence the place of the child in the household, and thus also in society more generally. She structures her interpretation of the data according to the social ages of children, based on a definition of children as “those who are in the process of becoming fully engendered as adults.”³⁴¹ From this perspective, adulthood is reached at marriage, “the time at which the ancient Near Eastern society considers a person an adult.”³⁴² Fruitful theoretical tools used in her work come from the fields of anthropology/ethnography, archaeology, the sociology of childhood, gender studies, and legal studies.³⁴³

To provide additional data on ancient childhoods, Henriksen Garroway in her 2018 monograph, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, studies life stages in ancient childhood and what can be learned about ancient lived experiences in these stages of childhood. “Children are present in texts and material culture. By readjusting analyses of sources from adult-centric to child-centric

³⁴¹ Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 10. That this process in ancient times quite often was interrupted is apparent in the long list of scholars offering research into “various aspects of a child’s death in Canaan, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine empire.” Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 24, n. 43. Garroway herself notes that “one of the best places to find them [children, in the archaeological record] is within mortuary contexts.” Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 24. Elsewhere, Henriksen Garroway states that infant mortality was at 50 percent and that archaeologists also estimate that “another 50 percent of children died before the age of fifteen years.” Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 223–4. Life expectancy was thirty to forty years old, based on evidence from Bronze Age Lachish, Kabri, and ‘En Esur burial populations. Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 224, n. 7.

³⁴² Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 10.

³⁴³ Henriksen Garroway, *Children in the ANE Household*, 4.

approaches,” questions about growing up in ancient Israel can be addressed.³⁴⁴ To overcome the paucity of data on ancient children, she uses archaeological and comparative ethnographic methods, drawing from the Hebrew Bible, epigraphic data from the ancient Near East, material culture, and ethnographic accounts.³⁴⁵ As a framework for her study, Henriksen Garroway identifies a variety of biological stages in “growing up”³⁴⁶ and populates a subset of these stages for ancient children—the stages from prenatal to juvenile (i.e., up to ten years for females and twelve years for males). With this work, she constructs a view of ancient children that reveals a normative construction of daily activities of children and interactions among children, their environment, and other people in it. However, in focusing on stages up to and including “juveniles,” Henriksen Garroway for her purposes sets aside two additional life stages still deemed part of childhood: puberty and adolescence.³⁴⁷ My reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative

³⁴⁴ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 1.

³⁴⁵ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, xi. For explanations of Henriksen Garroway’s temporal and geographical definitions of “ancient Israel” and her methodological approach using comparative material, see Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 8–21, especially 14–21. She looks for “incidental or background information” in the biblical texts about daily activities that might be common to everyday children, based on context. *Ibid.*, 13. The texts are supplemented with comparative sources. Henriksen Garroway offers the example of cutting the umbilical cord at birth. Archaeological data and biblical texts offer no data on this obviously necessary step, “but other ancient Near Eastern sources do.” *Ibid.*, 16. For the later childhood stages she considers, material culture (e.g., iconography, monumental reliefs, burial records, and fingerprint and footprint analysis) provides more data on ancient Israel and its children. In addition, direct data from ethnographic studies of societies deemed similar to ancient Israel are used. To overcome the paucity of data on ancient children, Henriksen Garroway uses a comparative approach, which “casts a broad net” to construct ancient Israelite childhood. *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁴⁶ Henriksen Garroway draws these ten stages from Barry Bogin and Holly Smith “Evolution of the Human Life Cycle,” in *Human Biology: An Evolutionary and Biocultural Perspective*, ed. Sara Stinson, Barry Bogin, and Dennis O’Rourke (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2012), 521.

³⁴⁷ Bogin and Smith, “Evolution of the Human Life Cycle,” 541–44, cited in Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 7. Henriksen Garroway describes the remaining life stages as follows: “Puberty, lasting days or a few weeks, leads to adolescence, which lasts five to ten years. The adolescent starts the journey toward social and sexual maturation and experiences a second, greater growth spurt. Adulthood marks the completion of skeletal, cognitive, and sexual maturity. Females reach adulthood around age eighteen to twenty, while male adulthood is reached between ages twenty-one to twenty-five. The final stage of life is old age, starting at either forty-five or fifty-five years old for females and males respectively.” Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 7.

places her securely in these latter categories without arguing for one or the other. As representing times of movement toward sexual maturity, they both allow for a focus in my exegetical work in Chapter 3 on menarche and menstruation, which previous interpretations of the narrative gloss over or neglect, or they attend to it in light of an unproblematized rite of passage rather than as an embodied transitioning child's experience. Like Henriksen Garroway, I address the paucity of ancient data on menarche by turning to comparative ethnographic data. I also contextualize the experience using linguistic and socio-historical research on biblical menstruation texts and their interpretation.³⁴⁸

Child-oriented biblical scholars have made important contributions in both biblical studies and childhood studies by taking up the mantra of the social constructedness of childhood and researching aspects of ancient Near Eastern childhood. They correct potential inaccuracies based on contemporary presuppositions of childhoods. I continue this work by interpreting Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child to question presuppositions underlying a child–adult binary and by revealing how ancient and contemporary views of menarche and menstruation might contribute to a child-oriented interpretation of the narrative.

Valuations and Valuing of Ancient Children

Child-oriented Hebrew Bible scholars have raised questions about how ancient childhoods and understandings of them differ from contemporary childhoods. They also examine whether ancient children were valued differently in their social world than contemporary

³⁴⁸ Such work more often is written with a gender binary in mind, rather than recognizing menstruation taboos' effects on transitioning children. The common messaging by which menarche signals entry into "womanhood" articulates one reason for this tendency to neglect a child-oriented perspective. I examine the relevant research on menarche and menstruation in Chapter 3.

children are valued. They consider such questions in light of the functions of ancient children in their childhoods and their roles in the biblical texts. As an early contributor to child-oriented biblical scholarship, Naomi Steinberg helped to establish the direction of the questioning of ancient children's value. Steinberg counteracts contemporary views of emotional attachment in the valuation of children, arguing that economic issues had significance in the Israelite social world: "The individual child was economic family property whose function was to carry forward the production and reproduction of the family into the next generation."³⁴⁹ Romanticizing how children are valued is inappropriate both in contemporary and ancient times and neglects far too much of what the biblical texts reveal. She concludes:

Despite the polarizing differences between the agrarian economic system of ancient Israel and industrialism and post-industrialism in the present, in neither time nor setting are children treated as fully human. In many ways, the past and the present have more in common when it comes to attitudes toward children than we might have initially thought.³⁵⁰

Koepf Taylor similarly emphasizes distinctions between the values that contemporary adults attribute to children and the values of children in ancient subsistence agrarian economies and cultures. She sees the latter's social value as "neither solely emotional nor solely economic."³⁵¹ She thus points to the need to consider children's value outside the dominant contemporary emotional realm to avoid anachronistic readings of the text.³⁵² Her child-centered readings shed light on the cultural and communal value of children in ancient Israelite culture, as

³⁴⁹ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, 123.

³⁵⁰ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, 130.

³⁵¹ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 30.

³⁵² Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 15–23. Koepf Taylor draws on the seminal work in childhood studies of Viviana Zelizer, who identifies a change in the cultural construction of U.S. childhoods in the twentieth century, from "the economically valuable, useful child to the priceless, useless child whose value can only be 'sentimental.'" *Ibid.*, 15. See Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

revealed in the Hebrew Bible. By considering the tropes of infertility, education, and children's suffering and death in the biblical texts, Koepf Taylor notes that children's value and function relate to adults' biological reproduction and economic survival, to cultural reproduction and continuity, and to communal survival. She recounts the biblical texts' portrayal of children's economic and communal value in light of the texts' concerns with fertility and infertility (biological reproduction), education and enculturation (cultural reproduction), and loss of and violence against children (threat to the communal future). In this light, I would propose that adults' motivating interests in child–adult relationality seem to be predominantly conservative and self-referential.³⁵³ A few elements in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative support this view (e.g., Yiphtach's response at seeing her), as do interpretations of the narrative that focus on Yiphtach's reproductive failures and on cultural rituals. In my exegetical work in Chapters 3 and 4, I counter this conservatism and adult-centric concerns by underscoring bodily transitions and change and the exercise of agency from a child-oriented perspective.

Taking issue with a narrow economic accounting of ancient children's value, Flynn uses comparative methods to reconsider the question of children's value.³⁵⁴ His methodological approach is to look at Mesopotamian linguistic identifiers of children and life stages and at terminological parallels in the MT Hebrew. In his questions about children's value across various life stages, including pre-natal stages, Flynn identifies a religious value for children in relation to

³⁵³ Vanessa Lovelace articulates this conservatism in describing a functional model of the sociology of contemporary families: "This perspective emphasizes the significance of the [conventionally structured] family as an institution for preserving social stability by socializing children, providing a major source for emotional and practical support for its members, policing sexual activity and sexual reproduction, and providing its members with a social identity." Vanessa Lovelace, "We Don't Give Birth to Thugs: Family Values, Respectability Politics, and Jephthah's Mother," *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. Gay Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 244.

³⁵⁴ Flynn notes that his comparative approach is descriptive and not intended to prove "specific cultural borrowing between Mesopotamia and Israel." Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 17.

domestic cults. He states: “We find that the comparative approach between Mesopotamian and Israelite expressions [involving children] reveals a common domestic-cultic value for children rooted in connections between deities and children.”³⁵⁵ His review of Mesopotamian texts includes medical, ritual, and contractual texts, as well as letters and prayers, and thus provides a broader cultural matrix in which to locate children; the juxtaposition of these texts against the Hebrew Bible is done with an understanding that the biblical texts represent a religious agenda(s): “The HB’s promotion of YHWHism via the child–deity connection becomes a main feature of understanding the construction of children in the [Hebrew Bible].”³⁵⁶

In light of Flynn’s work, exegesis of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative needs to recognize the function she might be serving in the texts’ varied conversations and debates about Yahwistic cultic practices and valuations. In addition, valuation of virginity in light of Flynn’s work on domestic cults might be helpful, particularly in relation to Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. Flynn provides additional perspective on the narrative’s and Bat-Yiphtach’s interest in her בתולים as he explains a cognate Mesopotamian term:

Another stage of childhood suggests a transition period close to the social age of marriage. For example, youth of marriageable age are either *batussu* or *batultu*, “young men” and “young women.” There is debate over whether these youth are virgins, yet most evidence seems to point in that direction. They are still at home, not yet married, but clearly older than a weaned child.³⁵⁷

Furthermore, in this discussion Flynn cites a Neo-Assyrian letter in the *Annals of the Kings of Assyria*: “I burnt as a burnt offering their adolescent boys (*batulišunu*) and girls

³⁵⁵ Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 9.

³⁵⁶ Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 19. Flynn’s perspective here serves as an important reminder and caveat to child-oriented biblical scholars working both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Christian Testament.

³⁵⁷ Flynn draws on Martha T. Roth, “Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Forms,” *CSSH* 29, no. 4 (1987): 715–47, cited in Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 13.

(*batulatešunu*).³⁵⁸ The cognate term and the fate of the boys and girls to which it refers present interesting parallels to Bat-Yiphtach's story and invite questions about the risks that ancient valued virginal "adolescents" might have faced in Israelite and surrounding cultures.³⁵⁹ Flynn acknowledges that "children die, are sacrificed, are punished, and are used for economic gains of the family and household," and nevertheless also asserts that "the ancients engaged in these practices while maintaining a widely held value for children."³⁶⁰

Complex constructions of how and to what end children are valued in child–adult relationality are necessary. As Flynn notes, children certainly die and are sacrificed in the biblical texts and in the ancient social world, and also in contemporary contexts.³⁶¹ Heath Dewrell in his 2018 work on child sacrifice gives renewed attention to scholars' long debates about the biblical texts' views on and concerns with child sacrifice. He notes that "the vast majority of contemporary scholars" accept that child sacrifice did occur in ancient Israel, despite the discomfort the idea presents to modern Jewish and Christian faith communities.³⁶² Scholars accepting the practice as likely turn to secondary questions of whether YHWH "himself was

³⁵⁸ Budge and King, AKA 301 ii 19, cited in Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 13.

³⁵⁹ As interesting as such questions might be, a historical comparative study between the AKA and Judges 11 is outside the scope of this project. The burning of adolescents in the AKA might support a provenance for the development of Judges following the Assyrian conquest of Israel, as Baker has proposed, but the literary connections with the Iphigenia story also suggest the possibility of a post-exilic dating, as Römer has suggested. See Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges*, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. Paul Anderson and Yvonne Sherwood (Leiden: Brill, 2016); and Römer, "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell...?" Although I appreciate the comparisons that Baker is able to make between Judges and other Mesopotamian literature, the function of the narrative and the questions it inspires in light of its long history of interpretation seems to me to be more closely tied to that of post-exilic wisdom literature. Thus, I prefer Römer's hypothesis, at least regarding a provenance for the inclusion of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative in Judges.

³⁶⁰ Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel*, 9.

³⁶¹ In pointing to contemporary child sacrifice, I assume a broader understanding of "sacrifice," in which children simply are sacrificed in the course of adults' achievement of their own ends, and not necessarily for culturally inspired purposes.

³⁶² Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 1.

understood as the recipient of such offerings or if Israelite child sacrifice instead represents an example of foreign syncretism and apostasy” as Israelites offered up their children to foreign gods.³⁶³ Dewrell first brings readers up to date on the history of the debate, following Eissfeldt’s argument in 1935 that למלך (in Lev 18:21, 20:1–5; 2 Kgs 23:10; and Jer 32:35) represents a form of ritual sacrifice, rather than a deity to whom a sacrifice is made.³⁶⁴ Dewrell goes further, looking also at extra-biblical archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence in the Levant and central Mediterranean with which to consider the biblical texts.³⁶⁵ He argues that a למלך sacrifice is one of three different forms of sacrificial rituals included in the Hebrew Bible that involve the sacrifice of children. Dewrell argues that these למלך sacrifices were a syncretistic form, probably introduced into the Jerusalem cult by King Ahaz. They were “an originally Phoenician/Punic rite that involved the sacrifice of children of both sexes in fulfillment of vows, probably made to ensure success in private undertakings.”³⁶⁶

The other two forms of child sacrifice are seen as “native” Israelite rituals. The first of the native forms is the general sacrifice of firstborn children, which Dewrell posits might have been practiced by “a small ‘ultra-pious’ or ‘literalist’ group of Yahwists, a group that probably perpetually remained a minority of the Israelite population at large.”³⁶⁷ The second of the native

³⁶³ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 1.

³⁶⁴ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, Chapter 1. Further argument ensues over whether the deity is or is not YHWH.

³⁶⁵ Dewrell notes that, at this point, evidence of a connection between Punic *lmlk* and Hebrew למלך rituals is only circumstantial. He hypothesizes, however, that “the presence of an apparently identical child sacrifice rite both in Carthage and in Judah,” with Phoenicia as “the most likely link between the two,” is still of value until future archeological discoveries either confirm or deny it. Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 69.

³⁶⁶ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 143. Dewrell’s argument is far more complex than I discuss here.

³⁶⁷ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 72–90. The proposed function was to ensure “the resulting general fecundity of land animals, and humans (or at least a lack of divine intervention in the form of famine and bereavement).” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 97.

forms of child sacrifice, also of firstborns, was an extreme action undertaken during times of distress and as a last resort.³⁶⁸ Although interpreters of biblical texts more often cite texts that clearly speak against the acceptability of child sacrifice in the Israelite “Yahwistic” cult, Dewrell offers the following caveat:

[M]uch of the Deuteronomistic History and several of the prophetic books are primarily devoted to the fact that the standard Jerusalem cult did not conform to their idea of legitimate Yahwistic practice. This fact should warn us against basing one’s reconstruction of actual (in contrast to biblically ideal) Israelite religious practice on the “legal possibilities” presented in the Hebrew Bible. That is, even if the texts of the Hebrew Bible do absolutely and unanimously reject child sacrifice (a dubious claim to begin with, given Exod 22:28b–29), they would still provide little evidence that all, or even most, Israelite Yahwists agreed.³⁶⁹

Dewrell draws from a variety of biblical texts as he juxtaposes their “apparent purpose, function, and historical development” to the extra-biblical evidence he garners for לַמֶּלֶךְ and first-born rituals to identify the potential forms of Israelite ritual child sacrifice. Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative represents one of these texts.³⁷⁰ In Dewrell’s reading, Bat-Yiphtach stoically advises Yiphtach “that his vow must be fulfilled, only asking for two months to go into the hills so that ‘she may weep over her youth.’”³⁷¹ After her return and the fulfillment of the vow, “[t]he narrative concludes with a notice that she had never known a man sexually and an etiology for an

³⁶⁸ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 145.

³⁶⁹ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 102.

³⁷⁰ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 108–15. Other texts Dewrell considers include Moabite King Mesha’s sacrifice of his son in 2 Kings 3, in which “Mesha’s sacrifice of his firstborn son is presented as an effective means of propitiating a deity” (i.e., the Moabite deity Chemosh). Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 97. Also considered is Micah 6:1–8, in which “Micah implies that his listeners believed that [YHWH] could potentially be persuaded to act by the sacrifice of a firstborn child.” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 101. In both these references, “sacrifices are presented as offered during times of distress, and in each case the sacrifice of a firstborn child appears to have been perceived as a particularly valuable, and presumably particularly effective offering.” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 107.

³⁷¹ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 109. Noting the varied meanings that have been assigned to בתולה, Dewrell notes that in several attestations of the word, “it does seem to have at least an implication of virginity (see Gen 24:16; Lev 21:3, 14; 21:12; 2 Sam 13:18–19). Nonetheless, I prefer to err on the side of caution and translate the word ‘youth.’” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 109.

otherwise unknown custom in which the daughters of Israel weep for the daughter of Jephthah for four days each year.”³⁷² Dewrell’s concern with the historical reality of child sacrifice results in a quick turn to Yiphtach’s vow and the resulting sacrifice. Thus, like other commentators, he is concerned with what Yiphtach is promising in his vow and what the implied reader might conclude from it.³⁷³ However, Dewrell ultimately rejects Judges 11:29–40 as providing useful textual evidence for a historical reconstruction of child sacrifice in the Israelite Yahwistic cult, pointing to the problems of using what is a presumed etiology and a certain legendary folktale to reconstruct historical child sacrifice. He includes the story in his survey of biblical texts that narrate or address child sacrifice but concludes that “establishing that there existed in ancient Israel a rite by which children were vowed and then sacrificed solely on the basis of the Jephthah story... puts more historical weight on the folktale than it can bear.”³⁷⁴ As Dewrell nicely illustrates, texts used in researching and reconstructing ancient childhoods and how historical children were valued must be chosen with care.³⁷⁵

Assessing and interpreting children’s value in ancient texts and contexts requires complex constructions of “value,” caution in overgeneralizing, and awareness of how contemporary presuppositions influence the readings. Child characters in the biblical texts reflect

³⁷² Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 109.

³⁷³ See my review of the literature in Chapter 1.

³⁷⁴ Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 115.

³⁷⁵ Dewrell argues that different texts “deal with earlier traditions, in some cases rejecting [them] outright but in others trying to preserve and rework them in a more palatable direction.” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 189. He notes that the linking of all child sacrifice with foreign deities was a late development that eventually provided the solution for addressing the historical reality of Yahwistic child sacrifice. Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 190. He also asserts that all child sacrifice in the cult ended at some point during the exile and that “[t]here is no evidence that any Yahwistic group continued to sacrifice their children according to any of the three known forms of child sacrifice after the fall of Jerusalem.” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 193.

a reality in which ancient children are both valued and vulnerable, as Parker asserts.³⁷⁶ From her exegetical work examining children in the Elisha cycle of 2 Kings, Parker acknowledges that children in the narratives do fulfill a certain function, and sometimes the function actually relates to the children themselves—to their contributions in economic, religious, and military spheres. “The text reveals children as vital to the ancient world on many levels, without necessarily anticipating the adults that they will become.”³⁷⁷ However, Nolan Fewell offers a different perspective that in various texts and at various times and places is equally true: “There is no concern for the children themselves, their experiences or their suffering; rather, they are there to further the stories of Israel, Abraham, Moses, David, Job, Elisha, and Jesus.”³⁷⁸ Parker nicely captures the complexity: In the varied tales in the Elisha cycle, “adults can be advocates or adversaries. Children can be beloved or butchered.”³⁷⁹ Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, among others, suggests that apparently beloved children can be “butchered” as well. Sanguine constructions of how biblical texts value child characters are thus to be avoided.

Agency of Ancient and Textual Children

Recognizing and affirming children’s agency, including children’s ability to influence social contexts, is a significant corrective that scholars in childhood studies have sought to achieve, as I noted previously. Similarly, child-oriented biblical scholars generate interpretations that focus “on the agency and action of children and youth in the biblical text, instead of seeing

³⁷⁶ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*.

³⁷⁷ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 200.

³⁷⁸ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 27.

³⁷⁹ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 201.

them primarily as passive, victimized, or marginalized,” as Gallagher Elkins and Parker assert.³⁸⁰ Thus, child-oriented biblical scholarship is interested in assessing ancient and textual children’s agency. Questions about Bat-Yiphtach’s agency as transitioning child are relevant to this project, just as questions of agency have arisen for feminist interpreters who read her as a woman.

How is agency constructed? In her reading of the children in the Elisha cycle, Parker understands agency as both a capacity to influence and the exercise of some level of authority.³⁸¹ Agency in this understanding conveys multiple understandings of power, including both inherent and assigned power. Although *power* can be used to name both forms, they are distinct. The former refers to the exercise of action and relationality, the capacity to exist, to affect or be affected; it means “to multiply connections that may be realized by a given ‘body’ to varying degrees in different situations,” according to Brian Massumi.³⁸² The latter concept of power indicates use of “an instituted and reproducible relation of force.”³⁸³ In its institutionalized form, such power can be associated with constraint, and also with possibilities for acting. Such perspectival distinctions are helpful in assessments of children’s agency.

In the course of recognizing children’s agency, child-oriented scholars also make visible some of the limitations both in children’s agency and in adult constructions of children’s agency. For example, for my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, Henriksen Garroway’s construction of the growing child indicates limitations on children’s social agency. Henriksen Garroway

³⁸⁰ Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 425.

³⁸¹ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 99.

³⁸² This form of agency or power is conveyed by *puissance* in French. See Brian Massumi, “Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements,” *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xvii.

³⁸³ This form of agency is labeled with a different word in French: *pouvoir*. Massumi, “Notes on the Translation,” xvii.

presumes that “being part of a society means knowing what actions are proper and expected,” and these proper actions are learned through “enculturation and socialization.”³⁸⁴ Her view suggests that a child’s choices in enculturation are both active—embracing it—and passive—learning by observing and internalizing lessons.³⁸⁵ However, this construction of a child’s observation as a passive form of children’s agency is problematic. Gopnik’s research on contemporary children suggests that children’s observation has far more possibility and scope than adults might be comfortable admitting.³⁸⁶ In this light, agency is not just a capacity to affect or a possibility of acting, but a possibility of seeing and interpreting.

Also problematic is that in neither the active acceptance of enculturation nor the passive internalizing of it does a child’s agency extend to rejecting or altering the world and worldview that adults enforce, impose, or construct for themselves. “Recognizing the place of the child as the *receptacle of culture* is one way of engendering and one way of understanding how children were educated.”³⁸⁷ As in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, in the process of enculturation, children’s agency is limited to obedience and to acceptance of the adult worldview.

Koepf Taylor also offers problematic views of agency in relation to enculturation and tradition. She notes David Carr’s understanding that scribal education has been seen as both the acquisition of a skill and enculturation into a particular worldview.³⁸⁸ “The enculturation of

³⁸⁴ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 137.

³⁸⁵ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 137. Somewhat surprising in this introduction of enculturation is that “a child” is discussed using male pronouns. Thus, a child’s world consists of the environment and people with whom *he* interacts, and in this world, *he* learns by observing. *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ See, e.g., Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby*, 116–121. Underscoring my reading of Bat-Yiphtach is a broader and more active observational agency.

³⁸⁷ Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 138, emphasis added.

³⁸⁸ See David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11, as cited in Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 68.

young minds ensured the continuation of [the] narratives of a mythic past and the cultural identity and values they conveyed.”³⁸⁹ She notes that the preservation of “Judean communal and cultural identity” became critical for the exilic and diaspora communities:

The value of child instruction in the Hebrew Bible is less in children’s personal gain for the sake of their own futures than in that of the community, which survives by instructing them. The apparently successful enculturation of children in and after the Babylonian exile resulted in the continued endurance of Judean identity and the text of the Hebrew Bible, so that this text persists as a form of cultural heritage to this day.³⁹⁰

Cultural preservation and conservation certainly are deemed important in places throughout the Hebrew Bible, as Koepf Taylor states. In texts such as Deut 6:7, 11:18–20; and Exod 12:26–7; 13:8, 14, she perceives a non-Priestly, post-Deuteronomic redactional layer incorporating “a close relationship among cross-generational instruction, parental obedience, and the responsibility of each generation to the next [or perhaps each generation to the previous?], which is broadly applicable but particularly salient in the context of exile and diaspora.”³⁹¹ She observes that when communities have lost most of that which they value, “children are the remaining resource they must hone.”³⁹² Her perspectives underscore the ubiquitous struggle, both in the texts and in its interpreters, between preservation and conservatism of traditions through time and across generations, and adaptation and development that might be a proper response to changing and unstable contexts.

³⁸⁹ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 68.

³⁹⁰ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 73.

³⁹¹ Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 73–4. Koepf Taylor’s redaction and source analysis reveal and rely on shifts in scholars’ understandings of the still commonly cited source hypothesis popularized by Wellhausen in the nineteenth century: the J, E, P, and D sources. As already stated, my project focuses on a synchronic literary reading of Judges 11:29–40, so that redactional layers and questions are deemphasized. However, as already noted, Römer’s proposal of the narrative as a post-exilic, post-DtrH Wisdom insertion seems appropriate. See Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomists...?,” 27–38.

³⁹² Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children*, 91.

Diaspora presents an opportunity for additional questions about constructions of agency, according to Dong Sung Kim. The capacity of children to “move freely and ignorantly” between boundaries is one way in which children can “interrupt the categories constructed by the society, and disclose its instability and artificiality,” he notes.³⁹³ Kim thus advocates for a more reflexive awareness among adult biblical scholars and interpreters about the cultural politics that influence their interpretations and their understandings of children’s agency. “When children’s agency is defined *not only* in terms of their actions within particular events or narratives, *but also* in terms of their right of choice to become who they want to be—in other words, their choice of identity—several difficult questions may arise.”³⁹⁴ The questions that he poses stem from juxtaposing children’s agency and the biblical texts’ construction of national and ethnic identity. I would add that reflexivity about interpreters’ religious identity also is relevant.

Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, from a child-centered perspective, poses questions about who most benefits from conservatism of traditions and parental obedience, as well as about the child–adult dichotomy and presuppositions about its distributions of power and agency. With their child-centered work, Henricksen Garroway and Koepf Taylor begin, at least implicitly—and Kim begins explicitly—to explore the power dynamics and potential for agency in a child–adult binary and in light of recent scholarship in the sociology of childhood.

Interpreters of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative also have raised questions about the agency of the various individual characters in the narrative. As I have noted, this individualistic perspective is being problematized by researchers in childhood studies. A review of Nolan Fewell’s *The*

³⁹³ Dong Sung Kim, “Children of Diaspora: The Cultural Politics of Identity and Diasporic Childhood in the Book of Esther,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie Faith Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 110.

³⁹⁴ Kim, “Children of Diaspora,” 111.

Children of Israel—one of the earliest works by a Hebrew Bible scholar to examine the biblical texts’ child-related narratives—reveals why. In 2003 Nolan Fewell invited readers to “imagine what might happen... if we were to start looking for these children who are hidden between the lines, if children were allowed to surface and reshape the meaning of the biblical text.”³⁹⁵ Nolan Fewell interprets the story of Bat-Yiphtach and her father (Judges 10–11) by reconstructing the presumed ritual in Judges 11:40.³⁹⁶ Bat-Yiphtach is the child in whose memory the ritual is kept, and Nolan Fewell retells the narrative creatively to an imagined audience participating in the ritual of compassion still being practiced: “Those of us here... think her story deserves to be told. We are afraid that if we don’t tell the story, no one will. If no one tells this story, someone may have to relive it. And so we tell it to you, our daughters, that you may tell your daughters and they may tell theirs.”³⁹⁷ As in Nolan Fewell and David Gunn’s *Gender, Power, and Promise*, the retelling of Judges 11 in *The Children of Israel* involves two abused and neglected children: Yiphtach and Bat-Yiphtach.³⁹⁸ However, in *The Children of Israel*, the emphasis is on Yiphtach and Bat-Yiphtach as foreigners and outsiders. Nolan Fewell’s critique is of the community of people who made them such. The tragedy of Bat-Yiphtach’s death stems from the failure of the

³⁹⁵ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 27. In each chapter, Nolan Fewell offers creative, midrashic retellings of Hebrew Bible narratives involving children. Her interpretations are constructed as stories, a two-act play, an epic poem, and a prayer; and interspersed throughout are remembrances that reveal and preserve her own daughter’s voice. Nolan Fewell thus invites her readers to join a conversation involving the Hebrew Bible and its stories that has ethical implications and breaks categorical and disciplinary boundaries. The conversation that her book represents has been influenced by multiple discourses provided by her daughter, philosophers, theorists, and literary and biblical critics.

³⁹⁶ See Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 68–82.

³⁹⁷ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 69.

³⁹⁸ See Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 70, and Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon,)126.

community to care for the stranger, the Other.³⁹⁹ Nolan Fewell's Bat-Yiphtach is cast as a child whom the society has "othered," leading to her sacrificial death; however, under the influence of Emmanuel Levinas, the interpretation becomes problematic. The character of Bat-Yiphtach as a child in this retelling is accorded the same sort of initiative or agency that she is granted in *Gender, Power, and Promise* as a (young) woman. In *Gender, Power, and Promise*, she shows initiative and takes control of the vow, "turning it from a weapon of victory accidentally causing unavoidable collateral damage to a chilling lesson about recklessness, thoughtlessness, and human worth."⁴⁰⁰ In *The Children of Israel*, the child is given an ethical reading using Levinas's ethics, in which she "makes a movement toward the Other (her father and secondarily the community of Gilead) knowing that she can never return to the point of her departure. Her action... is aimed at a world without her.... This is not self-sacrifice simply as a gesture of obedience, but a risking of self in the hopes of inaugurating a 'spiritual journey' in the Other."⁴⁰¹ Within Nolan Fewell's retelling of the narrative, a significant shift seems to have occurred in Bat-Yiphtach's status: She develops from a girl who "[a]lone danced in the street silent except for her thin child's voice..." to one "dancing determinedly toward a world that would forever resist her song."⁴⁰² Influenced by Levinas, Nolan Fewell's retelling of Bat-Yiphtach's story

³⁹⁹ Nolan Fewell juxtaposes and interweaves the narrative with the writings, in lengthy footnotes, of Emmanuel Levinas, Julia Kristeva, and Zygmunt Bauman. She also brings biblical scholars into the conversation through her constructed narrative, explaining within her own story world how scholars have resolved the ambiguities and gaps. Thus, she engages biblical scholarship by making it part of the story retold to the implied audience: "No one seems to know what was in that child's mind when she stepped out of the house that day. Some say she didn't know any better, that she didn't know about the vow, that she was only doing what she thought might please her father. She was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time." Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 78. Phyllis Tribble and Esther Fuchs are among the "some" to whom Nolan Fewell refers; they both "see the daughter's ignorance as a patriarchal construction designed to minimize Jephthah's responsibility." Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 78, n. 27.

⁴⁰⁰ Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 127.

⁴⁰¹ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 80–1, n. 34.

⁴⁰² Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 78, 80,

grants the child both spiritual development and agency: She becomes one who has seen the Face of the Other and chooses self-sacrifice.⁴⁰³ Supported by “a small group of young women,” Bat-Yiphtach gives herself “for the adult citizens of Gilead who made no move to save her or comfort her”; and together, she and her friends “grieved about being young women in a world where the young were expendable, where adult ambition and position and possessions eclipsed care and responsibility for children.”⁴⁰⁴ The whole community watched in satisfaction as Yiphtach, the outsider, got caught in his own trap and sacrificed his daughter.⁴⁰⁵

As a foundation for childist scholarship, Nolan Fewell’s work, and her insistence that biblical texts be read “for the sake of our children,” has been invaluable. In this case, she attends to Bat-Yiphtach as child and has in view a child, child–adult relationality, the narrated social world of the children and adults, and contemporary communities whose neglect of children troubles her. Her interpretation of the narrative provides a different perspective on the child Bat-Yiphtach from other interpretations in which the child’s filial piety is to be emulated or whose disrespect for her father earns her condemnation. However, reading the narrative through Levinas’s ethics is problematic because, in granting Bat-Yiphtach greater agency, Nolan Fewell converts child sacrifice into self-sacrifice.⁴⁰⁶ The othered one becomes responsible for the awakening of the community of those who make her other.

⁴⁰³ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 80.

⁴⁰⁴ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 81.

⁴⁰⁵ Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel*, 82.

⁴⁰⁶ In this regard, the view is similar to that of Christian interpreters who construct a typological interpretation of the narrative in which the daughter prefigures Christ’s humanity. See, e.g., Gunn, *Judges*, 138–40. I have intentionally chosen not to engage with these interpretations because they reflect Christians’ Old Testament readings of the narrative rather than a Hebrew Bible interpretation.

A child's death has the potential power—likely in both contemporary and ancient times—to affect the adults who prefer stability, rationality, and conservatism and to move them toward action, affect, and change.⁴⁰⁷ Bat-Yiphtach's narrative might have been incorporated into the biblical texts with such purposes in mind. However, constructing Bat-Yiphtach's agency as self-sacrifice in light of the text is problematic. I expand the discourse on children's agency in Chapter 4 by constructing a framework for analysis based on relational assemblages. Conceptualizations of agency as dependency enacted in relational assemblages offers a more helpful accounting of child–adult relationality and of Bat-Yiphtach's role and its limitations in the narrative, as well as its inclusion in the biblical texts. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Bat-Yiphtach's agency in light of her bleeding body, socio-cultural expectations of obedience, and social norms and expectations of bleeding girls is limited to a routine, conservative agency.

Biblical Collectives and Invisible Children

In the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, Parker and Gallagher Elkins note that giving attention to children in biblical narratives requires noticing not only when they are active and central characters in a pericope, but also when their presence can be assumed in collectives: “Settings that involve collectives—for example, families, crowds, congregations, clans, [tribes,] assemblies, nations, and foreign peoples—would contain many children within these general groups.”⁴⁰⁸ Womanist scholars have been particularly adept at seeing the fullness and complexity

⁴⁰⁷ Questions of whether ancient parents and adults were so moved by the deaths of children, in light of high infant mortality rates and early deaths, have been raised by some child-oriented biblical scholars. See, e.g., Henriksen Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel*, 246–9; and Heath Dewrell, “The Logic of Sacrificing Firstborn Children,” *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Sharon Betsworth and Julie Faith Parker (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 91–108.

⁴⁰⁸ Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 425. The inclusive masculine plural in biblical Hebrew can disguise the presence of women and children in a variety of textual settings. For explanation of

of individual humans represented in these collectives. The relationship between child-oriented scholarship and womanist scholarship has not yet been articulated in a meaningful way.

Womanist scholars and child-oriented scholars have a similar desire to conduct research and to offer biblical interpretations that make ethical demands of readers. In describing the relationship between womanist and feminist (but not yet child-oriented) scholars, Gafney states that “womanists and feminists ask different questions of a text than do other readers and different questions from each other. And we also ask some of the same questions, and we arrive at similar and dissonant conclusions.... [W]e ask questions about power, authority, voice, agency, hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion.”⁴⁰⁹ Children often come into view in womanist scholarship. When womanist scholars attend to mother characters in biblical texts, these mothers tend to be seen relationally and thus seen as concerned with children.⁴¹⁰

For example, Lovelace rereads the story of Yiphtach and his daughter by focusing on the “unnamed and silenced mother” of Yiphtach.⁴¹¹ She considers the three generations in the story, taking into account the problematic racist and classist implications of contemporary interpreters who adopt (wittingly and unwittingly) family-values rhetoric.⁴¹² In doing so, she provides an

the inclusive masculine plural, see Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003).

⁴⁰⁹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 7. Generating a Venn diagram indicating how womanist and child-oriented interests and works overlap and examining how the works might complement one another and energize the discipline more broadly certainly offer interesting possibilities but are beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁴¹⁰ See, e.g., Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks*; and Kirk-Duggan and Pippin, eds., *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest*.

⁴¹¹ Lovelace, “We Don’t Give Birth to Thugs,” 239. Her interpretation argues that both Yiphtach and his mother are racialized black; she reads from the mother’s perspective and refrains from explicit interest in the perspective of the adult child. *Ibid.*, 243.

⁴¹² See, e.g., Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 647 (2005): 279–98.

example for reading a child non-chronologically and relationally, while implicitly conveying an awareness of the lifelong influence of child–adult relationships. Meanwhile, as already noted, Bridgeman has explicitly positioned her womanist reading of the way child metaphors operate in Isaiah as related to child-oriented scholarship, noting that she “adds to the body of literature regarding children in the Hebrew Bible.”⁴¹³ Pointing to Nolan Fewell’s call to read for the sake of our children, Bridgeman concludes her chapter by stating that “[g]oing forward, and for the sake of our children, womanist interpreters must point out the implications of allowing metaphors to stand unchallenged, even when the perpetrator in the text is God.”⁴¹⁴

Gallagher Elkins and Parker echo Bridgeman’s call to stop “allowing” when they call child-oriented scholars to “counter a culture of indifference toward children, in the text and beyond.”⁴¹⁵ However, appreciating children’s “agency and contributions to the worlds (biblical or modern) in which they reside”—in adopting the emphasis on children’s agency from scholars in childhood studies—child-oriented biblical scholars potentially forego a sensitivity to the intersectionality of children and the varieties of oppression that can affect their agency. Womanist scholarship is, by definition, always already intersectional.⁴¹⁶ In addition, the leap to agency potentially discounts the ways in which calls for obedience influence power dynamics in

⁴¹³ Bridgeman, “I Will Make Boys Their Princes,” 311. The examples of such work that she identifies include Bunge (2008), Parker (2013), Garroway (2014), and Steinberg (2015), among others. In her essay, Bridgeman looks “at the way these texts denigrate and make children more vulnerable, and at the ways such portrayals explicitly condone child abuse.” Bridgeman, “I Will Make Boys,” 312.

⁴¹⁴ Bridgeman, “I Will Make Boys,” 323.

⁴¹⁵ Gallagher Elkins and Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative,” 422.

⁴¹⁶ In constructing the intersectional oppression of the slave girl in Acts 12, Margaret Aymer adds both age and forced migration/trafficking victim to racism, classism, and sexism as forms of oppression influencing the character’s story. See Margaret Aymer, “Outrageous, Audacious, Courageous, Willful: Reading the Enslaved Girl of Acts 12,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 268.

child–adult relationality in the text, in the ancient context, and in the text’s continued use. Bridgeman’s essay questions and problematizes child abuse as a response to parental disobedience, both metaphorically and rhetorically in the relationship of Israelites and their god and actually in the relationship of children and their parents. Althea Spencer-Miller then adds complexity to perceptions and easy pronouncements about disobedience and corporal punishment when she states, in response to Bridgeman, that “I am aware, from [the] Jamaican experience, of a segment of people for whom severe punishment was connected to survival. Damaged food, clothing, and possessions were not easily replaced. There were no ready second chances for disobedience and waywardness.”⁴¹⁷ Both Bridgeman and Spencer-Miller offer perspectives that complexify power dynamics and agency in child–adult relationality and that advise against premature pronouncements about Bat-Yiphtach’s agential capacity. Relying on scholars Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher and their articulation of agency in relational assemblages, I assess Bat-Yiphtach’s agency as bleeding, transitioning child in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2, I examined the field of childhood studies, its interdisciplinarity, and the tenets and guiding principles that have shaped its development. I discussed the shifts that are in process and that scholars are calling for in future research. These shifts inform my contribution to child-oriented biblical scholarship. Child-oriented biblical scholarship continues to grow in quantity and influence. I reviewed the developments and conversations in the field, outlining the

⁴¹⁷ Althea Spencer-Miller, “Looking Forward from the Horizon: A Response in Africana Sisterhood and Solidarity,” *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 344. For clarity, Spencer-Miller prefaces her comment with a self-declaration: “I am neither a defender nor practitioner of corporal punishment. I find it repulsive, unimaginative, and an easy resort in many instances. I condemn abuse in any form.” Ibid.

contributions that child-oriented scholars make to historical reconstructions of the social world behind the texts and children in that world. I also examined child-oriented scholars' interactions with Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and how child-oriented biblical scholarship influences my perspectives on the text. Childhood studies and child-oriented biblical scholarship together present opportunities for a fresh reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, particularly in relation to transitioning children and menarche.

Bat-Yiphtach's narrative raises important questions for child-oriented biblical scholars to address—theoretical questions related to how conceptualizations of child–adult relationality rely on a child–adult binary and its underlying presuppositions. For my child-oriented reading of Bat-Yiphtach, the exegetical view I construct is based on a theoretical underpinning that undercuts the child–adult binary by emphasizing the transitioning child. In constructing this view, I prioritize a particular ethical perspective on child–adult relationality. Relying on John Wall's construction of ethics in light of childhood, Anna Mae Duane provides a helpful description of this relationality:

...one that avoids the neat binaries of adult and child, of the reasoning and unreasoning subject... [one that] rejects the idea of a straight line leading from child to adult (or put another way, from them to us)... In this ethics neither observer nor observed holds a place of privilege; rather, each learns from orbiting the other, always rethinking their own assumptions.⁴¹⁸

In Chapter 3, I turn to the narrative to consider Bat-Yiphtach as bleeding, transitioning child and what her presence reveals in Judges 11:29–40. In Chapter 4, I rethink assumptions about agency and how agency is exercised both in the narrative and in its interpretations via relational assemblages. These interpretive moves support my thesis that menarche matters in Bat-Yiphtach's transitional characterization and that individualistic understandings of agency have

⁴¹⁸ Duane, Introduction to *The Children's Table*, 15.

not yet accounted for the breadth of variables in the narrative and its interpretation. These perspectives make an important contribution to child-oriented biblical scholarship.

CHAPTER 3

MENARCHE, MENSTRUATION, AND MOONS: BAT-YIPHTACH AS TRANSITIONING CHILD

As I argued in Chapter 1, interpreters' characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach have varied from child to adolescent to young woman to woman. A few scholars have recognized that menstruation might have a role to play in the narrative, particularly in relation to the ritual they see implied in Judges 11:40.⁴¹⁹ Interpreters also have recognized that the daughter's transitioning from one stage of life to another is relevant.⁴²⁰ In the former case, the concern and its interpretive lens are primarily sociological and anthropological views on rites of passage; in the latter case, the assumption of Bat-Yiphtach's arrival at the (socially constructed) category of woman and a primary concern with interrogating the gender binary result in Bat-Yiphtach's having immediately and already arrived at womanhood. Interest in Bat-Yiphtach as a transitioning child and in the effects of menarche⁴²¹ and menstruation on transitioning female children generally have not yet influenced the narrative's interpretation.

⁴¹⁹ See, e.g., Peggy Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 58, 68; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*, unabridged (New York: Schocken Books, 2013), chapter "Father-Right Awry: Jephthah and His Daughter." For these scholars, the ritual alluded to in Judges 11:40 indicates a rite of passage, seen in some traditional cultures, that occurs at puberty as girls begin to menstruate.

⁴²⁰ In addition to Day, "From the Child Is Born," and Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, see, e.g., Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 48–9.

⁴²¹ Menarche, from Greek μήν- (month or moon) and ἀρχή (beginning), is the first menstrual cycle, or first menstrual bleeding.

In this chapter, I argue that Bat-Yiphtach is a transitioning child, lamenting her בתולים, and I use research on the experiences of menarche and menstruation for transitioning children to address several ambiguities in the narrative, including שנים חדשים (two new moons).⁴²² The chapter has four sections: First, I examine the biblical scholarship and texts that have been used to expand the allusions in בתולה and בתולים; second, I survey menstruation and its treatment in the biblical texts and in biblical scholarship; third, I construct a child-oriented interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child by reviewing studies with and incorporating voices of post-menarcheal subjects; and fourth, I construct my interpretation of the narrative in light of this work. I then offer my translation and conclude the chapter.

בתולה and בתולים in the Hebrew Bible and in Childist Scholarship

In Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, בתולים occurs in 11:37–38, with a pronominal suffix both times: בְּתוּלִיָּהּ and בְּתוּלִי. The ambiguity in and challenges of the term have been important in the history of interpretation of this narrative. In Judges 11:37–38, בְּתוּלִיָּהּ and בְּתוּלִי often were translated, simply, *my virginity* and *her virginity* in English bibles.⁴²³ However, in the late twentieth century, scholars began to explore the lexemes' potential meanings, and many have promoted a broader understanding, as my review of the literature in Chapter 1 showed. The

⁴²² As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the category of transitioning child in my project addresses the inadequacy of the child–adult binary for conceptualizing human development. Bat-Yiphtach has been interpreted as both child and woman and yet is neither fully child nor fully woman. My use of the category of transitioning child is intended to highlight the inadequacy of these labels and to deconstruct the child–adult binary, similar to feminists' deconstruction of the gender binary.

⁴²³ Many contemporary English translations, including NRSV and NKJV, still opt for virginity. ISV, published in 2011, reads “Then she continued talking with her father, ‘Do this for me: leave me alone by myself for two months. I’ll go up to the mountains and cry there because I’ll never marry.’” A footnote to the verse then provides a “literal” translation: “Lit. *there on behalf of my virginity*; i.e. terminating the genealogy of Jephthah.” NJPS translates the term maidenhood. CEB has Bat-Yiphtach “crying over the fact that I never had children.”

range of texts in which בתולים and בתולה are used has allowed interpreters to prevail against what was an enduring focus on female virginity and to examine more broadly ancient views on the process of embodied human development. In this section, I review Hebrew lexicons' definitions of the terms, the expanded meanings constructed in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and understandings of the terms offered by child-oriented scholars.

בתולים and בתולה in Hebrew Lexicons

A review of Hebrew lexicons and the meanings they offer for the lexemes בתולים and בתולה (relying on a presumed root of בתל) provides both diachronic and synchronic views of how meaning is assigned.⁴²⁴ The term בתולה occurs fifty times in the Masoretic text, two times in Ben Sira, and four times in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴²⁵ Although more recent lexicons offer broader understandings of the lexeme based on structuralist developments in the mid-twentieth century, BDB—originally published in the early twentieth century—retains “virgin,” and on the basis of an Assyrian cognate *batultu* (also *batulu* of young man), it supplements this view with “one living apart in her father’s house as a virgin.”⁴²⁶ What “living apart” indicates as a lived reality is not clear. In addition, BDB defines בתלים as a plural absolute intensive of בתולה, in an entry following the latter, with the meaning of “virginity.” Concrete occurrences of the construct בתולי are “tokens of virginity” (e.g., Deut 22:15, 17). Occurrences in Judges 11:37–38 are identified as abstract expressions of the construct.

⁴²⁴ For a helpful overview of how diachronic and synchronic perspectives have contributed to Hebrew Bible scholars' lexical and semantic definitions of ancient Hebrew terms, see Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel*, LHBOTS 464 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 1–32.

⁴²⁵ David Clines, ed., “בתולה,” *DCH*, 2:289. Eng identifies 51 occurrences. Eng, *The Days of Our Years*, 31.

⁴²⁶ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, “בתולים, בתולה,” *BDB*, 143.

Meanwhile, HALOT defines בתולה as a “grown-up girl without any sexual experience with men” (and presumably boys as well).⁴²⁷ Also, בתולים is a derivative of the singular noun and means the state of virginity (Lev 21:13; Judg 11:37f; Ezek 23:3, 8; Sir 42:10) or evidence of virginity (Deut 22:14, 17, 20). HALOT’s definition of בתולה leads to questions about its implied views of age, gender, and penis-penetration and sexual status vs. other forms of “sexual experience.” The definition is problematic for its unarticulated presuppositions regarding “girls” who are “grown up,” monolithic “men,” and the sexual encounters between them.

Taking into account Ugaritic, Akkadian, Aramaic, and Arabic cognates, TDOT states that “[i]t is best to conjecture that there was an original common Semitic word *batul(t)*, and that it means a young girl at the age of puberty and the age just after puberty.”⁴²⁸ Gradually and through time, בתולה “assumed the meaning ‘virgo intacta’ in Hebrew and Aramaic.”⁴²⁹ However, in the Old Testament, the term clearly means virginity only three times, and all three are in legal texts. In many cases, “it cannot be determined whether the various authors wanted their readers to take it to mean virginity or not.”⁴³⁰

DCH takes a synchronic approach, constructing a broad lexical domain for בתולים and בתולה.⁴³¹ It offers the “headword” בתול, as a feminine noun, which does not occur in any of the Hebrew texts included (i.e., MT, non-biblical Hebrew texts, Dead Sea Scrolls, and inscriptions).

⁴²⁷ L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, “בתולים, בתולה,” *HALOT*, 1:167–8.

⁴²⁸ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., “בתולה,” *TDOT*, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 340.

⁴²⁹ Botterweck and Ringgren, *TDOT*, 341–2.

⁴³⁰ Botterweck and Ringgren, *TDOT*, 341. In summary, TDOT recognizes that, “[h]owever one may interpret *bethulah* in individual cases, this word does not have a theological meaning in a real sense.” *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴³¹ Eng offers a helpful comparison of this difference, noting that, in contrast to BDB and HALOT, “most of the newer dictionaries contain absolutely no historical, diachronic, or comparative data.” Eng, *The Days of Our Years*, 19.

The headword as construct occurs ten times in biblical Hebrew, two times in Ben Sira, and one time in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In a relational sense—in light of the verbs of which it is subject and object and thus with a focus on use rather than etymology as the primary determinant of meaning—the dictionary constructs a semantic domain that includes young womanhood and virginity; as construct, it refers to a period of adolescence, and sometimes specifically of youth, marriageability, or virginity. Meanwhile, a בתולה is a “young woman, esp. as marriageable, sometimes specif. virgin.”⁴³²

In the following section, I review occurrences of the terms in context to illustrate the scholarly consensus for a broader lexical domain.

MT Contexts of בתולה and בתולים

In 1972 Gordon Wenham, one of the early proponents of a broader understanding of בתולה, posited the term as indicating a stage of life somewhat equivalent to a teenager.⁴³³ Wenham looked at cognate terms in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Sumerian and the full range of occurrences of בתולה and בתולים in the Hebrew Bible. The terms appear in legal, narrative, and poetic texts, serving varying purposes and offering varying shades of possible meanings.⁴³⁴ Among these occurrences, virginity is not always the primary focus, as Wenham carefully reveals. He thus argues for defining the terms according to a broader semantic field:

b^etūlāh has no more reference to virginity than the English word “girl.” Rather, it denotes a “girl of marriageable age,” who may or may not be a virgin, depending

⁴³² Clines, “בתול,” *DCH*, 2:289.

⁴³³ Gordon Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” *VT* 22 (1972): 326–48.

⁴³⁴ Wenham suggests that legal texts ostensibly would want to use language with the greatest clarity and precision, with narrative prose having more fluidity and poetic writings the greatest degree of figurative use. Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 329–30.

on her circumstances. Since it is not used of older women, its *semantic field* roughly corresponds with that of the English word “teenager.”⁴³⁵

Wenham’s reading suggests that virginity is one potential aspect among an array of aspects that characterize (for actual embodied female humans) a rather nebulous, transitioning life stage somewhere between “girl” and “older women”—somewhere between child and adult.

Restricting the meaning of בתולה and בתולים to virginity is inappropriate in a range of its MT occurrences. Different aspects of this life stage are emphasized by different writers in different genres and even within different writings within these legal, narrative, and poetic genres. To illustrate, plural בתולות is paired several times with בחורים to indicate young people of binarily constructed genders (see, e.g., Pss 148:12; Is 23:4; Zech 9:17; and Lam 1:18, 2:21), as “male and female counterparts.”⁴³⁶ Although virginity might be a characteristic of these young people of both genders, a narrow concern with virginity in these cases is presumed to be inappropriate.⁴³⁷

Use of בתולה in poetic texts shows that biblical authors also applied the term as a modifier in the personification of nations or cities, sometimes along with בת (e.g., Isa 37:22, 47:1) and sometimes not. Consider, for example, Jer 18:12–13⁴³⁸:

⁴³⁵ Emphasis added. Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 326. Note that Wenham does not reject the possibility of virginity as one potential aspect of a בתולה. Instead, he suggests that בתולה no more refers to virginity than “girl” does. In neither case is the possibility of an allusion to virginity absent. Instead, interpreters, in light of context decide the primary concern of the life stage.

⁴³⁶ Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, especially the Elisha Cycle* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013), 57. The pair also appears in the singular, בחורה and בחור (e.g., Deut 32:25; 2 Chron 36:17; Jer 51:22; and Ezek 9:6).

⁴³⁷ Wenham states that as a fixed pair in Hebrew poetry, “[s]ince it has not been suggested that *bāhur* refers to a virgin male, the parallelism makes it superfluous to suppose that *b^etūlāh* has a reference to virginity either.” Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 344.

⁴³⁸ Translations in this chapter are mine, unless otherwise noted.

12 ואמרו נואש כִּי־אֲחֵרֵי מַחֲשׁוֹבוֹתֵינוּ נִלְךְ וְאִישׁ שְׂרָרוֹת לְבוֹהֶרֶע נַעֲשֶׂה
 13 לִכְן כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
 שְׂאֵל־נָא בְּגוֹיִם מִי שָׁמַע כְּאֵלֶּהָ
 שְׁעָרַת עֲשָׂתָהּ מֵאֵד בְּתוֹלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

12 And they [the people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem] said, “Despair! For we will go after our own devisings, and each person, we will do [according to] a stubborn will.”

13 Hence, thus says YHWH, “Ask among the nations: Who has heard about these (things)? Horrors has she done, in abundance, [this] willful Yisrael!”⁴³⁹

Translations often render the phrase *בתולת ישראל* in Jer 18:13 as “virgin of Israel.”⁴⁴⁰ Despite the retention in some translations of the “virgin” city or nation, scholars suggest that virginity likely is not the primary characteristic indicated by *בתולת* in these cases.⁴⁴¹ For example, Wenham notes that “[o]bviously this figurative use of *b^etûlat* tells us very little about the precise meaning of the word.”⁴⁴² John Schmitt states that “virgin” is an inappropriate translation. He examines use of the term in both Jeremiah and Amos (Jer 18:13; 31:4, 21; Amos 5:2) and concludes that “[t]he phrase *b^etûlāt yišrā’el* does not depict Israel as a ‘virgin.’ Indeed, the phrase refers primarily neither to the ‘virginity’ of the modern English word (the Hebrew word does not mean that) nor to Israel.”⁴⁴³ Schmitt suggests instead that the four uses of *בתולת ישראל* in these two prophetic

⁴³⁹ In *BHS*, v. 12 is set as prose and v. 13 as poetry.

⁴⁴⁰ For example, the “virgin of Israel” has done a horrible thing (KJV), the “virgin Israel” has done a most horrible thing (NRSV), and “Virgin Israel has done the most horrible thing” (CEB).

⁴⁴¹ See, e.g., Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 821. Lundbom says the use of the term *בתולת ישראל* here is intended to convey irony. Meanwhile, JPS has “Maiden Israel has done a most horrible thing.”

⁴⁴² Wenham, “*B^eTÛLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 345.

⁴⁴³ John Schmitt, “The Virgin of Israel: Referent and Use of the Phrase in Amos and Jeremiah,” *CBQ* 53, no. 3 (1991): 387. Schmitt provides various reasons (i.e., “conceptual, grammatical, and contextual”) for understanding “Israel” as the capital cities. Explaining his reasoning for this argument is beyond the scope of this project.

books allude to divine protection of the capital cities; in Jer 18:13, this protection (of a בתולה) is coming to an end.⁴⁴⁴ He points in his reading to one of many possible aspects of a relational (potentially virgin) girl of marriageable age: She is one who presumably needs protection but will be denied it.

Without discounting this possibility, I see another allusion in the term as well:

Connecting the בתולה ישראל in Jer 18:13 with the characterization of each one, איש, in the previous verse leads to the possibility that, in this case, willfulness or stubbornness is one characteristic of the בתולה ישראל, as my translation shows. This willfulness—this rejection of the plans and schemes of the male authority figure, perhaps displayed by some actual ancient בתולות, might influence prophetic imaginations and articulations of the deity’s willingness to continue divine protection.⁴⁴⁵

As another example of poetic use, Wenham looks at בתולים in Ezekiel 23. “In the parable of Oholah and Oholibah, Ezekiel (xxiii 3) speaks of them playing the harlot and their *b^etûlîm* breasts being handled. Here ‘virgin’ would be an inaccurate description.”⁴⁴⁶ In the problematic

⁴⁴⁴ Schmitt, “The Virgin of Israel,” 387.

⁴⁴⁵ Further study of this possibility is beyond the scope of this project. I offer it here to indicate that a broader understanding of בתולה as “girl of marriageable age”—already conveying a hyponymic sense relation to “virgin,” as well as to a variety of other characteristics of transitioning female children—presents behaviorally related options for the phrase בתולה ישראל in this verse, and potentially in others. For poetic prophetic texts, translations can draw more fully on the term’s context, recognizing that it likely is doing different work, rather than pointing to ישראל’s virgin status.

⁴⁴⁶ Wenham, “*B^eTÛLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 345. Wenham and others often cite Joel 1:8—“Lament like a *b^etûlāh*, clothed in sackcloth, for the *ba^al* of her youth”—as another occurrence that supports the inappropriateness of “virgin” as the translation in all cases. Ibid., 345. Similarly to my comments regarding Jer 18:13, perhaps the primary connection being made is to the author(s) experience with actual ancient בתולות, some of whom display heightened emotionality, tears, and sadness. That weeping is in view in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, as she laments בתולי, presents an interesting view of the relatedness of the two different texts.

text of Ezek 23:3, the poet points voyeuristically to girls' developing breasts in his use of the term בתולים.

For purposes of this project, the use of בתולה and בתולים in Deut 22:13–21, and Wenham's argument regarding it, are useful.⁴⁴⁷ Here, Wenham deals explicitly with the way that menarche and menstruation are aspects of what these terms convey. Wenham argued for a meaning of “girl of marriageable age”—an argument that, by the current consensus about the meanings of בתולה and בתולים, can be recognized was adequately made.⁴⁴⁸ Regarding Deut 22:13–21, he states that the texts “make much better legal sense if *b^etûlîm* is taken to refer to the age and marks of adolescence and not to virginity.”⁴⁴⁹ In the law, an איש who takes an אישה goes into her but hates her. In his complaint against her, he says ולא מצאתי לה בתולים (“but I did not find evidence of her virginity” (NRSV); “I found that she was not a virgin” (JPS); and “I found her not a maid” (KJV)). Her parents respond by bringing evidence of her בתולים. Wenham notes that what the man did not find was evidence of menstruation; if the mother and father then can provide such evidence, the man is charged a fee for his accusation.

In this case, the ability of parents to provide evidence or tokens of virginity and thus the translation of בתולים as tokens of virginity is problematic. Wenham notes that scholars' oldest

⁴⁴⁷ Wenham, “*B^eTÛLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 330–36.

⁴⁴⁸ Responding directly to Wenham's proposal, Tom Wadsworth in a 1980 article read Wenham as arguing that “...*bethulah* means ‘a girl of marriageable age, a teenager,’ and was never meant to connote ‘a virgin.’ [But] It is the thesis of this paper that Wenham's view is an extreme position which, upon closer examination, is not compatible with the use of *bethulah* in the Old Testament.” Tom Wadsworth, “Is There a Hebrew Word for Virgin? Bethulah in the Old Testament,” *Restoration Quarterly* 23.3 [1980]: 161. Although Wadsworth himself raises some interesting issues, he begins by mischaracterizing Wenham's proposal as absolutist. About Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, Wadsworth states that “[t]he daughter of Jephthah, who must meet an untimely death, ‘bewails her *bethulim*’ because ‘she had never known a man’ (Judges 11:37-39).” Wadsworth, 164. The causal connection made here is an interpolation and not evident in the text.

⁴⁴⁹ Wenham, “*B^eTÛLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 340.

explanation of the supposed evidence in Deut 22:15 “is that it is official attestation that the girl’s hymen was unbroken when she was handed over to her husband. The most popular explanation among modern commentators is that it is the bed-linen or garments used on the wedding-night.”⁴⁵⁰ A better alternative, according to Wenham, is the following:

[T]he husband became suspicious that his bride was with child before he married her. Of course, her failure to menstruate might be due to her conceiving through her husband. Hence, the parents rebut the accusation by producing evidence that the girl was menstruating regularly when she was betrothed.... The parents then produce a piece of their daughter's clothing with menstrual blood stains, which they claim proves she was not pregnant prior to her marriage.⁴⁵¹

Wenham’s argument, by which בתולה and בתולים come to indicate a girl of marriageable age and her features, involves an awareness of the aspects and influence of menarche and menstruation in the use of these terms. The contribution of this awareness for Deut. 22:15 is helpful for a child-oriented interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, in which she laments her בתולים. I construct this contribution in the following three sections of this chapter.

A broader view of בתולה and בתולים, for which Wenham and others since have argued, points to the possibility of seeing the multiple bodily and behavioral changes that happen in

⁴⁵⁰ Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 334–35. I remain skeptical that tokens or evidence of virginity could reliably be produced either in ancient or contemporary times. However, researching the degree to which “tokens of virginity” might have been produced and thus might serve as an appropriate translation, particularly in legal texts, is beyond the scope of this project. Wenham notes that “[t]he custom of publicly displaying the bed-clothes afterwards is known in Palestine,” citing Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village II* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1935), 128ff. See Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 334. In *Rabbah Niddah* 5.4, translation of a rabbinic legal opinion states that “girls of three years old and one day can be betrothed through intercourse.” The legal pronouncement problematizes presuppositions about age, marriage, and virginity that underlie contemporary assertions about tokens of virginity as the proof that parents must produce in Deut 22:15. See Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 750.

⁴⁵¹ Another possibility explaining a lack of menstruation is that an אישה has not yet experienced menarche. Wilma Ann Bailey suggests that “prepubescent marriage” might have been practiced in ancient Israel “when religious, economic, social, or political factors warranted it.” See Wilma Ann Bailey, “Baby Becky, Menarche and Prepubescent Marriage in Ancient Israel,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 37, no. 1-2 (2011): 113. Bailey argues for allowing physiological factors to play a larger role in interpretations of biblical texts, as I do in my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. I discuss her work further in the next section of this chapter.

transitioning female children, now often referred to as “girls of marriageable age.” In some MT texts, virginity and presumably its reference to a vagina’s status regarding penis-penetration is the primary issue. In this case, a translation of virgin or virginity might be appropriate, even as the translation itself circumscribes the potential range of meanings.⁴⁵² In addition, as Wenham notes, by the first century CE, the terms’ range of meanings *in use in the available texts* seems to have narrowed, and in later Christian texts and translations, the more technical and narrower meaning of “virgin” or “virginity” does seem to have become attached to the use of בתולה and בתולים.⁴⁵³ However, Wenham’s initial work and my supplementation of it show that a broader assortment of physiological and behavioral characteristics are represented in uses of the terms across the range of texts in which they occur.

A Child-Oriented View of בתולה and בתולים

Child-oriented scholars also have recognized the relevance of the term בתולה for their work and promote a child-centered translation of it (i.e., it proceeds from childhood). For example, Naomi Steinberg and Julie Faith Parker identify lexemes pointing to various stages of childhood or indicating youthfulness. In this context, Steinberg defines a בתולה as “a pubescent

⁴⁵² Wenham states that, in Judges 11:37–38, “‘virginity’ or ‘youth’ would be equally appropriate translations here,” but prefers the latter, stating that “the sad tale ends on a note, whose full pathos is only apparent if it is an *additional* piece of information, ‘She had never known a man’ (v. 39).” Emphasis added. Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 341.

⁴⁵³ “It is not until the Christian era that there is clear evidence that *b^etūlāh* had become a technical term for Virgin.” Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH* ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’” 347. For some scholars and interpreters, what virginity (as non-penis-penetration) signifies might limit the imagined possibilities when interpreting texts in which forms of בתולה and בתולים appear. Diachronic developments and later concerns with virgin births and their prophecy both influence meanings that scholars and interpreters then later assign to earlier occurrences of the same terms in Hebrew texts. For purposes of this project, I affirm Thomas Römer’s proposal of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative as a later, post-Deuteronomic wisdom-type narrative in Judges, and thus as not so late as to force the narrower meaning. See Thomas Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter?” *JSOT* 77, no. 1 (1998), 27–38.

young woman who has not yet borne a child.”⁴⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Parker provides an extensive analysis of the terms בחור and בתולה together, noting that they “refer to teenagers or young adults, yet merit brief discussion as the ending echelons of youth.”⁴⁵⁵ In addition, Milton Eng, who had a broader view in his lexical review of the full life cycle in Hebrew Bible terminology, identifies the meaning of בתולה both as virgin and as young woman and places it in the semantic field of “the young.”⁴⁵⁶ He suggests, in a “*preliminary* outline of the life cycle in ancient Israel,” that בתולה (as well as בחור) indicate a part of the life cycle between childhood and mature adult, which extends from puberty to marriage.⁴⁵⁷ Kristine Henriksen Garroway also reflects this view, identifying בתולה as “the technical term for the social age of a pubescent girl.”⁴⁵⁸ Although the understandings of the terms בתולה and בתולים indicate that they indeed have relevance for the work of child-oriented scholars, this late stage of childhood has received less attention in the field’s early years.

Conclusion

A broad view of what בתולה and בתולים signify is now so generally accepted that building arguments for translations referring to a girl or young woman of marriageable age is unnecessary. However, conceptualizations and characterizations of this transitioning

⁴⁵⁴ Steinberg, *The World of the Child*, 27.

⁴⁵⁵ Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 57.

⁴⁵⁶ Eng, *The Days of Our Years*, 58.

⁴⁵⁷ Eng, *The Days of Our Years*, 57. Because of the enormity of the task of examining terms according to their semantic domains, Eng focuses only on בער, ילד, and טף in the category of “the young.”

⁴⁵⁸ Kristine Henriksen Garroway, “Failure to Marry: Girling Gone Wrong,” in *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, ed. Shawn Flynn (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 66.

marriageable female child can still be less than satisfying as embodied aspects of the process of transition are neglected and as the child–adult binary constrains what interpreters have seen.

Biblical authors' use of בתולה and בתולים might indicate actual experience and concern with transitioning female children and how they navigate the outward and inward effects of change during their pubescence—for example, of breasts and bleeding, of hormonal, emotional, and behavioral effects. Contemporary biblical scholars might also recognize the significance of such effects when these terms are present in the texts. These transitioning children, as a result of their visible physical changes, fall somewhere between child and adult. But as interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative reveal, these transitioning children often are placed into one category or the other, depending on the purposes and intentions of the interpreter. A child-oriented interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative presents opportunities for considering how the experience of menarche and menstruation, signified in Bat-Yiphtach's lament over her own בתולים, can inform interpreters' translations and readings of the narrative. In the next section, I survey the work on menstruation and menarche in biblical scholarship to clarify its usefulness for my reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.

Menstruation in Biblical Scholarship

In the previous section, I examined the range of meanings in בתולה and בתולים to show that, as understandings of the terms have expanded to indicate “one of marriageable age,” broader developmental reproductive capacities—and in particular, menarche and the beginning of menstruation—are also at times implied in these terms. Although virginity (as penis-penetration status) is one such aspect, other elements of reproduction also are in view. In this section, I survey terminology and texts related to menstruation. Although most biblical

scholarship on menstruation focuses on priestly legal texts, which articulate purity concerns around menstruation, narratives also offer a view of menstruation. This broader view supports a concern with menarche and menstruation in an interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, including her own concern with בתולי (my בתולים). However, I argue that a focus on (adult) women—to the neglect of transitioning (girl) children—still dominates the discourse on menstruation in biblical scholarship, so that research on menarche in childhood studies becomes necessary for interpreting Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. This research allows for a shift in enculturated perspectives on menstruation and the child–adult binary.

Terminology

Menstruation most often is read within the semantic field of the lexeme נָדָה. Understood in some cases to indicate a flow (זָרַח) of blood, according to *DCH*, lexicons present varied and negatively shaded definitions of the term.⁴⁵⁹ The lexeme is presumed to derive from the root נָדָה, which in the Qal binyan is to retreat, flee, depart, and in the Hiphil is to chase away. According to *BDB*, נָדָה as feminine noun means impurity (as abhorrent/shunned); it indicates “ceremonial impurity,” broadly constructed but “esp. of menstruation.”⁴⁶⁰ *HALOT* defines נָדָה as bleeding or menstruation, and as abomination, defilement, and separation. In addition, cognate terms in Syriac (*nedd^etā* and *n^edūdūtā*) mean filth and something detestable, respectively.⁴⁶¹ In studying the semantic field of נָדָה, Moshe Greenberg concludes that “the base idea of ndd is ‘distancing’—

⁴⁵⁹ Clines, “נָדָה,” *DCH* 2:621–4. The lexical field of זָרַח, meaning flow or gush, is broad, referring also to flows of water (e.g., Is 48:21) and flows of milk and honey (e.g., Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; Num 13:27; 14:8; Deut 6:3; 11:9, etc.). Its relationship to menstruation and other bodily discharges as flows occurs primarily in Leviticus 15. See Clines, “זָרַח,” 3:95–6.

⁴⁶⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “נָדָה,” *BDB*, 622.

⁴⁶¹ Ludwig and Baumgartner, “נָדָה,” *HALOT*, 673.

physical (e.g., flight from) and moral (e.g., abhorrence of)—and that this offers the least encumbered etymology for נִדָּה.⁴⁶² *TDOT* notes that the etymology of the term is unclear and recognizes a shift in the lexeme’s meaning through time: “In the case of a menstruating woman, the word originally denoted the discharge or elimination of the menstrual blood; it then came to denote the impurity of a menstruating woman in particular or impurity in general.”⁴⁶³ The term נִדָּה occurs 29 times in the Hebrew Bible and 68 times in the Dead Sea Scrolls, according to *DCH*, and the meaning is impurity, except where it refers to a flow of blood that causes ritual impurity, as in Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19ff; 18:19; Ezek 18:6; 22:10; 36:17.⁴⁶⁴

As the lexical field and occurrences of נִדָּה reveal, menstruation and flow of blood are closely linked to priestly texts and cultic issues. As a result, much of the Hebrew Bible scholarship on menstruation focuses on issues related to cultic understandings of purity and

⁴⁶² Moshe Greenberg, “The Etymology of נִדָּה ‘(Menstrual) Impurity,’” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 69. Greenberg points to uncertainty about the etymology of נִדָּה and provides a study of the scholarship on נִדָּה and נִדָּה. He states that נִדָּה “has a specific abstract reference to menstrual impurity (as abhorrent [to males] and entailing separation of the sexes). It has a generic abstract reference to the state of ‘impurity’ and a generic concrete reference to an ‘impure thing/act’ (what is to be kept apart, abhorred). The generic senses occur almost exclusively in biblical and Qumran nonlegal contexts; the specific abstract sense ‘menstrual impurity’ prevails in priestly legal texts. For the specific, concrete ‘menstruant,’ Biblical Hebrew employs the euphemistic *dawâ*. In Mishnaic Hebrew, *dawâ* is replaced by *niddâ*.” Greenberg, “The Etymology of נִדָּה,” 76. In Lev 12:5, where a woman who gives birth to a female neonate is impure כַּנְדֵּה (according to her נִדָּה), Wilda Gafney translates נִדָּה as “menstrual separation and quarantine.” Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 112.

⁴⁶³ G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., “נִדָּה,” *TDOT* 9, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 232.

⁴⁶⁴ Clines, *DCH*, 5:621–24. Tarja Philip notes that in later texts (i.e., Zechariah, Lamentations, Ezra, and Chronicles), נִדָּה and impurity have become synonymous, whereas in the priestly writings, the noun and adjective forms of נִדָּה emphasize the term’s connection with impurity but don’t equate the two. Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (New York: Lang, 2006), 33. In addition, Tirzah Meacham states that “[i]n Lev 20:21, the sin of adultery or incest with the wife of one’s brother is described using the word *niddah*, thus extending the meaning of the word to include a clearly forbidden sexual act. In other parts of the Bible, the term *niddah* includes abominable acts, objects, or status, especially sexual sins and idolatry.” Tirzah Meacham, “An Abbreviated History of the Development of the Jewish Menstrual Laws,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NJ: University Press of New England, 1999), 27.

impurity. However, beyond the legal codes, narratives also allude to what interpreters presume is a menstrual flow of blood in other ways—for example, כִּי דֶרֶךְ נְשִׁים לִי, “For the way of women is to me” (Gen 31:35). In the following sections, I survey texts in which menstruation is a priestly purity concern and narratives that allude to menstruation. In both cases, the texts reveal views of the embodied, physiological experiences of women.⁴⁶⁵

Priestly Texts and Purity Concerns

Menstruation as blood flow makes up a relatively narrow field in biblical scholarship, and the primary focus is on its impurity. In the ancient social world, as in the biblical texts, blood signified and symbolized both life and death.⁴⁶⁶ The recognition of blood as both “life force and vitality” and as source of impurity “led to contradicting regulations regarding its use. Considered exceptionally holy,”⁴⁶⁷ it was used in cultic and apotropaic rituals. Meanwhile, also viewed “as impure and dangerous, it was placed out of bounds through taboos.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ I say “women” because both the biblical texts and much of the scholarship cast menstruation as an adult woman or wife’s experience. Menstruation is presumed to be the bodily experience that makes a female child into a woman, so that women are prioritized, and menarche, puberty, and girls experiencing blood flow remain unseen. Bailey’s work, which I examine later in this section, is the one exception. Bailey, “Baby Becky, Menarche and Prepubescent Marriage.”

⁴⁶⁶ For an overview of “the major historical influences that shape ideas about blood” as it relates to menarche and menstruation, see Sally Dammery, *First Blood: A Cultural Study of Menarche* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2016), 1–24. Dammery offers perspectives on physiology of blood flows conveyed in Greek Hippocratic and Aristotelian texts. She notes that classicist Lesley Dean-Jones argues for a sacrificial connotation for the menarcheal girl in Hippocratic texts, in that metaphoric parallels were drawn between bleeding girls and bleeding animal sacrifices. Lesley Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding According to Hippocratics and Aristotle,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 119 (1989): 191, cited in Dammery, *First Blood*: 2–3. A full review of Greek medical texts on menstrual bleeding and their assumptions regarding menstrual blood flow is beyond the scope of this project.

⁴⁶⁷ Christian Eberhart, “Blood, ANE and HB/OT,” *EBR* 4, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 202.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.* “Taboo” is a Polynesian idiom of two parts—*ta* meaning to mark, and *pu*, an adverb of intensity, according to Philip. She notes that “taboo,” in itself, has neither a positive nor a negative connotation. Thus, context drives how the term is being used. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible*, 11.

In the Hebrew Bible, the most explicit references to menstruation are found in the law codes, which vary in their requirements regarding menstrual blood flow.⁴⁶⁹ Where menstruation has been treated in the biblical studies discipline, scholars' interest in impurity and its place in legal texts primarily motivate the work.⁴⁷⁰ The reception of the texts, their perspectives on purity, and their effects on menstruating women in Jewish and Christian traditions also receive attention.⁴⁷¹

The legal texts reveal that priestly attitudes toward and rules on menstruation were neither monolithic nor constant through time. They evolved. In their work on menstruation or blood flow and purity, scholars consider Leviticus 12 (childbirth); Lev 15:19–24 (menstrual discharges); Lev 15:25–30 (long-term discharge of blood); Lev 18:19 (prohibiting intercourse

⁴⁶⁹ A full review of the literature on the legal codes is beyond the scope of this project. However, current perspectives suggest “the Holiness source (H, consisting of the Holiness Code [Leviticus 17–26] and a number of insertions and redactions in the rest of the Pentateuch) may be regarded as later than the Priestly source (P), and even responsible for the final redaction of the Pentateuch. Both sources are seen as processes, overlapping in time and extending through several centuries.” Thomas Kazen, “Dirt and Disgust: Body and Morality in Biblical Purity Laws,” *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible*, ed. Baruch Schwartz et al. (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 59.

⁴⁷⁰ Philip notes that her attempt to understand the essence of “impurity of blood from the womb” is based on priestly writings because “the priests were the ones who placed it in a systematic framework.” Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible*, 68. Ilana Be’er states that “the biblical prescriptions concerning the discharge of vaginal blood are best understood when examined within the framework of which they form a part—the framework of purity and impurity regulations.” Ilana Be’er, “Blood Discharge: On Female Im/Purity in the Priestly Code and in Biblical Literature,” in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus/Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 152. See also Debora Klee, *Menstruation in the Hebrew Bible* (diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1998); Susan Haber, “*They Shall Purify Themselves*”: *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism*, ed. Adele Reinhartz, EJM 24 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 9–29; and Judith Herbert et al., eds., *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003). Dorothea Erbele-Küster interrogates conceptualizations of purity/impurity and offers a distinctive analytical framework for Leviticus 12 and 15. See Dorothea Erbele-Küster, *Body, Gender and Purity in Leviticus 12 and 15*, JSOTSup 539 (New York: T&T Clark, 2017).

⁴⁷¹ See, e.g., Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Jonah Steinberg, “From ‘Pot of Filth’ to a ‘Hedge of Roses’ (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism,” *JFSR* 13, no. 2 (1997): 5–26; and Rahel R. Wasserfall, ed., *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, Brandeis Series on Jewish Women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999).

with menstruants); and Lev 20:18 (punishment for intercourse during menstruation).⁴⁷² These texts represent variations in priestly perspectives on menstruation, its effects and prohibitions, and punishment. Consider Lev 15:19–24:

¹⁹And any woman who has a flux of blood, her flux being from her genitals, seven days she shall be in her menstruation, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. ²⁰And whatever she lies upon in her menstruation shall be unclean, and whatever she sits upon shall be unclean. ²¹And whoever touches her bedding shall launder his garments and bathe in water and shall be unclean until evening. ²²And whoever touches any object upon which she has sat shall launder his garments and bathe in water and shall be unclean until evening. ²³And if it is on the bedding or on the object that she is sitting on when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening. ²⁴And if a man in fact beds her, her menstruation shall be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days, and any bedding upon which he lies shall be unclean.⁴⁷³

In contrast to this passage, the Holiness Code legislation in Lev 18:19, prohibiting a masculine singular “you” from encountering (קרר) a menstruating woman or wife (אשה בנדת), contradicts the regulation in Lev 15:24, in which a man who has intercourse with a menstruant is not prohibited from doing so but simply contracts her impurity and is unclean for seven days.⁴⁷⁴ “Insofar as menstruation is included in the Holiness Code, it can be understood and categorized in certain cases as sin, for one can choose or choose not to abide by the rules. In

⁴⁷² For a close reading of all these texts, see Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*. My interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative and the relevance of menarche and menstruation to it make the texts on childbirth and long-term blood flows less relevant to this project. My review thus focuses on the relationships between Lev 15:19–24; Lev 18:19; and Lev 20:18. A full review of the literature on Leviticus, the law codes, and purity and impurity in the law codes is beyond the scope of this project.

⁴⁷³ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1 (New York: Norton, 2019), 419–20.

⁴⁷⁴ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 73. Some scholars interested in the legal codes’ concerns with purity propose a distinction between ritual purity and ethical purity. In this case, Leviticus 15 is concerned with ritual purity, and in Leviticus 18, intercourse with a menstruant becomes a matter of ethical purity. See, e.g., Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–42. See also Elizabeth Goldstein, “Women and the Purification Offering: What Jacob Milgrom Contributed to the Intersection of Women’s Studies and Biblical Studies,” *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond*, ed. Roy Gane and Ada Taggar Cohen (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 47–65.

the Holiness Code, *niddah* comes to describe a forbidden act,” states Rahel Wasserfall.⁴⁷⁵ In Lev 18:19, the consequences for lying with a menstruous woman, among other prohibitions in the chapter, are communal: Israel will be spewed from the defiled land. In Lev 20:18, the offending partners are cut off from their people. Varied views on the impurity of menstrual blood and its effects are evident.⁴⁷⁶

Menstrual blood and its capacity to defile also influence priestly perspectives in Ezekiel and serve both literal and figurative purposes. References to אִשָּׁה נֹדָה, טִמְאֵת הַנְּדָה, and כְּטִמְאֵת הַנְּדָה occur in Ezek 18:6, 22:10, and 36:17, respectively. In Ezek 18:6, the righteous man restricts himself from having menstrual sex; in Ezek 22:10, those men “among you” who rape or violate or have intercourse with a menstruating woman are accused⁴⁷⁷; and in Ezek 36:17, the impurity of the house of Israel is likened to the impurity of the menstruant. In Ezekiel, the occurrences of נֹדָה and its connection to intercourse with a menstruant reflect the Holiness Code’s “abstract concept of impurity... [which] covers all the land”; its defilement was irreversible.⁴⁷⁸ As Philip notes, through Ezekiel and its articulation of the Holiness Code, the terminology that had

⁴⁷⁵ Rahel Wasserfall, “Introduction: Menstrual Blood into Jewish Blood,” *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, Brandeis Series on Jewish Women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 4.

⁴⁷⁶ Goldstein notes that some feminist scholars perceive a half-empty glass regarding portrayal of women in P, while others see a glass half-full. See Goldstein, “Women and the Purification Offering,” 56–64. Both the half-empty and the half-full perceptions are likely engendered by the varied perspectives already in the texts themselves. Early rabbinic interpretations and Orthodox Jewish traditions have continued the more restrictive views on menstrual purity and intercourse during menstruation. See, e.g., Steinberg, “From ‘Pot of Filth.’”

⁴⁷⁷ The meaning of נֹדָה in this verse is variously translated. Moshe Greenberg suggests that it implies a use of force and signifies “unwillingness of the woman to acquiesce in the illegal union.” Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37 AB 22A* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 455. Leslie Allen similarly sees force: “others [among you] force themselves on women suffering from menstrual pollution.” Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 30. Klee argues that “rape” is the appropriate translation. Klee, *Menstruation*, 106, cited in Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 63. The primary concern in the passage is intercourse with a menstruating woman, forbidden by Lev 18:19, so that the importance of force might be less about its effect on the sexual partner and more about the energy with which the accused break the laws maintaining purity.

⁴⁷⁸ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 73.

signified menstruants expanded to signify a more abstract concept of impurity, adapting to the “reality in exile.”⁴⁷⁹

Priestly legal literature articulates the danger that menstruating women in particular, as well as women with other discharges, can present through defilement of sacred space. Following the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE, menstruation was seen as defiling family space as well. Thus, “during the Second Temple period (before the second century), menstruating women were segregated and resided in what was called ‘a house of impurity.’ They could not adorn themselves, had to eat alone, and could not continue their duties in their homes.”⁴⁸⁰ In addition, concern with menstruation and its defiling nature continued after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. Even as parts of the legal code addressing defilement from other bodily impurities fell into disuse (e.g., skin diseases and discharges from male flesh), stipulations based on the impurity of menstrual blood and prohibiting intercourse with menstruating women influenced rabbinic interpretations of the law codes. Beliefs in the danger and pollution of female blood discharge “gained the ascendancy until they became more and more acceptable in early post-biblical and later Judaism.”⁴⁸¹ Impurity, and especially women’s impurity caused by menstruation, became a central topic “in Jewish family life and... is reflected in the disagreements between the Pharisaic and Sadducean Halakha; in the *Mishnah*

⁴⁷⁹ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 73.

⁴⁸⁰ Wasserman, “Introduction,” 5. Leslie Cook offers a different perspective on the effects on women of such regulations: that in the absence of the temple and following the catastrophic loss of both temples, the priestly reconstruction of the religious and social environment incorporated women, through their role in regulating the domestic context, “as equal partners in that endeavor.” Leslie Cook, “Body Language: Women’s Ritual of Purification in the Bible and Mishnah,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NJ: University Press of New England, 1999), 43.

⁴⁸¹ Be’er, “Blood Discharge,” 164.

and in the *Talmuds*, and in the *Midrash*.⁴⁸² Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert states that “[t]he type of blood that receives the most sustained attention in classical rabbinic literature is menstrual blood.”⁴⁸³ In addition to its discussion in an entire tractate (*Mishnah Niddah*), it is “the only legal area in the impurity laws that is carried forth into Talmudic discussion, and into medieval legislation and finally contemporary halakhic observance by observant Jewish women.”⁴⁸⁴ Wasserman similarly notes that “[b]y the end of the Talmudic period (400–500 CE) male emission and skin diseases were removed from the system of purity, but *niddah* was not.”⁴⁸⁵ The Holiness Code’s stipulations on the impurity of menstruation and menstrual sex and their interpretation continue to affect some contemporary Jewish women and their relationships.⁴⁸⁶

As I show in this brief survey of biblical legal texts and their interpretation on menstruation, the concepts of menstruation and impurity became tightly woven together as the terminology used to indicate menstruation and the concerns reflected in the priestly texts

⁴⁸² Philips, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 2. The *Mishnah* tractate *Niddah* includes rabbinic discourse on the impurity of menstruation, in which “the rabbis reinterpret the biblical law [in Leviticus 15] in significant ways.... [The] innovation is the invention of the rabbi as an expert on menstrual blood, as the authority to be consulted by women.” Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Yalta’s Ruse: Resistance Against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NJ: University Press of New England, 1999), 60–1. A recent focus in talmudic studies is the relationship between perspectives on menstrual blood in the Babylonian Talmud and Zoroastrian texts. See Shai Secunda, “The Construction, Composition and Idealization of the Female Body in Rabbinic Literature and Parallel Iranian Texts: Three Excursuses,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 23, no. 23 (April 2012): 60–86; Haggai Mazuz, “Qur’ānic Commentators on Jewish and Zoroastrian Approaches to Menstruation,” *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 15 (2012): 89–98; and Samuel Israel (Shai) Secunda, “Dashtana – ‘ki Derekh Nashim Li’: A Study of the Babylonian Rabbinic Laws of Menstruation in Relation to Corresponding Zoroastrian Texts” (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 2008).

⁴⁸³ Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Blood: Judaism,” in *EBR* 4, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 215.

⁴⁸⁴ Elisheva Fonrobert, “Blood: Judaism,” 215.

⁴⁸⁵ Wasserfall, “Introduction,” 5. Philip notes that “[t]he general tendency of the interpretation of the laws is to broaden them and to make them more stringent.” Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 51.

⁴⁸⁶ See, e.g., Wasserfall, ed., *Women and Water*; and Steinberg, “From ‘Pot of Filth.’”

developed. Biblical scholarship on menstruation tends to reflect this relationship: Issues of purity and impurity often underscore the attention given. Such work neglects actual physiological effects of menstruation and assumes that menstruation is experienced by adult women.

Transitioning children and menarche are not in view.

Menstruation in Biblical Narratives

Allusions to menstruation in biblical narratives receive similar treatment, in that menstruation is constructed as a woman's concern. Philip notes three narrative texts that recognize and draw on realities of menstrual blood flow for literary purposes: Gen 18:11 (Sarah), Gen 31:35 (Rachel), and 2 Sam 11:4 (Bat-Sheva). Terminology of נדה is lacking in each. Nevertheless, menstruation is potentially in view and often is noted in translations and interpretations.⁴⁸⁷

In Gen 18:11, ארה פנשים (the pathway of women or wives) had ceased to be for Sarah. The idiom in this form occurs nowhere else. The emphasis on Sarah's advanced age and prediction of a pregnancy and child lead to interpretations of the pathway as menstrual bleeding. The phrase indicates that "menstruation has a functional role in the story."⁴⁸⁸ The text is of interest in relation to my interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative: In Gen 18:11, Sarah's age brings an end to menstrual cycles as scholars suggest that transition into menopause and the

⁴⁸⁷ The three narratives together convey, only obliquely, that menstruation is part of the lived experience of people in ancient contexts; begins at some point (I argue that the beginning point is with female children in transition); affects children, women, and men disproportionately; and ends at some point (for women who live long enough). My brief review of the narratives keeps this range of menstruation's effects in view.

⁴⁸⁸ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 20. Other translations give "the manner of women" (NRSV, KJV) had ceased to be; JPS provides a more explicit interpretation: "Sarah had stopped having the periods of women."

cessation of menstrual flow are in view.⁴⁸⁹ In neither Sarah's narrative nor Hagar's is the onset of menstrual flow in view. Concerns with the effects of menstrual bleeding on purity and holiness also appear to be absent. In this narrative, Sarah, Avraham, and their potential (but not yet actualized) children are affected by Sarah's ceasing of the ארה כנשים.

Scholars also see menstruation in Gen 31:35. Here, Rachel does not stand to greet her father, Lavan, when he enters her tent to search for his תרפים (teraphim) which she has taken and has stored בכר הגמל (among the camel blankets)⁴⁹⁰ and on which she sits. She says to her father that she is not able to stand before him because the דרך נשים (the way of women) is to her.⁴⁹¹ The phrase is translated the way of women (NRSV), or the custom (KJV) or manner (JPS) of women and generally is assumed to refer to menstrual flow. J. E. Lapsley notes that “[m]ost commentaries do not reflect directly on Rachel's speech to Laban, except to note that Rachel is menstruating (and they do not doubt her word).”⁴⁹² Esther Fuchs sees in the euphemism male attitudes toward menstruation:

⁴⁸⁹ Gordon Wenham states that reiterating Sarah's advanced age in the verse “underlines the magnitude of the miracle of Isaac's birth: it was not simply that Sarah had long been infertile but that she was well past the menopause too.” Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 48. Victor Hamilton states that “Sarah was not just old or older, but her menses had ceased.... The narrator simply states the biological facts.” Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50* NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 12. In Gen 18:12, Sarah herself questions whether, at this late date, when she is old and worn out (or “dried out”), she might still experience (lubricating sexual) pleasure. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 36.

⁴⁹⁰ This idiom occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Translations are problematic. NRSV and JPS have “the camel's saddle”; KJV translates “the camel's furniture.” Rashbam proposes that the כר is the blanket or rug that goes under a camel's saddle. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 24. E.A. Speiser translates the idiom, most comfortably of all, as the camel cushion. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 242. In Lev 15:9, establishing restrictions for a man with unclean flow, the lexeme for saddle is מרכב, which according to Alter “refers to anything a person mounted on an animal would sit on, and so includes saddlecloths, pillows, and the like.” Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, vol. 1, 418.

⁴⁹¹ Philip states that דרך and ארה, used in Sarah's narrative, are synonyms. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 20.

⁴⁹² Jacqueline Lapsley, “The Voice of Rachel: Resistance and Polyphony in Genesis 31.14–35,” in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 233 n. 2. Esther Fuchs also acknowledges Rachel's menstruating condition and explores gender issues of language and deception in the narrative. See Esther Fuchs, “‘For I Have the Way of Women’: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in

“The way of women” is a euphemistic name for menstrual blood, which in a patriarchal economy is symptomatic of somatic impurity. The need for a “clean” expression testifies to the dis-ease which the referent arouses in the patriarchal mind, especially when the female subject in question is a respectable matriarch. The euphemism is expressive of the horror menstruation evokes in the male imagination, a horror encoded in the Levitical laws of *nidda* (Lev 15:19-33), as well as in the prophets’ figurative use of *nidda* as a synonym for moral impurity (Ezek 36:17; Lam 1:17; 1 Chron 29:5).⁴⁹³

Rachel’s words and strategy for keeping the תרפים undiscovered might allude to either the impurity or the detestability of menstruation; and as Fuchs also suggests, the way of women might allude to deception and manipulation. In the story, Rachel’s words successfully curtail her father’s search.

The narrative is ambiguous about the meaning of the idiom and its intended effect. In Gordon Wenham’s interpretation, “[s]uspense turns into malicious pleasure at the deadly fun made of the *terafim*: they are only to be ‘saved’ by a menstruation. This means that they are as unclean as can be, in this new position they come near functioning as... sanitary towels.”⁴⁹⁴ Offering a different perspective, Philip points to the openness with which Rachel conveys information about her menstrual state to her father as an indication that “in the society described in the story, it was acceptable for a daughter to discuss menstruation with her father, and it was seen as a natural phenomenon.”⁴⁹⁵ Philip also asserts that “[s]ince Rachel was barren for many years, she frequently menstruated, which wasn’t so with the fertile women who were frequently

Biblical Narrative,” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 68–83. Claus Westermann is an exception to Lapsley’s observation: He translates the phrase, “the lot of women is upon me” and calls Rachel’s words “a pretense.” Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 487, 495.

⁴⁹³ Fuchs, “For I Have the Way,” 80.

⁴⁹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 276.

⁴⁹⁵ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 24. Philip contrasts this view with that of “modern western society,” in which “menstruation is seen as something shameful, which should be hidden from the eyes of men, especially those of fathers and brothers.” Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 39 n. 23.

pregnant and breast fed their babies.”⁴⁹⁶ The narrative, when so interpreted, provides a second example of an ancient story in which menstruation becomes visible (either in truth or as deception)—this time for a mid-life wife who has successfully delivered a child.⁴⁹⁷ When the phrase is interpreted as referring to menstruation, the narrative shows the effects of blood flow on both Rachel and her father.⁴⁹⁸

Bat-Sheva, in 2 Sam 11:2–4, is another wife and woman character for whom menstruation is in view, according to some interpretations. In this case, Bat-Sheva’s bathing in 2

⁴⁹⁶ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 24. Questions regarding the frequency with which ancient female transitioning children and women experienced their bleeding cycle are difficult to answer. Scholars tend to look at experiences of women in pre-industrialized and tribal contexts and suggest that “because tribal women lactated longer and more intensively, they actually did not experience their menstruation every month: menstruation was a liminal stage.” Wasserfall, “Introduction,” 10. Wasserfall relies on arguments by Harrell (1981) that “scholars, influenced by psychoanalysis, tend to see menstruation as a recurrent monthly phenomenon because modern women, using contraception and having fewer pregnancies than in earlier centuries, do actually experience their menstrual blood as a monthly phenomenon.” See Barbara Harrell, “Lactation and Menstruation in Cultural Perspective,” *American Anthropologist* 83 (1981): 797–821, cited in Wasserfall, “Introduction,” 10. This assertion that menstruation was “liminal” for ancient women because pregnancy and breast-feeding stopped the cycle of blood flow seems to rely on a view that flows are restrained throughout the time of lactation, that children were breast-fed for about three years, and that ancient women experienced no fertility challenges. (The last is particularly problematic in light of the number of barren women in the Hebrew Bible.) Dean-Jones notes in relation to ancient Greek women that “the Hippocratic gynecological treatises do not support this interpretation [of fewer menstrual cycles because of pregnancy and lactation].” Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding,” 185. A full review of the literature on ancient experiences of lactation and pregnancy in relation to menstruation is beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, I find the underlying presuppositions about the reduced experience of blood flows overgeneralized and problematic—not least because the effect is to minimize the challenges that menstruation might have represented to ancient transitioning children and women. Contemporary studies identify numerous factors that influence the length and regularity of menstrual cycles, including nutrition, body mass index (as an indicator of nutrition), activity level, ethnicity, genetics, endocrine function, and age at menarche. See, e.g., Aditi Samanta, Joyeeta Thakur, and Monali Goswami, “Menstrual Characteristics and Its Association with Socio-Demographic Factors and Nutritional Status: A Study Among the Urban Slum Adolescent Girls of West Bengal, India,” *Anthropological Review* 82, no. 2 (2019): 105–124; see also Jon Abbink, “Menstrual Synchrony Claims Among Suri Girls (Southwest Ethiopia): Between Culture and Biology,” *Cahiers D’Études Africaines* 55, no. 218 (2015): 279–302. www.jstor.org/stable/24476707. Assertions that ancient children and women rarely experienced menstruation can serve to terminate or limit discourse about menstruation.

⁴⁹⁷ I assume mid-life because she is twenty years older than she was when Yaacov first encountered her at the well in Gen 29:11 and kissed her. The narrator provides no sense of her age at either narrative moment. At the well, she simply was old enough to be responsible for her father’s sheep and for Yaacov to kiss her. After a month or moon of days in Lavan’s household, Yaacov loved her and wanted her as his wages for seven years’ work.

⁴⁹⁸ One line of questioning which seems thus far to have been neglected, to the best of my knowledge, is whether menstruation also has something to do with Rachel and Leah’s separate tents. Exploring this question is beyond the scope of this project.

Sam 11:2 is explained parenthetically in 2 Sam 11:4: מתקדשת מטמאתה (purifying from her impurity). The phrase is assumed to combine elements of reproductive factors and ritual purity laws: “She was purifying herself after her period” (NRSV); “she had just purified herself after her period” (JPS); or David lay with her, “for she was purified from her uncleanness” (KJV). Philip notes the strangeness of the participle מתקדשת, which occurs in a string of past tense verbs. She suggests the intent might have been to “create a connection with another participle, i.e., רהצת, in v. 2.”⁴⁹⁹ In her close study of the two lexemes for washing and purification that occur in 2 Sam 11:2,4, she concludes that the parenthetical represents a later insertion, at which time priestly views on purification from menstruation had changed: “The original non-priestly emphasis on menstruation’s relation to fertility was replaced by the priestly emphasis on its impurity.”⁵⁰⁰ In this narrative, “sanctification... serves the aim of the writer, who wanted to make clear that David is the father of the baby Bathsheba is expecting.”⁵⁰¹ Similarly, A.A. Anderson notes that the parenthetical “was intended to stress that it was a favorable time for conception, and, especially that Uriah could not have been the father of the child that was eventually born.”⁵⁰² The narrative and its interpretation potentially reveal ancient and contemporary views on the relationships between menstrual flows, sex, and successful fertilization leading to pregnancy.⁵⁰³ In this case, menstruation affects Bat-Sheva, her husband

⁴⁹⁹ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 27.

⁵⁰⁰ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 28.

⁵⁰¹ Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth*, 27.

⁵⁰² A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC 11 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 153. Anderson notes that other translations (NEB) adjust the emphasis (Bat-Sheva had not yet completed her purification) and then indicate that David’s crimes included disregarding the ritual law. Ibid. Gafney suggests the possibility that the latter mention of purification is a second purification event stemming from the need for one following a “sexual encounter, whether consensual or not.” Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 215.

⁵⁰³ A full review of ancient beliefs about the relationship between menstruation, ovulation, and fertility, and whether contemporary scholars take ancient beliefs into account in their interpretations, is beyond the scope of this

Uryah, and the sovereign rapist David, whose poor timing results in a fertilized and implanted egg.⁵⁰⁴

That menstruation might also be considered in interpreting the repeated stories of barrenness in the Hebrew Bible is often ignored. However, menstruation by its nature is at least short-term “barrenness”: the failure of an egg to be fertilized and implanted in the endometrial lining.⁵⁰⁵ Offering another perspective on menstruation and barrenness, Wilma Ann Bailey makes an explicit connection—or more accurately, a connection between menarche and barrenness. Her research on menarche lays a foundation for my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative in that she finds issues of menstruation in a narrative—Gen 24:10–67; 25:21 (Rivkah)—in which it is not usually seen.

Despite the reference to reproductive challenges (Gen 25:21), scholars generally have not asserted that menstruation is relevant to Rivkah’s story. Bailey’s concern with prepubescent marriage and her creative use of changes through time in physiological aspects of reproduction bring menarche, the onset of a menstrual flow, into view. Asserting that “[p]hysiological factors must be taken into account when reading and interpreting texts from ancient time periods,”⁵⁰⁶

project. Scholars suggest that this relationship was not understood in ancient times. In fact, according to Dammary, the relationship between human ovulation and menstruation was first hypothesized only in 1793 by John Daveridge. See Dammary, *First Blood*, 20–23. See also Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding.”

⁵⁰⁴ Gafney makes clear that “rapist” is appropriate terminology here. See Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 215.

⁵⁰⁵ “Each month the left or the right ovary brings forth a ripening ovum.... The egg’s journey down the fallopian tube to the uterus is called *ovulation*. As the egg passes down the tube, it may meet with a sperm, unite, and form an embryo. This embryo will then embed itself in the endometrium, the lining of the uterus, or womb.... But if the egg travels down the tube unaccommodated by a fertilizing sperm, then the enriched endometrium is not needed for food. The hormone estrogen, which supported the lining, soon stops its work. Progesterone takes over, stimulates the contraction of the uterus, and assists the velvety lining to leave through the vagina as menstrual ‘blood.’” Janice Delaney et al., *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 7.

⁵⁰⁶ Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 113.

Bailey argues that Rivkah’s “barrenness” (and potentially that of other so-called barren women in the Hebrew Bible) might stem from Rivkah’s youth and her prepubescent status.

Marriage of young girls has been an accepted norm in various societies and cultures through time, including in contemporary times, states Bailey.⁵⁰⁷ She then considers the combination of child marriage and menarche to interpret Rivkah’s narrative. Focusing on research regarding physiological changes related to menarche, she describes menarche as “the age at which the first menstrual bleeding occurs. It is the culmination of a two-year process (on average) that begins with breast development and pubic hair growth.”⁵⁰⁸ Her literature review on the age of onset of menses shows that the age of transition is lower now than it was in the past. For example, in Scandinavia, 130 years of data on menarche revealed a decline in the age at which the onset of menses occurs: from more than 16 years of age in the 1830s to age 13 by 1960.⁵⁰⁹ “For a biblical scholar, the trend raises questions such as, what was the age of menarche for the *women* of ancient Israel, and how might that information shed light on biblical stories that focus on marriage and particularly, ‘barren women’?”⁵¹⁰

Bailey examines the biblical texts, ancient Greek and Roman writings, and anthropological studies of cultures in which prepubescent and pubescent marriage occurs. She proposes that the author of the Rivkah narrative envisions “Becky”—who is identified as a בַּעַר,

⁵⁰⁷ “Even in the 21st century, the practice is well attested in some African, Asian and even Latin American nations.” Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 114. See, e.g., United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in the Arab Region: Dynamics, Challenges and Policy Options* (New York: UN, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.18356/642c1303-en>

⁵⁰⁸ Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 115.

⁵⁰⁹ Mona Rosenberg, “Menarcheal Age for Norwegian Women Born 1830–1960” in *Annals of Human Biology*, 18 no. 3 (1991): 207–19, cited in Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 115. See also Dammary et al., *The Curse*, 49.

⁵¹⁰ Emphasis added. Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 116.

as well as a בתולה and an עלמה—“to be a child, who is betrothed and then married to Abraham’s forty-year old son, Isaac. She is depicted as a child-bride, a social custom practiced in the time of the author and probably throughout the history of the ancient Near East.”⁵¹¹ Mary Douglas provides comparative evidence of contemporary child marriage; in *Purity and Danger*, she notes that Orthodox Brahmins opt for prepubescent marriage:

[They] preserve the purity of their *women* by requiring girls to be married before puberty to suitable husbands. They put strong moral and religious pressures on one another to ensure that every Brahmin girl is properly married before her first menstruation. In other castes if they do not arrange a real marriage before puberty, then a substitute rite of marriage is absolutely required. In middle India she can first be married to an arrow or a wooden pounder.⁵¹²

Rivkah’s “barrenness” in Gen 25:21—or more accurately childlessness, in Bailey’s view—might stem from her prepubescent marriage, and from her not yet having experienced menarche. Bailey suggests that ancient girls, young women, or women might have begun their menses at 19 or 20 years of age.⁵¹³ Her proposal complicates the way interpreters assign characters’ status as child or adult—and the binary itself—based on contemporary views of the stages of the life cycle and their markers. Bailey’s work also suggests that menstruation and marriage might not create rigid markers for distinctions between ancient and narrated female children and women. More importantly, her call to consider physiological elements can be

⁵¹¹ Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 132.

⁵¹² Emphasis added. Professor Mary Douglas and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Routledge, 2002), 146. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵¹³ Bailey bases the estimate on contemporary anthropological studies of traditional cultures, as well as on Lev 27:4, which she suggests assigns higher equivalency values to females at age 20 because of their presumed child-bearing capacity. Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 119. Bailey’s review of Greek texts, including Hippocratic texts, of the fifth and fourth century BCE indicate that 14 was the assumed age of onset, but the actual estimation is suspect. Bailey, “Baby Becky,” 117–8. See also Dammary, *First Blood*, 3. Assessing the accuracy of Bailey’s suggestion—that menarche occurred at the age of 19 or 20 in the ANE context—is beyond the scope of this project. However, her focus on prepubescent marriage helpfully exposes unacknowledged presuppositions in some contemporary scholarship about life stages and ancient social norms, as well as the relevance of menarche and menstruation to biblical narratives involving female characters, barrenness, and reproduction.

juxtaposed with Wenham's earlier work, which reorients scholars' understandings of בתולה and בתולים to construct broader views of the embodied transitioning of female children, including Bat-Yiphtach.

For this project, Bat-Yiphtach is a transitioning child, and her concern with בתולי (my בתולים) alludes to a range of developmental and reproductive issues that emerge during this transition, including menarche and menstruation. As I have shown in this section, issues of purity often motivate scholars' interest in and research on menstruation. However, as Bailey reveals, readers might suppose or imagine that menstruation is part of some female characters' construction and interpretation, even where the terminology of נדה is lacking. In addition, research on menstruation tends to construct menstruation as a woman's experience, thus relying not on experiential views but on cultural impositions of the category of woman. The complexity of the processes of human development and of reproduction are rarely in view in the scholarship on menstruating women. In this case, cultural presuppositions use a biological development to project an immediate shift in category from child to woman. However, this transition might be seen as a more complex process than language denoting categories of (girl) child and (adult) woman allows, even as cultural contexts and language still commonly create an immediate shift.

My review of biblical scholarship related to menarche and menstruation reveals that issues of purity dominate the biblical texts' and scholars' discourse on menstruation and that transitioning children and the early years of menstruation are rarely in view. Research in the interdisciplinary realm of childhood studies, on menarche and transitioning children, helps to expand the view of menarche and menstruation from the new menstruant's subject position and thus to construct a child-oriented interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.

Adolescence and Menarche in Childhood Studies

Through my review of the lexical field of בתולה and בתולים, as well as of נדה and biblical laws and narratives involving menstruation, I have argued that menstruation is relevant to an interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative. Citing Day, Bachmann supports the claim: "It is best, with Peggy L. Day, to take it [Bat-Yiphtach's lament] to mean the period between menarche and having a child."⁵¹⁴ But what is it about menarche and this period for a transitioning child that is being lamented? Driscoll articulates a problem with the common focus on rites of passage: "The rites of passage assigned to girl-becoming-woman appear to mark bodily changes that alter girls without any necessary reference to personal experience."⁵¹⁵ In light of the previous sections, constructing an interpretation of the narrative based on Bat-Yiphtach's lamenting over her בתולים requires a more complex physiological perspective than the language of "a girl of marriageable age" or a simple statement about a period of time or rite of passage in a female child's life typically conveys. Insights can be gleaned from the actual voices of transitioning children and their experience of menarche. This move to grant children subject status has been crucial in childhood studies, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In listening to these voices, I rely on research contributing to childhood studies and conducted primarily in majority world cultural contexts.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Bachmann, *Judges*, 142.

⁵¹⁵ Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 90.

⁵¹⁶ In childhood studies, "majority world" signifies non-Western countries, where a majority of the world's populations, including children, resides. "Minority world" signifies Western, first-world countries. "The terms highlight that First World children are the minority while Third World children are the majority of the world's child population." Samantha Punch, "Childhoods in the Majority World: Miniature Adults or Tribal Children?" *Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2003): 278. Development studies scholars in childhood studies have critiqued the "colonial imperialism" in applying "Minority World conceptualizations and priorities to the Majority World" children.

Research in childhood studies in recent decades has generated data on experiences of menarche and menstruation from both post-menarcheal and pre-menarcheal girls' perspectives. A survey of the research on menarche reveals how transitioning female children experience this physiological change.⁵¹⁷ In the following paragraphs, I first construct menarche as both biological and cultural phenomenon and then address four aspects that have particular relevance for Bat-Yiphtach's narrative: 1) emotions and reactions of menarcheal girls; 2) preparation for menarche and the roles of mothers and fathers; 3) familial and cultural expectations and constructs; and 4) menarche, "womanhood," virginity, and sexuality. In this section, I argue that research on menarche and menstruation in the field of childhood studies provides physiological and contextual perspectives on Bat-Yiphtach's lamenting.

Menarche as Biological and Cultural Phenomenon

A focus on menarche is a fruitful means to recover the excluded middle of the child–adult binary.⁵¹⁸ For transitioning children, menarche is a natural/biological experience that happens in and is influenced by the cultural/social context of the transitioning child experiencing it.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ As Reider Aasgaard and Kristine Henriksen Garroway have asserted, a scarcity of data on ancient children—and in my project, on their experiences of menarche—makes reconstructions of historical transitioning children's experience difficult. See Chapter 2. The data presented here rely on two strategies: First, gaining access to transitioning girls' voices relies both on research with young subjects and on memories and recollections of the menarcheal experience from older subjects. Second, I rely on comparative ethnographic data to access transitioning children's perspectives on menstruation, primarily focusing on data from research with majority world subjects.

⁵¹⁸ See Alan Prout, "Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Reconsidering the New Sociology of Childhood," *Global Studies of Childhood* 1, no. 1 (2011): 4–14. Prout's call for addressing the excluded middle is a call to recognize how modernist conceptualizations based on "dichotomized oppositions" continue to influence how valid knowledge is produced in the sociology of childhood. He states: "[M]oving the sociology of childhood beyond the grip of such modernist thinking entails developing a strategy for 'including the excluded middle.' *Inter alia* this may necessitate greater attention to the interdisciplinarity and the hybridity of childhood; being symmetrical about how childhoods are constructed; attending to the networks, flows, and mediations of its production; and the co-construction of generational relations." *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵¹⁹ Anthropological studies that compare cultural environments and rites of passage that relate to a transitioning child provide views of cultural contexts but less often explore the rite of passage from the perspective of the transitioning children. For this project, I prioritize a childhood studies lens rather than an anthropology lens to

Messaging about what menarche is and means is culturally dependent. In both ancient and contemporary contexts, biological processes and socio-cultural factors together shape the experience. Ayse Uskul identifies the relationality of the biological and socio-cultural elements of menarche:

Menarche, the onset of the first menses, is a significant milestone in a woman's life and reproductive cycle. For the female adolescent, it is a sharply defined, sudden, and distinct *biological event* (Golub, 1992; Koff, Rierdan, & Silverstone, 1978). Menarche is also a *socio-cultural event* that is shaped and constructed by cultural institutions such as religion, science, and media (e.g., Chandra & Chaturvedi, 1992; Laws, 1990; Paige & Paige, 1981).⁵²⁰

In her study of recollections of menarche among undergraduate students, Janet Lee notes that “experiences of menarche vary widely across cultures and depend upon cultural and family norms, a girls’ age and preparation, and her personal and community resources (Marván et al. 2006; Uskul 2004).”⁵²¹ Philip states that the “physiological event of menstruation... has cultic, cultural, and social functions.”⁵²² The embodied experience cannot be divorced from a transitioning child’s socio-cultural and familial context.

contribute to the child-oriented interpretive possibilities for Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. For a review of anthropological perspectives on menarche and menstruation, see, e.g., Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 7–17.

⁵²⁰ Ayse Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories from a Multicultural Sample,” *Social Science & Medicine* 59 (2004): 667. Uskul also notes that a few studies “have looked at cultural similarities or differences in women’s menarche experiences, [and] it is usually in the area of anthropology where we find cross-cultural studies.” Meanwhile, she contributes “to the slowly growing cross-cultural psychology literature on women’s menarche experiences.” Ibid. Uskul cites from this literature Sharon Golub, *Periods: From Menarche to Menopause* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992); Elissa Koff et al., “Changes in Representation of Body Image as a Function of Menarcheal Status,” *Developmental Psychology* 14 (1978): 635–642; Prabha Chandra and Santosh Chaturvedi, “Cultural Variations in Attitudes Toward Menstruation,” *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 37 (1992): 196–198; Sophie Laws, *Issues of Blood: The Politics of Menstruation* (London: Macmillan, 1990); and Karen Paige and Jeffery Paige, *The Politics of Reproductive Ritual* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981).

⁵²¹ Janet Lee, “Bodies at Menarche: Stories of Shame, Concealment, and Sexual Maturation,” *Sex Roles* 60 (2009): 615. By sexual maturation, Lee means “the production of the body in the context of sexual/reproductive issues.” Lee cites Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories”; and Maria Luisa Marván et al., “Emotional Reactions to Menarche Among Mexican Women of Different Generations,” *Sex Roles* 54 (2006): 323–330.

⁵²² Philip, “Menstruation and Childbirth,” 127.

In my construction of a child-oriented reading, contemporary studies involving menarcheal subjects can help to fill some of the gaps in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative. These studies provide access to views held by transitioning girls on the onset of menses.⁵²³ Research on menarche has focused on a variety of issues: the age of onset; how well subjects were prepared for the event; how (from whom) they received information about it; what information they received before and after the onset of menses; emotional reactions to it; practical, hygienic, and relational consequences; and navigating menstruation in their private (family) and public (e.g., school and religious) contexts.⁵²⁴ In addition, studies by researchers have garnered data from menarcheal and menstruating subjects in a variety of contexts. In addition to studies among varied and culturally different populations in the United States, data on experiences of menarche also have been gathered from pre- and post-menarcheal subjects native to Egypt, Iran, India, Nepal, Tanzania, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Venezuela, Lithuania, Malaysia, and Japan.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Although my priority is on incorporating perspectives from the field of childhood studies and thus on research produced in cooperation with younger subjects, some of the data gathered come from older subjects remembering their experience of menarche. Importantly, studies have shown that because of the enormity of the experience, memories of the event are striking. "The analysis of women's menarche stories revealed that women remembered their first menstruation very clearly and vividly." Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 671. See also Sharon Golub and Jo Catalano, "Recollections of Menarche and Women's Subsequent Experiences with Menstruation," *Women & Health* 8, no. 1 (1983): 49–61.

⁵²⁴ See, e.g., Kelly Orringer and Sheila Gahagan, "Adolescent Girls Define Menstruation: A Multiethnic Exploratory Study," *Health Care for Women International* 31, no. 9 (2010): 831–47, doi: 10.1080/07399331003653782.

⁵²⁵ See, e.g., Abdel-Hady El-Gilany et al., "Menstrual Hygiene Among Adolescent Schoolgirls in Mansoura, Egypt," *Reproductive Health Matters* 13, no. 26, (2005): 147–52; A.E. Arafa et al., "Prevalence and Patterns of Dysmenorrhea and Premenstrual Syndrome Among Egyptian Girls (12–25 years)," *Middle East Fertility Society Journal* 23 (2018): 486–90; Sima Zalberg, "Channels of Information About Menstruation and Sexuality Among Hasidic Adolescent Girls," *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 17 (Spring 2009): 60–88; Hemant Tiwari et al., "Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs About Menarche of Adolescent Girls in Anand District, Gujarat," *La Revue de Santé de la Méditerranée orientale* 12, no. 3/4 (2006): 428–33; Prabisha Amatya et al., "Practice and Lived Experience of Menstrual Exiles (*Chhaupadi*) Among Adolescent Girls in Far-Western Nepal," *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 12 (2018), e0208260. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208260; Marni Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality, Menstruation and Risk: Girls' Experiences of Puberty and Schooling in Northern Tanzania," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 11, no. 4 (May 2009): 383–98; Deanna Dorman Logan, "The Menarche Experience in Twenty-Three Foreign Countries," *Adolescence* 15 (1980): 247–56; Joan Chrisler and Carolyn Zittel, "Menarche Stories: Reminiscences of College Students from Lithuania, Malaysia, Sudan, and the United States," *Health Care for Women International* 19 (1998): 303–12; John McMaster, and Kenna Cormie. "Menstrual and

Dammery conducted 54 interviews with women from 16 different countries, with a particular interest in looking at cross-cultural similarities and differences.⁵²⁶ The goal in reviewing these studies is to construct a child-oriented reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and a subject position for Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child.

Emotions and Reactions of Post-Menarcheal Girls

Emotions about and reactions to menarche show evidence of a complex mix of embodied (emic) experiences and cultural (etic) influences. Studies of transitioning girls' experiences of menarche reveal that negativity is the predominant characterization offered by subjects.⁵²⁷ In Uskul's research with subjects in 34 different countries, the subjects' negative emotional reactions included fear, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, shock, confusion, misery, and worry.⁵²⁸ Marni Sommer reports similar affects in response to menarche, as does Dammery.⁵²⁹ Negative perspectives reflect both the embodied realities of menstrual bleeding and the assimilation of "prevailing cultural views early in life."⁵³⁰ Many subjects—both those who recently experienced

Pre-menstrual Experiences of Women in a Developing Country," *Health Care for Women International* 18, no. 6 (November 1997): 533. doi:10.1080/07399339709516309; and Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories." These studies report the nature and structure of their data gathering techniques, their sample size and sample demographics, and their statistical analysis of the data (e.g., using grounded theory). Sommer notes that "participatory approaches, which emphasize an equalizing and dynamic exchange between researcher and participants, were utilized to enable the researchers to gather sensitive information while simultaneously empowering girls." Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality, Menstruation and Risk," 387. For details on these elements of the research, please refer to the cited works.

⁵²⁶ Countries included Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Ukraine, England, Uganda, Sri Lanka, India, Fiji, Chile, Singapore, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Korea, Philippines and Indonesia. Note that these interviews were with women who reported memories of their experience of menarche. Dammery, *First Blood*, xi.

⁵²⁷ See, e.g., Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 672.

⁵²⁸ Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 671.

⁵²⁹ Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 388; Dammery, *First Blood*, 29.

⁵³⁰ See, e.g., Dammery, *First Blood*, 25–41.

menarche and those who recollected their experience—report that they did not feel adequately prepared, and in this case, the lack of preparedness contributed to the negative emotions experienced at the onset of menses.⁵³¹

Although a majority of subjects report negative reactions only, some study participants report positive emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement, pride, and relief), while others experience a mixture of both.⁵³² Positive emotions were mentioned in conjunction with feeling prepared and already having seen others in the household experience menstruation.⁵³³ How mothers responded to daughters' bleeding also influenced these feelings.⁵³⁴ Transitioning girls needed both emotional and physical support, as well as interpretive information. Tiwari et al. found that a majority of the girls in their Indian study “believed that menstruation is a purging of body impurities (56.5%),... whereas 10.0% felt it was something dirty”; the other 31.0 percent felt that it was a normal physiological event.⁵³⁵

Results from the breadth of studies I reviewed reveal the complex realities of menstrual bleeding for transitioning children. Post-menarcheal subjects tend to have a more negative view of menarche than pre-menarcheal subjects.⁵³⁶ These more negative views of menstruation among post-menarcheal children versus pre-menarcheal children suggest one possibility: that dealing with the actualities of blood's flowing from the body was worse than what pre-menarcheal girls

⁵³¹ See, e.g., Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 251.

⁵³² Uskul, “Women's Menarche Stories,” 671; Dammery, *First Blood*, 37.

⁵³³ Uskul, “Women's Menarche Stories,” 671.

⁵³⁴ Dammery, *First Blood*, 33–37.

⁵³⁵ Tiwari et al., “Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs,” 431.

⁵³⁶ See, e.g., Tiwari et al., “Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs,” 429; and Gun Rembeck et al., “Attitudes and Feelings Towards Menstruation and Womanhood in Girls at Menarche,” *Acta Pædiatrica* 95 (2006): 709. The former study occurred in India, the latter in Sweden.

tended to imagine. These emotional responses to menarche of transitioning children influence my understanding of Bat-Yiphtach's lament of her בתולים.

Preparation for Menarche and the Roles of Mothers and Fathers

Members of the household play an important role in subjects' immediate reactions to menarche. Expectations of and preparations for menarche influence transitioning girls' perspectives. Both knowledge about and feeling prepared for the onset of menses can mediate the transitioning child's negative views and experiences. Nevertheless, many post-menarcheal girls report that their knowledge and preparation for menarche was inadequate. Some menstruating subjects were surprised and unsure of what was happening, and some thought that they were ill.

If the information, when it is delivered, is accurate and the recipient recognizes it at the time of delivery as personally relevant, trauma and fear at the first signs of blood can be lessened.⁵³⁷ Mothers or sisters often serve as sources of this information. In Tiwari et al.'s study in India, "the major source of information was the mother (60.7%) followed by older sisters (15.8%)."⁵³⁸ However, in northern Tanzania, some transitioning girls reported that they could not talk with their mother or share that they had started bleeding because they had learned in primary school that if they did, their mother would die.⁵³⁹ In some contexts, grandmothers and aunts play a role in providing information on menarche and menstruation.⁵⁴⁰ In a Zimbabwean study, some

⁵³⁷ Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 673–4.

⁵³⁸ Tiwari et al., "Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs," 430.

⁵³⁹ Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality, Menstruation and Risk," 389.

⁵⁴⁰ In some contemporary contexts, transitioning girls receive information at school. For example, in Dorman Logan's study, in minority countries like the United States, as well as in Japan, Columbia, and El Salvador, girls received information in school during health education, "although the quality of this education is questionable."

subjects reported that when a girl begins to menstruate, traditionally she tells her grandmother, who informs the girl's mother.⁵⁴¹ And in some families, fathers communicate with their daughters about menarche, either before or after the event.⁵⁴² For example, among 18 Iranian subjects in Deana Dorman Logan's study, one-third reported speaking with their father about menarche; one stated that "he explained the whole thing to me."⁵⁴³ However, transitioning girls in other contexts report that they did not want their father to know and that menarche affected their relationships with their father negatively. Uskul reports that among her subjects, "several participants recalled being angry with their mothers for sharing the event with others, especially with their fathers, without their consent."⁵⁴⁴ One African respondent (the country was unspecified) stated that "I remember I think what upset me most about it [menarche] was the fact that my father and I were very close. All of a sudden this separated me from him."⁵⁴⁵

Family and household dynamics and assigned meanings influence how transitioning girls are prepared for and experience menarche. In turn, the experience affects a menarcheal girl's relationships with members of her household. Interpreters of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative often are

Dorman Logan, "The Menarche Experience," 249. Sommer reports the effects of school instruction in northern Tanzania, where schools in some cases have been a source of misinformation. Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality, Menstruation and Risk," 390–92.

⁵⁴¹ McMaster and Cormie. "Menstrual and Premenstrual Experiences," n/p.

⁵⁴² Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 388.

⁵⁴³ Dorman Logan, "The Menarche Experience," 252. Dorman Logan also reports that her Iranian subjects tended to report less negative feelings about menarche: "The most common reaction expressed by the Iranians was one of feeling 'more grown up' (55%). These are girls who spoke freely with the fathers and friends as well as with their mothers, all of whom matter-of-factly responded to the news of the menarche with such phrases as, 'Don't worry; it's natural.'" Ibid., 253. Note that all of Dorman Logan's 95 subjects from 23 different countries were in the United States studying English. Four of the fathers connected with daughters in the study are doctors.

⁵⁴⁴ Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 672.

⁵⁴⁵ Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 672, 673. She reports that she could no longer wrestle or roughhouse with him, as she had before.

concerned with and fill gaps related to the portrayal of her familial relationships. In interpreting Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child, I consider how these familial relationships affect her experiences of her transition and the lament of her בתולים.

Familial and Cultural Expectations

The biological and emotional experiences of menarche depend on the familial and cultural context of the transitioning child and the messaging and expectations imposed. For example, in some cultures, menarche is met with ritual celebrations. Such ceremonies are more common in societies where a rigid gender identity is emphasized.⁵⁴⁶ From her interviewees, Dammary learned details about such celebrations: “that water is used for purification, old clothing discarded and new given to symbolise new identity, scented flowers or unguents applied to the body, gifts intended as dowry contributions, feasts and strengthening of kin alliances, and for some, marriage arrangements.”⁵⁴⁷ Dammary suggests the possibility of psychological benefits from celebrations but also offers a caution: “Although the secular and religious ceremonies give young women choice in participation, they are nonetheless ceremonies of control, influencing the ways in which young women might live a particular religious or social life.”⁵⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Uskul notes that African women in her study were more likely than others to have a sense of celebration; but on the basis of one subject’s response, she cautions that the social or cultural reaction to menarche of celebration does not mean that the transitioning child experiences the

⁵⁴⁶ Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry III, “Adolescent Initiation Ceremonies: A Cross-Cultural Code,” *Ethnology* 18, no. 2 (1979): 199–210, cited in Dammary, *First Blood*, 68.

⁵⁴⁷ Dammary, *First Blood*, 68. See Chapter 3, “A Rather Special Ceremony,” 65–91.

⁵⁴⁸ Dammary, *First Blood*, 91. In addition, the framework within which these “specifically female aspects of culture and ritual” occurred was still established by men, where they exercised “wider social and religious control over menarcheal and menstrual bleeding.” *Ibid.*, 114.

onset of menstrual bleeding as such. Some do not appreciate the public nature of the treatment: “[H]ow society officially views and treats menarche does not mean that the girl who is having her first menstruation will experience the event in the same positive way.”⁵⁴⁹ Rituals and celebrations more commonly are practiced in traditional and rural contexts; although some of the participants in Uskul’s contemporary study were aware that these rituals happened in their country (e.g., in Benin, Cameroon, Zambia, and South India), most had not experienced them.⁵⁵⁰

Learning the rules and regulations imposed in some social and cultural contexts presents challenges for transitioning children. For example, the need for and expectation of secrecy is emphasized across a range of familial, cultural, and social settings. Dammary records that for most of her subjects, “the concealment of bleeding, beginning at menarche, followed customary methods that involved some curtailment of activity external to the home. There was no thought of protest against this and no suggestion that it might change.”⁵⁵¹ In addition, subjects from Zambia, Indonesia, India, and France reported that “men in their culture were categorically not informed” about menarche or menstruation.⁵⁵² Dorman Logan also reports that in Asian cultures, “little talk of menstruation occurs,” and “discussions with men are taboo.”⁵⁵³ Transitioning children in many cultures are taught to maintain secrecy about their bleeding so that others do not know about it, and they are embarrassed and ashamed when they fail to do so.

⁵⁴⁹ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 672, 676.

⁵⁵⁰ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 676.

⁵⁵¹ Dammary, *First Blood*, 114.

⁵⁵² Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 252.

⁵⁵³ Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 253. See also Dammary, *First Blood*, Chapter 6 “Concealing the Fact,” 114–39.

In addition, rules and restrictions are a heightened concern in cultures where religion plays a role in regulating daily life.⁵⁵⁴ In some cases, learning the restrictions and rules means navigating the requirement of secrecy, as discussed. However, transitioning girls also must abide by social and religious expectations (e.g., related to fasting or praying) that make secrecy more difficult to ensure, according to one South Asian subject.⁵⁵⁵ Another South Asian subject reported feeling anger and resistance to these expectations and ultimately rejected her religious tradition and its theology as a result of menstruation-related restrictions.⁵⁵⁶ In most contexts, transitioning children themselves are not able to exercise such choices; like the South Asian subject, they must be older and in social and cultural contexts that allow for transformation and liberation.⁵⁵⁷

In some contemporary contexts, separation of menarcheal and menstruating girls and women is still common. “Until relatively recently, separation of menstruating women from the rest of the population was common, and it is still practised in some areas of the world.”⁵⁵⁸ To illustrate, a study conducted with adolescent girls in Nepal provides contemporary views of the experience of menarche and menstruation for transitioning children in a traditional and religious context.⁵⁵⁹ In their study, Amatya et al. describe adolescents’ experiences of *Chhaupadi*, a

⁵⁵⁴ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 675.

⁵⁵⁵ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 675.

⁵⁵⁶ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 675–6.

⁵⁵⁷ “One of the reasons taboos die so hard—in all types of civilizations—is that they are rigorously taught to youngsters, who dare not question them. To the uninitiated, they represent the status and privilege of adulthood.” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 28.

⁵⁵⁸ Tiwari et al., “Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs,” 429. Delaney et al. concur: “In most native cultures the world over, . . . [t]he most widespread practice is the seclusion of the menstruating girl from the tribe for periods lasting from a few days to a few years.” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 28.

⁵⁵⁹ The research on Nepalese menstruation experiences was described as follows: “We collected data from 107 adolescent girls using a self-administered survey in two local schools in Achham. We also conducted a focus

tradition of “untouchability” and menstrual exile, in which Hindu menstruating girls and women are banished to *Chhau* sheds and livestock sheds.⁵⁶⁰ Of the 107 adolescents surveyed, Amatya et al. found that 30 stayed in their homes during menstruation and practiced menstrual taboos there, while 77 practiced *Chhaupadi*.⁵⁶¹ Among the latter, “over half of the participants lived in a livestock shed, ate outside their home, and defecated in open spaces. Participants were restricted from eating dairy products.”⁵⁶² Transitioning children experiencing menses for the first time are expected to remain in the *Chhau* or livestock shed for at least 14 days.⁵⁶³ Most of the *Chhaupadi* girls reported using old clothes to absorb the menstrual blood and changed these cloths at least every six hours.⁵⁶⁴ Despite having to vacate their homes, most of the adolescents (90 percent) were able to attend school during their menses.⁵⁶⁵

Seven of the Nepalese survey participants also joined in a focus group discussion, and here, the voices and words of the adolescents were included in the study, beyond the survey

group discussion with seven girls, held key informant interviews, and observed the girls’ living spaces during *Chhaupadi*, using a checklist.” Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 1/17.

⁵⁶⁰ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience of Menstrual Exiles,” 1/17.

⁵⁶¹ Participants ranged in age from 13 to 19, and 4 among the 77 who practiced *Chhaupadi* were married. The study also involved direct observation of the *Chhaupadi* living spaces. The sheds have been criticized “for being unhygienic, exposed, unsafe, and lacking basic necessities.” The practice of *Chhaupadi* and its related deaths have been widely reported in mainstream media, including *The New York Times*, BBC, NPR, CNN, and *The Guardian*. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, and United Nations agencies have worked to abolish it. *Ibid.*, 15–16/17. The authors also note that legislation passed in Nepal in 2018 prohibits the practice of *Chhaupadi*, but “the persistence of the practice of *Chhaupadi* in the far-western region of Nepal suggests that more than campaigns and laws will be required for elimination because the taboo against menses is so firmly entrenched.” In fact, the practice had already been banned by the Nepalese Supreme Court in 2005. *Ibid.*, 3/17.

⁵⁶² Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 6/17.

⁵⁶³ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 2/17.

⁵⁶⁴ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 6/17. In Dammary’s research, subjects reported simply having to squat because no cloths were available; or in Bangalore, one subject reported seeing women sitting on gunny bags, with long blouses as a covering. Dammary, *First Blood*, 117.

⁵⁶⁵ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 8/17. The finding indicates the complex relationship between traditional familial contexts and settings and more secular and contemporary norms.

results. In this context, family tradition was offered as the reason for practicing *Chhaupadi*. One participant provided the following description:

Immediately after I get my period, I leave the house for the shed, quietly without touching anything or anyone. My brothers will be sick if I touch them. The cattle will die, and the food will be rotten. There will be a death in the family if we don't follow it.⁵⁶⁶

Six of the seven adolescents involved in the discussion would stop the practice of *Chhaupadi* given the chance. A key informant interviewed for the study stated that “[a]dolescent girls understand the problems and consequences of the practice and are willing to bring the change.”⁵⁶⁷ The seventh adolescent said she would continue the practice of *Chhaupadi* because not practicing it would bring misfortune to her family.⁵⁶⁸

Expectations related to secrecy and separation perhaps are relevant in interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. I incorporate the transitioning child’s perspective on and responses to these socially imposed elements in my reading of Bat-Yiphtach.

Menarche, Womanhood, Sexuality, and Reproduction

Menarche and menstruation represent a complex intertwining of personal experience and cultural messaging. In contexts where religious messaging is prominent, purity restrictions and regulations can heighten the negative experience for transitioning children, as the study of Nepalese adolescents illustrates. However, even when the cultural meaning of the onset of

⁵⁶⁶ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 8/17.

⁵⁶⁷ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 11/17.

⁵⁶⁸ Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience,” 9/17. For a contemporary view of separation as practiced in a Jewish tradition—by Ethiopian Beta Israel women—and of the navigation of menstrual norms in changing contexts, see Lisa Anteby, “‘There’s Blood in the House’: Negotiating Female Rituals of Purity Among Ethiopian Jews in Israel,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NJ: University Press of New England, 1999), 166–186.

menses is positive, this messaging—imposed on the transitioning child—might be disconnected from a child’s view of the experience. For example, Uskul reports the following:

A woman from Central Asia... mentioned that many women in her country wait for the arrival of their period because it means being able to bear children and becoming eligible to get married, which are very highly valued in that culture. Another woman from East Asia said that menstruation is experienced as a positive event in her country because of the importance placed on reproduction. In both of these cases, the cultural value of menarche did neither help the women to have a pleasant menarche experience nor made them think about menstruation as a positive event.⁵⁶⁹

As this view from post-menarcheal subjects reveals, sexual maturity and reproductive capabilities shape the cultural messaging delivered to transitioning menarcheal and post-menarcheal children. However, understanding the actual experience of menarche and menstruation for transitioning children requires accessing the views of the children themselves.

After transitioning children have experienced menarche, they often are told that this biological milestone has moved them into womanhood. At this point, childhood (symbolically) is left behind.⁵⁷⁰ Of course, symbolic representation has its limits, as Driscoll suggests: “If menarche is an urgent rupture in whatever growing-up is prescribed for her, it does not make a girl a woman.”⁵⁷¹ Instead, womanhood is assigned or imposed, as a social and cultural interpretation, in response to a biological, physiological experience of transitioning children. Studies with transitioning children on menarcheal experiences suggest that “womanhood” is in this case a reference to (or euphemism for) sexual maturity, sexual availability, and reproductive

⁵⁶⁹ Uskul, “Women’s Menarche Stories,” 673.

⁵⁷⁰ See, e.g., Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 251; and Shirley Prendergast, ““To Become Dizzy in Our Turning: Girls, Body-Maps and Gender as Childhood Ends,” in *The Body, Childhood and Society*, ed. Alan Prout and Jo Campling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 101–124.

⁵⁷¹ Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence*, 91.

capacity, as if womanhood comprises primarily these three characteristics.⁵⁷² The sexuality and fertility that undergird and motivate the perspective by which menarche signals “womanhood” has a long history of prioritizing the male gaze on the transitioning child’s developing body.⁵⁷³ However, as Anne Teitelman reports, “[y]oung girls at menarche rarely self-identify as a sexual subject and may well find the information that they now have reproductive potential threatening.”⁵⁷⁴ Navigating the emic (biological and existential) experience of menarche and menstruation and the (etic) socio-culturally imposed perspective presents challenges for transitioning children.

As a result of their new (imposed and potential) sexual identity, transitioning children receive messaging indicating that controlling their interactions with boys and men takes on new urgency. “Menarche holds significance amid the biological changes of puberty due to its perceived link to sexual readiness, fertility and, in some cultures, beliefs about the power of

⁵⁷² Janet Lee, focusing on Western societies, examines menarche’s role in (hetero)sexualizing a transitioning child’s body. She notes that in patriarchal and heterosexist societies, “menarche simultaneously signifies both emerging sexual availability and reproductive potential.” Janet Lee, “Menarche and the (Hetero)Sexualization of the Female Body,” *Gender and Society* 8, no. 3 (1994): 344. Post-menarcheal female bodies, in their “womanhood,” also become more closely associated with earth, nature, life, mortality, and vulnerability, according to Lee; she notes that male bodies are less symbolically marked. *Ibid.*, 346. To the degree that information delivered to pre-menarcheal and post-menarcheal girls celebrates their “womanhood” (which in many contexts does not seem to coincide, in this messaging, with “adulthood”) through a focus on reproductive ability and sexual vulnerability, those who deliver the information sustain transitioning children’s assimilation of cultural scripts and discourses that circumscribe the meaning of womanhood.

⁵⁷³ Dammary provides a cultural study of menarche, beginning with ancient Greek medical texts by Hippocrates and Aristotle; she notes that “[t]he transition from child to woman, symbolized by menarche, has throughout history been a focus of the evolving thoughts, beliefs and actions of male medical practitioners, concerned to understand, to define and often also to control the menarcheal body.” Dammary, *First Blood*, 23. Meanwhile, Laura Fingerson’s study indicates that transitioning girls recognize both the risks and the power that their response to the male gaze affords them. Laura Fingerson, “‘Only 4-Minute Passing Periods!’ Private and Public Menstrual Identities in School,” in *Geographies of Girlhood: Identities in Between*, ed. Pamela Bettis and Natalie Adams, *Inquiry and Pedagogy Across Diverse Contexts* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 117–18. (115-136).

⁵⁷⁴ Anne Teitelman, “Adolescent Girls’ Perspectives of Family Interactions Related to Menarche and Sexual Health,” *Qualitative Health Research* 14, no. 9 (2004): 1292–308, cited in Dammary, *First Blood*, 38.

menstrual blood.”⁵⁷⁵ Following the onset of menses, transitioning children hear from family members that they should avoid boys. For example, in one cross-cultural study, in which U.S., Malaysian, Lithuanian, and Sudanese students were asked to write the story of their first menstruation, one Malaysian subject reported that “her aunt told her, ‘Don’t flash your smiles to boys or else you might get pregnant’”; another “told the boys that she could not play with them anymore because she had asthma.”⁵⁷⁶ Respondents from both Indonesia and Samoa in Dorman Logan’s study were warned about “having boyfriends.”⁵⁷⁷ Again, religious tradition can influence the messaging: “Ultra-Orthodox society maintains a conspiracy of silence about the human body, sexuality and fertility. This silence is a derivative of the strict supervision over sexuality in ultra-Orthodox society, which is enforced through many rigid rules about sexual behavior.”⁵⁷⁸ In addition, Doris Kieser notes the “confounding social qualities of both sexiness and purity” that bleeding, adolescent females have faced, influenced by “a long history of perceptions and practices related to purity... in both Jewish and Christian cultures.”⁵⁷⁹ In some traditional contexts and cultures, control over transitioning children’s sexuality becomes

⁵⁷⁵ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 383. Dorman Logan notes that, despite the common linking of menarche and fertility, fertility follows menarche by about a year. Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 248. Dammerly states that “menstruation can occur without ovulation, as it does at menarche and for some time thereafter.” Dammerly, *First Blood*, 20–1.

⁵⁷⁶ Chrisler and Zittel, “Menarche Stories,” 310. Connections between illness and menstruation were cited by subjects across the studies reviewed.

⁵⁷⁷ Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 251–2.

⁵⁷⁸ Zalberg, “Channels of Information About Menstruation,” 61.

⁵⁷⁹ Doris Keiser, “Protoevangelium of James, Menstruating Mary, and Twenty-First-Century Adolescence: Purity, Liminality, and the Sexual Female,” *Children in the Bible and the Ancient Social World*, ed. Shawn Flynn (London: Routledge, 2019), 206, 207. She states that “purity notions in the Christian Church evolved towards sexual purity and the pure female as the virgin Bride of Christ.” *Ibid.*, 207.

necessary for reasons involving cultural and religious expectations and, in some cases, economic and honor-related valuing of virginity.⁵⁸⁰

In a study involving post-menarcheal girls in northern Tanzania, in the Moshi and Rombo Districts of Kilimanjaro, Sommers focused on the link between menarche and sexuality. Her subjects came from both rural and urban settings and provided insights into the socio-cultural aspects of menarche, sexuality, and fertility for transitioning girls in these settings.⁵⁸¹ Three themes emerged in the study:

(1) the fear, shame, and confusion surrounding girls' experience at first menses and during subsequent menses management within the school environment; (2) the gap in pubertal-related information girls are receiving as traditional guidance fades and schools attempt to fill its place; and (3) the sexual questions and concerns of girls growing up facing new sexual pressures.⁵⁸²

Beliefs that early onset of menses is connected with premarital sex led both in-school girls and dropouts to hide their bleeding "for fear they will be accused of premarital sexual activity."⁵⁸³ Half of the transitioning girls interviewed in the rural area had not told anyone at all until they spoke with the researchers. The researchers later learned what some of the girls had been taught in primary school: that their mother would die if they told her.

⁵⁸⁰ Noha M. Al-Shdayfat and Gill Green, "Short Report: Reflections on Sex Research Among Young Bedouin in Jordan: Risks and Limitations," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (January 2012): 102–3.

⁵⁸¹ Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 383–98. In terms of methodology, Sommer notes that "the conceptual framework guiding our research was that of feminist and participatory methodologies that emphasize the drawing out of participants' voiced experiences." In addition, focusing on the Chagga region of northern Tanzania, Sommer states that the "ethnic group [is] known for its business acumen and for having less dramatic traditional practices around the onset of puberty than other ethnic groups (such as the Maasai, who conduct initiation rituals). The Chagga are known for historically supporting girls' education, and the region has one of the highest female literacy rates in the country." Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 385.

⁵⁸² Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 388.

⁵⁸³ Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 389.

Generational challenges and socio-cultural shifting revealed that the transitioning girls in Tanzania “are caught between tradition and modernization.”⁵⁸⁴ The challenges of managing societal transformations in the course of personal transitions and transformations became clear as the subjects conveyed mixed appreciation and regret for the ways of the past and the ways of the present. One girl in a rural setting lamented the loss of former traditions:

In the older generation, they used to be taught by their grandmothers about growing up, about how to keep themselves, about the importance of staying a virgin until they were married; and how it was a shame if you were not a virgin when you got married. But now, no one cares if you are a virgin when you get married—now they are not taught such things—you are just left to grow up with no guidance—no one tells them anything.⁵⁸⁵

In contrast to this lament for the past in a changing context, some of the subjects remembered that past times also included traditional ceremonies involving female circumcision, and “[t]he majority of girls expressed no interest in returning to such practices.”⁵⁸⁶

When the subjects in Sommer’s study were asked to create a curriculum for teaching younger girls about menarche and menstruation, the advice to “stay away from boys” often appeared. Such advice became necessary because of the risks of disease and pregnancy, with the understanding that boys can “ruin your lives.” Girls could be expelled from their families and from their schools for a premarital pregnancy.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 391.

⁵⁸⁵ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 391.

⁵⁸⁶ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 391. Subjects described authority figures’ power to make decisions about acceptable cultural shifts. For menstrual cramps—a minor issue relative to female circumcision but one that can represent considerable and potentially crippling pain in itself—subjects reported that mothers, fathers, and teachers did not accept new tools for managing the pain. While the transitioning girls sought pain medicines and frank explanations for menstrual cramps, their teachers, parents, and school nurses “[did] not condone the use of pain medicine and silenced discussion of menstruation”; they were more likely to recommend “hot drinks, exercise, and heating pads to girls.” Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 391.

As Sommers and her Tanzanian research partner developed relationships with their subjects characterized by trust, the transitioning girls became comfortable asking questions about menstruation and virginity. These questions provide a detailed view of the variation in the effects of menarche on transitioning girls and of the challenges of understanding a new, sexualized identity:

- Why do some bleed for five days and others for three days? (urban, in-school, Lina)
- Why is it that when girls are in their menstruation, some experience serious pain in the pelvis? And why is it people change during their period and experience changes each time—for example, pain one month, then rude another month, then vomiting? Why not a consistency of reaction? (urban, in-school, Lucy)
- Having vaginal discharge (white, watery, like milk, heavy, from a vagina)—is it a disease? (rural, in-school, Karina)
- Why is it that when girls reach this age of puberty (menstruation every month), why is it they're unhappy and afraid of boys, and run from them? (urban, in-school, Bertha)
- Why when a girl after she has started to grow up, she is always followed by boys? (rural, in-school, Gress)
- Why is it when I'm menstruating, I'm so short tempered without any reason? Why is it when I'm bleeding, or about to bleed, I always feel horny? (urban, school dropout, Anna)
- Does virginity start after starting to menstruate or when you are born? When is a person called a virgin? After menstruating or before? (urban, in-school, Yasinta)
- The boys say that the semen will make the pimples go away—so if put semen on their face, pimples will go away and face will be all soft? (urban, in-school, Gema)
- We were told in biology class that there is a nerve that when it is touched, you are no longer a virgin? (urban, in-school, Efgenia)
- If you have had sex and then you stayed for a long time, does your virginity come back? (rural, in-school, Dafrosa)⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁸ Sommer, "Ideologies of Sexuality," 390–92. Providing analysis of the virginity questions, Sommer states that "confusion remains among girls as to the meaning of 'virginity' and its preservation. The continuation of such societal pressures (for example, maintaining virginity) is not surprising, given existing literature on gender roles in Tanzania.... However, the misinformation being conveyed in school was surprising, as was the sheer lack of knowledge among 16- to 19-year-olds."

Such questions reveal the complexity that might underlie the lamenting of “*בתולים*” in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative—elements that “virginity” and “girl of marriageable age” alone tend to gloss over.

The questions and comments reveal that transitioning children must learn to navigate their own developing bodies and sexuality, and they also must navigate attention and pressure from boys and men who show interest in them. One subject described the attention a transitioning girl received from a male peer in school in Tanzania:

There was a male student in school—a priest who was married. He approached her and when she asked him why, saying he was married and grown up, and that what he wanted would destroy her life, he said that he loved her. The next day he brought her 5000 shillings [~ 4 U.S. dollars] and she said to him that this was not enough for her body—and that he should take the money home and buy some food for his children.⁵⁸⁹

Other girls shared experiences of pressure from male teachers, as well as from boys who are peers. One subject reported the following:

Boys try to pressure girls or approach them for love/sex, but the girls do not agree. Some do not agree because they like to study—and some know that it is a risk to have relations with boys—both because of pregnancy and HIV.⁵⁹⁰

In addition to physiological, emotional, and hygienic aspects of menarche and menstruation, transitioning children navigate sexual and reproductive capabilities and the social pressures from boys and men that accompany them. I interpret Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative with a more inclusive view of the perspectives offered by transitioning children, in light of biological and socio-cultural influences related to menarche.

⁵⁸⁹ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 392.

⁵⁹⁰ Sommer, “Ideologies of Sexuality,” 393.

Conclusion

Research with subjects experiencing or recollecting menarche shows that changes, complexities, and risks abound in a wide range of cultural, public, and familial contexts. As subjects, transitioning children convey their own perceptions and reveal that the cultural messaging they receive at menarche involves sexuality, reproduction, sometimes marriage, expectations regarding hygiene and separation, and often the need for secrecy and hiddenness. Personal experiences involve bleeding and managing it (as well as managing hygienic expectations), pain, confusion, embarrassment, shame, fear, restrictions on location and activities, and changed relationships with (primarily male) friends, family, and authority figures. In this mix of changing, natural embodiedness and both stable and changing cultures and norms, research in childhood studies provides a more comprehensive perspective on transitioning children that contributes to a child-oriented reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.

A Tower, Two Moons, and Bat-Yiptach's Lament: Judges 11:29–40

Based on my review of the shifting understandings of בתולה and בתולים and on the development of child-oriented interpretation in biblical scholarship, Bat-Yiphtach can be characterized as a transitioning child.⁵⁹¹ As such, physiological issues of menarche and menstruation come into view and can influence how the narrative is interpreted. In particular, my review of the research in childhood studies on how menarche and menstruation are experienced by transitioning children addresses ambiguities and fills gaps in the narrative, including gaps about Bat-Yiphtach's lament over her בתולים. Biblical scholarship on menstruation generally fails

⁵⁹¹ As I stated in Chapter 1, Bat-Yiphtach's centrality is an intentional choice and decision in my project. The narrative of her father, Yiphtach, who "judged Israel six years," extends from Judges 11:1–12:8, and in the context of the entire narrative, she is not the central character.

to address the onset of menses and its physiological and relational consequences.⁵⁹² Scholarship on Bat-Yiphtach and her lament fails to account for the menstrual bleeding of the “girl of marriageable age.”

My exegetical work on Judges 11:29–40 contributes to the growing literature of child-oriented biblical interpretation, described in Chapter 2. I structure this child-oriented analysis according to my research and findings on the perspectives of menarcheal and menstruating subjects. In addition, I see the narrative as folktale, following Heath Dewrell’s analysis of the narrative.⁵⁹³ In light of these influences, my analysis relies on the narrative’s grammatical ambiguities and gaps,⁵⁹⁴ folktale elements, and my review of scholars’ ethnographic and qualitative and quantitative research with menarcheal, transitioning children. From this review, I identify four aspects that are relevant to Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative and to her status as transitioning child: 1) emotions and reactions of post-menarcheal girls; 2) preparation for menarche and the roles of mothers and fathers; 3) familial and cultural expectations; and 4) “womanhood” and menarche’s relationship to reproduction and sexuality.

⁵⁹² The exception is Bailey’s work on how menarche might influence the interpretation of the Rivkah narrative. Bailey, “Baby Becky, Menarche and Prepubescent Marriage.”

⁵⁹³ As I discussed in Chapter 2, Heath Dewrell concludes that Judges 11:29–40 cannot provide useful textual evidence for a historical reconstruction of child sacrifice in the Israelite Yahwistic cult. Its genre is more appropriately seen as a presumed etiology and a certain legendary folktale: “[E]stablishing that there existed in ancient Israel a rite by which children were vowed and then sacrificed solely on the basis of the Jephthah story... puts more historical weight on the folktale than it can bear.” Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 115.

⁵⁹⁴ “This text [Judges 11:29–40] is filled with grammatical problems and open-ended translation possibilities.” Mercedes Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, Wisdom Commentary, ed. Barbara E. Reid, OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 128.

Emotions and Bat-Yiphtach's Lament

My exegesis of Bat-Yiphtach's story begins with a childist reorientation in the narrative's focalization. My lexical review of בתולים/בתולה and my review of research conducted with post-menarcheal girls provides for a more detailed construction for this shifted viewpoint. Here, Bat-Yiphtach, as transitioning child, takes center stage:

Bat-Yiphtach is an emotional, transitioning child, and she doesn't know exactly why she feels things so strongly now. Still, word has come that her father returns from his battle with the Ammonites, and as she enters the narrative in Judges 11:34, she dances and makes music to celebrate. She beams as she experiences the joy of her body's capacity to make music, to create rhythm, and to respond to it with dance. She might not know the traditional steps, but that doesn't stop her from dancing—dancing like nobody's watching.⁵⁹⁵ Unfortunately, her joy is short-lived as she sees the expression on her father's face. She had hoped that victory in battle, and the promise of a powerful position in the Israelite community, might bring changes—improvement—in their relationship. It had always been strained and distant—both literally and figuratively. Her developing breasts did not help.⁵⁹⁶ And now, just recently, bleeding. Her mood plummeted. As she encountered him, the words he spoke were not just hurtful; they were damning.

In this setting and set-up, Bat-Yiphtach's lament over בתולי (my בתולים) in Judges 11:37 gains the potential for a thick description. She is not off in the distant future, mourning her perpetual childlessness, her perpetual unmarried state, or her perpetual lack of sexual experience. She doesn't even know why her father is so anguished and angry or what this vow to YHWH has to do with her.⁵⁹⁷ Instead, she is lamenting the changes in her that are changing, for the worse, the relationship with her father. Explanations for Bat-Yiphtach's lament that prioritize her future

⁵⁹⁵ This characterization relies on the phrase, ורק היא יחידה, discussed further in the next section.

⁵⁹⁶ “For most women, anxieties about their developing bodies at menarche concerned the way these bodies looked and might be interpreted by others, rather than how they looked or felt to themselves. Breast development seemed especially fraught with such anxiety.” Lee, “Menarche and the (Hetero)Sexualization,” 351.

⁵⁹⁷ I see nothing in the narrative to indicate that Bat-Yiphtach knows the content of the vow. Rather than assume that she does or that she doesn't know the content, I remain with the ambiguity that the narrator offers.

prospects or social expectations might not coincide with the immediate experience of her own lament as transitioning child.

My survey of research conducted with post-menarcheal girls, in a variety of socio-cultural contexts, gives a nuanced and embodied view of the immediacy of Bat-Yiphtach's lament. Her bleeding body causes fear, discomfort, pain, embarrassment, confusion, misery, and worry.⁵⁹⁸ These emotions and reactions underlie Bat-Yiphtach's lament. In addition, she had become accustomed to being overlooked by all except her peers—both in her father's house and outside it. But her changing body brings unwanted attention, especially from men and also from boys. This lament is stirred by a mix of both embodied and socio-cultural factors: by an expectation that she must conceal her body's (natural) bleeding; by her lack of control over the arrival and duration of her cyclical flow of blood; by the mechanics and tools needed to address the flow of blood; and by social and cultic stigma assigned to the “dirtiness” or impurity of her bleeding body. She has far too many other emotional and physiological realities to focus only on her virginity.

My review of the literature on Bat-Yiphtach's narrative in Chapter 1 shows that her lament was long considered to be a lament upon her virginity. Physiological changes, familial relationships, and emotional and hormonal realities for transitioning children paint a broader and more complex picture of בתולי (my בתולים). In addition, social and cultic views—the narrator's view—of Bat-Yiphtach's lament as menarcheal transitioning child (בתוליה) and the transitioning child's views of the embodied experience (בתולי) undoubtedly vary.⁵⁹⁹ Perspectival differences between the one lamenting and the narrator reporting and scholars interpreting the lament are

⁵⁹⁸ Uskul, “Women's Menarche Stories,” 671.

⁵⁹⁹ Dammary, *First Blood*, 91; and Uskul, “Women's Menarche Stories,” 672, 676.

likely, according to my child-oriented research. These differences often are disregarded. In my translation of the narrative below, I make distinctions between Bat-Yiphtach's perspective and the narrator's pronouncement of what she laments. In my translation, Bat-Yiphtach laments "my bleeding body" and the narrator reports, from a cultic perspective, that she laments her impurity.

The Absent Mother, the Warrior Father, and Bat-Yiphtach's Preparation for Menarche

Research with menarcheal subjects shows that familial contexts and relationships influence how transitioning children manage the realities and emotions of menarche. The familial aspects of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative can be read as intensifying her lament over her בתולים. Although ambiguities and gap-filling, which influence scholars' interpretations of the narrative, also offer the possibility of constructing the familial environment so as to alleviate her lament (e.g., by seeing a genuinely distraught and cooperative, caring father or by creating a mother), I argue that familial factors intensify her lament.

In a variety of cultural contexts, preparation for what happens when the menstrual flow of blood begins can help to reduce the anxiety, worry, confusion, and fear that accompanies menarche for some transitioning children. However, feeling inadequately prepared and lacking in knowledge about what to expect more often are the norm. In some cases, mothers, sisters, aunts, or grandmothers provide information, and in some cases, speaking with mothers about menarche and menstruation is dangerous for the mother. In some cases, a father speaks with daughters about menstruation, and more often, menstruating children do not want their father to know.

In Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, her familial context is lightly sketched; a mother is lacking from the story.⁶⁰⁰ Only Yiphtach's mother—called a זנה (sex worker or follower of a foreign

⁶⁰⁰ In other narratives in Judges, mothers also are absent. These absent mothers are (not) in Aksah's narrative (Judges 1:13–15); Yether's brief appearance (Judges 8:20–21); or the narrative of the hacked up secondary

god⁶⁰¹) and an אשה אחרת (another woman/wife)—is noted in Judges 11:1–2, and she is not present as a grandmother in Bat-Yiphtach’s story. Although some interpreters create a mother for Bat-Yiphtach,⁶⁰² a close rendering of the Hebrew provides no explicit mother. Thus, Bat-Yiphtach cannot learn what to expect about menarche, as a transitioning child, from her mother. She cannot be comforted or instructed by her mother after her first flow of blood, either about the mechanics or the socio-cultural or cultic expectations.

In addition, Yiphtach seems an unlikely source of information or comfort for Bat-Yiphtach. Until her arrival in Judges 11:34, Yiphtach’s concern is with the authorities and the Ammonites; here, any evidence of his support of, and attention to, Bat-Yiphtach is lacking.⁶⁰³ To illustrate, in Judges 11:11, Yiphtach goes with the authorities (elders) of Gilead from ארץ טוב—the place to which he fled from his half-brothers in Judges 11:3 and the place from which the authorities (forcefully) recruited him in Judges 11:5. He goes with the authorities and sends word, at המצפה, to the Ammonites.⁶⁰⁴ Following his failed diplomatic efforts in Judges 11:12–27,

wife (Judges 19:1–30). Meanwhile, mothers are more central characters in the narratives of Shimshon (Judges 13:1–14:6; 16:17) and Mikayehu (18:1–4). Devorah is called a אם בישראל (mother in Yisrael) in Judges 5:7.

⁶⁰¹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 119.

⁶⁰² Charles Heavysege creates a mother for Bat-Yiphtach who condemns Yiphtach. In the Greek tragedy of Iphigeneia, versions differ as to whether a mother saves Iphigeneia from the father’s vow. See Chapter 1.

⁶⁰³ Bat-Yiphtach’s absence from the earlier part of Yiphtach’s narrative supports Thomas Römer’s argument, who concludes that the Bat-Yiphtach narrative includes post-Deuteronomic perspectives and that “the story of Jephthah’s vow and sacrifice [I would say the story of Bat-Yiphtach] belongs to another literary level than the surrounding verses.” He also argues that the story was composed by an author/redactor to fit into its present context “to create a sort of ‘tension’ between the gift of the spirit and the vow.” Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomist?” 29.

⁶⁰⁴ I retain the priority of “the watchtower” as a translation for המצפה. See Clines, “מצפה,” *DCH* 5:590. Towers have a symbolic connection to menarche and menstruation in folktales and fairy tales. Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 161–99. In their review of Grimm fairy tales, “[t]he unseemly haste with which nubile maidens were locked away in towers in the land of Grimm seems to be a direct narrative analogue to the custom of seclusion at menarche in most early societies.” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 161. Niditch recognizes the symbolism of “women snatched from home and kept in a tower” as relevant to rites of passage and the narrative, but she does not make the connection of the tower with blood flow explicit. See Susan Niditch, *Judges*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster

Bat-Yiphtach's father remains otherwise occupied: In Judges 11:29, the (warrior) spirit of YHWH is upon him,⁶⁰⁵ and Yiphtach from here is on the move. He traverses Gilead and Menasheh. Then he passes beyond the watchtower in Gilead, *המצפה*, and from here he advances to the place where the warriors of Ammon have amassed.⁶⁰⁶ He does battle with the Ammonites and then smites them, *עשרים עיר*, across twenty towns or villages, or perhaps in twenty raids, before he returns to *המצפה*.⁶⁰⁷ These verses provide no details about Bat-Yiphtach and her

John Knox, 2008), 134. In studies of the setting of Judges 11:29–40, translations that jump too quickly to Mitspah as a proper noun miss the possible relevance of a watchtower to Bat-Yiphtach's menarche in the narrative.

In addition, *מצפה* alludes to "a location with a good view, from which one can keep close watch on activities in the area... a 'lookout point....'" J. R. Zorn, "Mizpah," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 701. Zorn lists four different *מצפה*s in the Hebrew Bible, and the *מצפה גלעד*, "although not the most important *מצפה* of the Bible," is likely the same *מצפה* featured in the narrative of Rachel, Lavan, and Yaacov, in Genesis 31. Zorn, "Mizpah," 704. I have already discussed menstruation's relevance in this Genesis narrative. Wilda Gafney reveals a second relevant connection between Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and Genesis 31: In describing the leave-taking of Rachel and Leah from their father in Gen 31:49–50, Gafney interprets the covenant of *מצפה* in the following way:

...[as] a covenant about the treatment of women...: 'If you abuse my daughters or if you take women above my daughters, though no person is with us, look—God is a witness between you and me' (Gen 31:49–50). The 'May the Lord Watch...' is really 'May the Lord watch to see if you mistreat my daughters.' It is unfortunate that the context of the Mitzpah covenant has been all but forgotten (Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 60).

Bat-Yiphtach, as transitioning child at *המצפה* in Judges 11:29–40, reveals how dramatically the covenant has been forgotten in this place, at *המצפה*: The father himself sacrifices the daughter, and YHWH the deity is no longer a witness.

⁶⁰⁵ In the battle against the Ammonites, Yiphtach smote them, a great smiting, so that death-dealing seems appropriate imagery for the spirit here. Many interpretations have in view a more constructive, triumphal, or life-giving spirit. However, a less sanguine, more violent sense of the *רוח יהוה* in Judges is fitting (see Judges 3:10; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

⁶⁰⁶ In Judges 10:17, the narrator states that the warriors of Ammon encamped *בגלעד*, in or at the gilead, while the warriors of Israel gathered and encamped *במצפה*, in or at the mitspah. The definite article is included in both cases. Through much of the Yiphtach narrative, beginning in Judges 11:1, *גלעד* appears without the definite article, including in the references to *זקני גלעד*. It returns in Judges 11:29, where Yiphtach crossed over *את הגלעד ואת מנשה*. In contrast, the definite article attached to *מצפה* in all other verses of the narrative disappears in this one verse. Exploring the use of the definite article in this narrative (which in some prepositional phrases is only apparent in the Masoretic pointing) and throughout Judges is beyond the scope of this project but offers an interesting study for future research. For a recent proposal on biblical Hebrew's use of the definite article, see Peter Bekins, "Non-Prototypical Uses of the Definite Article in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 225–40. doi: 10.1093/jss/fgt001

⁶⁰⁷ *DCH* includes both city or town and raid or invasion in the lexical field of *עיר*. Clines, "עיר," *DCH* 6:232. Although Judges 11:33 is not identified as one of the occurrences of the meaning of raid, the context certainly allows for this understanding. The phrase *עשרים עיר* falls within a prepositional phrase that identifies the dispersed nature (from one place until another) of Yiphtach's movements.

whereabouts during this time, nor about the daughter–father relationship.⁶⁰⁸ Was Bat-Yiphtach in the watchtower, המצפה, for the duration of Yiphtach’s battles with the Ammonites? Had she been there for long? Is this the place where she grew up? What happened to Yiphtach’s dwelling in טוב ארץ (a good land) and to the אנשים ריקים (men of no social value) who gathered themselves to him? Was Bat-Yiphtach with Yiphtach and the men there? If so, how did she come to be in “his house,” at the watchtower? Although the narrator focuses attention elsewhere, these questions are pertinent to a child-oriented reading of the narrative in that the story’s pathos effectively engages readers’ and hearers’ concern for Bat-Yiphtach as a character.⁶⁰⁹ Despite this pathos and the tragic tone in Yiphtach’s response to seeing Bat-Yiphtach in Judges 11:35, a positive and intimate relationship in which father provides sensitive information to a transitioning child about menstrual flows, bodily changes, and social and cultural norms in the community from which he has been removed would be difficult for me to rationalize.

The only indicator that Bat-Yiphtach and her father shared a living space is in the reference to ביתו, his house, from which she emerges. What this house looks like and who else resides in it are gaps to be filled. Interpreters often do so in relation to the question: Who would Yiphtach have expected to see coming out of ביתו, his house, to greet him?⁶¹⁰ Some interpreters

⁶⁰⁸ In fact, any evidence of Bat-Yiphtach herself is lacking until Judges 11:34. The narrative provides few clues to decipher the nature of the father–daughter relationship, instead allowing the ambiguity and gaps to result in varied interpretations of the relationship.

⁶⁰⁹ The narrator does convey that when Bat-Yiphtach enters the narrative, her father has raided or subdued the threatening Ammonites across twenty neighboring towns and villages. However, in the broader context of Judges, stability and שלום are short-lived. For Bat-Yiphtach, her companions, and other children among the Israelites and their adversaries, the settings in Judges offer little safety or stability.

⁶¹⁰ In Judges 11:29, Yiphtach vows to offer up whatever comes out “from the doors of his house,” and the narrator begins Judges 11:34 by noting that “Yiphtach came to המצפה (the watchtower, or Mitspah), to his house, and הגה, his daughter is going out to meet him.” The repetition of יצא from 11:29 to 11:34 suggests that readers and hearers are to recognize Bat-Yiphtach as exiting the doors of her father’s house; but the text does not make the place from which she goes out explicit.

ascribe high status to Yiphtach to answer the question.⁶¹¹ For example, for Jack Sasson, בֵּיתוֹ refers to a “compound.”⁶¹² Other interpreters imagine a more modest dwelling: Alter imagines the house to be the one from which he departed when his brothers chased him away.⁶¹³

Henriksen Garroway notes relevant imagery for the house, suggesting both a “traditional Israelite four-room house [that] accommodated livestock” and the non-traditional household from which Bat-Yiphtach and her father come: “a poor, lower-class, military family.”⁶¹⁴ In light of the presence of livestock, scholars have suggested that Yiphtach might expect a slave to emerge from his house, or animals.⁶¹⁵ Leaning toward Henriksen Garroway’s imagery, I imagine his house as a modest dwelling, a small or even temporary structure with “doors”—a place to enter and exit—and where Bat-Yiphtach has settled while she waits and hopes for her father’s return from the campaign against the Ammonites.⁶¹⁶ She encounters her father alone, suggesting that

⁶¹¹ Yiphtach’s focalization dominates Bat-Yiphtach’s story. As her father, he sees her, the narrator characterizes how her actions have affected him, and he describes the effect she has on him in his own words. Interpreters have often noted his verbal acuity and negotiation skills. However, his words throughout seem to fail to have the intended effect. Despite interpretive possibilities that construct Yiphtach as a heroic, successful warrior; a patriotic Israelite; and a pious member of the Yahwistic cult, ambiguity equally allows for characterizations of him as an absent father who is self-serving, narcissistic, and only conveniently devout. My interpretation prioritizes the latter view. As a father, he demands obedience and provides little of the time and little of the guidance that would benefit his daughter. As Henriksen Garroway notes, “[f]athers should be making betrothal arrangements, not arrangements for their [daughter’s] sacrifice. Jephthah did not get the memo. His teenage daughter was left at home, unattended, while he was off at war.” Henriksen Garroway, “Failure to Marry,” 67.

⁶¹² Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, page 439.

⁶¹³ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, vol. 2, 125. The possibility provides interesting gap-filling possibilities for Bat-Yiphtach’s early years, although the presumed involvement of Yiphtach as father would not necessarily change.

⁶¹⁴ Henriksen Garroway, “Failure to Marry,” 66, 67.

⁶¹⁵ For example, Pamela Tamarkin Reis asserts that Yiphtach fully expected to encounter a slave. Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah’s Daughter,” *Proof* 17, no. 3 (1997): 281. My reading of Yiphtach’s actions and words, in which he can’t remember whose god is whose and bargains with the authorities out of self-interest, is less complimentary than that of Tamarkin Reis. A lack of impulse control seems more likely than foresight, planning, and recognition of potential consequences. The question of what Yiphtach expected is not relevant to my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. I have not encountered an interpretation suggesting that he might have expected one of his אנשים ריקים (men of no social value) to emerge.

⁶¹⁶ Or possibly the Moabites, according to the critical apparatus in BHS. Alter notes a “scholarly consensus that this entire passage of attempted diplomatic negotiation has been spliced in from another source. According to

relatively few people or animals are in this household.⁶¹⁷ As a result, the household, in my reading, does not reflect the ideal *בית עב* that in some scholarship is constructed as the cultural norm of ancient Israel.⁶¹⁸ This shelter bears little resemblance to this ideal *בית עב* and appears to hold no Israelite *משפחה*—a clan or extended family among whom father and daughter reside.⁶¹⁹ Thus, whether others have filled the roles that a warring father and absent mother normally might fill for a transitioning child seems doubtful.

The dialogue between father and daughter and the relationship it conveys have inspired a range of interpretations. Readings depend on whether interpreters construct Yiphtach as a tragic hero, an ignorant fool, a pious and devout follower of YHWH, or, as Pamela Tamarkin Reis does, an overindulgent but otherwise attentive and loving father (to a spoiled daughter).⁶²⁰

the account in Numbers 20 and 33, it is Moab, not Ammon, that refuses right of transit to Israel.” Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 123.

⁶¹⁷ As I noted in Chapter 1, the phrase *ורק היא יחידה* (only she alone) can describe her status either in the preceding phrase, in which she dances and plays a small instrument, or the following, in which Yiphtach has no (other) sons or daughters. I opt for the former. Sasson, with many other scholars, emphasizes the phrase’s connection with the latter. As a result, Bat-Yiphtach is imagined as playing and dancing in a women’s welcoming ceremony or celebration, as seen in other biblical texts (e.g., Miriam in Exod 15:20–21 and the women greeting David in 1 Sam 18:6). The connection then results in Bat-Yiphtach’s being constructed as a woman as interpreters assume a setting in which only women greet returning warriors. Says Sasson of 1 Sam 18:6, “[w]omen surge from diverse towns, singing and dancing and accompanied by musicians with drums, jubilation, and sistrum....” Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 439. See also Niditch, *Judges*, 134. Nevertheless, questions remain about these imaginings. For example, child-oriented readers might then wonder about the location of children and transitioning children during such festivities and how inclusion and exclusion were managed.

Another possible interpretive move is to see the phrase, *יחידה* (only she alone), in relation both to what precedes and what follows: Bat-Yiphtach dances and plays, and she does so alone, because she has no siblings by Yiphtach.

⁶¹⁸ For a discussion of the terms, *בית עב* and *בית*, and their indications of family households, nuclear families, and extended families, see Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IL: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 24–6. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶¹⁹ “Biblical terminology... supports a distinction among four different types of family household that coexisted in ancient Israel: paternal joint families consisting of two (stem family) or more nuclear subunits; fraternal joint family households (Deut 25:5); nuclear family households; and extended family households (e.g., Lev 22:12). Although the paternal joint family household was considered ideal, it did not necessarily dictate reality.” Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, 26.

⁶²⁰ Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child.” Yiphtach’s focalization dominates Bat-Yiphtach’s story. As her father, he sees her, the narrator characterizes how her actions have affected him, and he describes the effect she has on him in his own words. As multiple scholars have noted, Yiphtach remains the subject of the broader narrative’s two

Ambiguity in the passage allows for these interpretative possibilities; it equally allows for an interpretation of him as an absent father who is self-serving, narcissistic, and only conveniently devout. My interpretation prioritizes this view. As a father, he demands obedience and provides little of the time and little of the guidance that would benefit his daughter. Thus, I interpret him as an absent father who has shown little interest in attending to Bat-Yiphtach and her transitioning status: His response at seeing her casts blame and calls her trouble: ויאמר אהה בתי הכרע הכרעתני ואת היית בעכרי (“Aaugh! My daughter! You absolutely force me to my knees! And you—you are among the ones troubling me!”) She responds to his outburst, affirming that he must do to her as he vowed⁶²¹; when she also conveys that his withdrawal (i.e., their separation) will be done to her, he simply says לכי (“Go!”).⁶²²

The narrative includes only one indicator that Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child is not alone. After suggesting that her father’s withdrawal from her is necessary (for שנים חדשים (two moons)), she then says: ואלכה וירדתי עליההרים ואבכה על־בתולי אנכי ורעיתי (“and I will go. Then I will travel down upon the hills, and I will cry over my בתולים—I and my girlfriends.”). Bat-Yiphtach has been in the vicinity of the watchtower at least long enough to form relationships with peers (during the period of the raids against the Ammonites, if not before). Some who are with her as she weeps are likely post-menarcheal. They might have spoken with her about menarche, might

primary concerns. These two concerns or plot problems involve the oppression by and battle with the Ammonites, for which Yiphtach is designated as leader, and the rash or improper vow, of which Yiphtach is the initiator. See, e.g., Fuchs, “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing,” 117, 126–7; Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 43; and Nelson, *Judges*, 211.

⁶²¹ Note that the narrative does not indicate whether Bat-Yiphtach knows or does not know the consequences of the vow.

⁶²² Bat-Yiphtach’s imperative that her father withdraw (הרפה) from her, which I read as a more nuanced volitive mood rather than as strict command, indicates a period of separation. The period of separation, שנים חדשים, occurs three times in the narrative in two different forms. Scholars have noted its meaning as two months but also that the translation is problematic. I discuss the phrase in light of the separation in the next section.

have helped her to prepare for blood flows and comforted her through the pain of them, in the absence of her mother. In addition, when they bleed, Bat-Yiphtach and her female friends must go, as custom requires. Bat-Yiphtach's words convey relationships with companions, although almost as an afterthought, but the grammatical construction of the weeping verb is first person singular, indicating Bat-Yiphtach's sense of isolation.

Despite the presence of her companions, the narrative draws Bat-Yiphtach as a transitioning child with few relationships—mother, father, or other familial connections—that might have prepared her, educated her, guided her, or comforted her through menarcheal and menstrual experiences. An emotional response of weeping upon her בתולים would be heightened by the lack of supportive relationships.

Familial and Cultural Expectations: Secrecy and Separation in Bat-Yiphtach's Narrative

Research shows that cultural and familial settings influence the expectations of and impositions on menarcheal and menstruating girls. Transitioning female children learn about cultural and familial norms of secrecy, of celebration or separation, and of views of menstrual blood as dirtiness and impurity. These cultural meanings assigned to menarche and menstruation are relevant in interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and help to address its ambiguities and translation challenges.

Cultural norms and narratives often impose secrecy and constrain disclosure about menstruation. As Fuchs noted of the terminology, “the way of women,” in Gen 31:35, euphemisms in biblical narratives can connote menstrual bleeding bodies and avoid the need for

explicit terminology.⁶²³ The dialogue between father and daughter in Judges 11:35–38a offers a test case for menstrual norms regarding secrecy, euphemistic language, and separation.

Following Yiphtach’s raids on Ammonite settlements, he returns to the watchtower, to *המצפה*, to encounter his daughter. As I have noted, he screams in agony, rending his clothing, and he says to her, *ויאמר אהה בתי הכרע הכרעתני ואת היית בעכרי* (“Aaugh! My daughter! You absolutely force me to my knees! And you—you are among the ones troubling me!”). He explains his reaction: *ואנכי פציתי פי אל־יהוה ולא אוכל לשוב* (“I... I opened my mouth to YHWH, and I am not able to take it back!”) Some scholars suggest that Bat-Yiphtach already knew of the vow and its consequences because the vow was uttered at Mitspah.⁶²⁴ My construction of Yiphtach’s movements suggests otherwise: He had already advanced toward the Ammonites when he vowed the vow. Thus, the accused daughter responds as might be expected in this context—seeking her absent and inattentive father’s approval after his emotional and fault-finding outburst:

ותאמר אליו אבי פציתה את־פיך אל־יהוה אשה לי כאשר יצא מפִיך³⁶
אחרי אשר אשה לך יהוה נקמות מאיביך מבני אִמון.

She says: “My father.... You opened your mouth to YHWH. Do to me according to what went out of your mouth, after what YHWH has done for you, (granting) vengeance from your enemies, from the men, women, and children of Ammon.”⁶²⁵ These men, women, and children are not Bat-Yiphtach’s enemies. She calls them “your enemies.” Perhaps she would have hoped

⁶²³ Fuchs, “For I have the Way,” 80.

⁶²⁴ See, e.g., Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child,” and Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 127.

⁶²⁵ I follow here the example set by Wilda Gafney, who makes explicit the full range of populations hidden in inclusive plurals (e.g., *בני אִמון*). See, e.g., Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 287.

that her father had not turned them into his enemies. Nevertheless, the attentive and placative daughter recognizes that his vengeance and victory over “your enemies” take priority.

Still, Bat-Yiphtach does have information she must convey to her father:

ותאמר אל־אביה יעשה לי הדבר הזה הרפה ממני שנים חדשים³⁷

ואלכה וירדתי על־ההרים ואבכה על־בתולי—אנכי ורעיתי.

She tells him: “It will be done to me, this thing: Withdraw from me (for) two new moons, and I will go. Then I will travel down upon the hills, and I will cry over my bleeding body—I and my girlfriends.”⁶²⁶

With שנים חדשים most often translated as two months (e.g., in NRSV, KJV, and JPS), the request has long troubled biblical scholars. As Sasson states, “[w]hy two months... is a riddle, for unlike the ‘three months’ that is mentioned fairly often in Hebrew literature, this interval does not seem especially meaningful.”⁶²⁷ Interpretations suggest that Bat-Yiphtach goes down on the mountains with her companions “for” this period of time. However, Garcia Bachmann comments on the logistical problems of this translation: “The daughter asks for a retreat on the mountains, accompanied by her peers (and their mothers, I would assume; there was already enough turmoil without letting teenage girls roam alone for two months).”⁶²⁸ Tamarkin Reis also notes problems with translations of “two months.”⁶²⁹ Based on the absence of the preposition “for” in the MT,

⁶²⁶ The verb, יעשה, most often is presumed to be a niphil jussive, “Let it be done.” Bat-Yiphtach’s words are a request that “this thing” be done לי, “for me.” In light of the absence of the shortened form that can indicate a jussive mood, of my child-oriented and menarcheal lens, and of my translation of לי as “to me,” I translate יעשה as a niphil indicative, “it will be done.” See P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., 2nd repr. (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2009), 114.

⁶²⁷ Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 441.

⁶²⁸ Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, 135.

⁶²⁹ “The logistics of provisioning, maintaining, and protecting a group of young women on the mountains for 60 days would be burdensome and expensive.” Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 287. Although I find Tamarkin Reis’s treatment of Bat-Yiphtach condescending and excessively critical and her treatment of Yiphtach as more

she argues that Bat-Yiphtach goes away not *for* two months but *at* two different times—to participate twice in idolatrous worship related to the new moon. Her suggestion has merit, in that the absence of a preposition leaves a gap to be filled. However, reading through a child-oriented lens, I need an interpretation that constructs the representation of Bat-Yiphtach more in keeping with the pathos of the narrative than Tamarkin Reis’s judgmental characterization of Bat-Yiphtach does.

In the setting of the narrative, reckoning the time period simply as “two months” neglects a relevant aspect of Bat-Yiphtach’s story. Moons, like towers, have a symbolic connection to menarche and menstruation in folktales and fairy tales, according to Delaney et al.⁶³⁰ But “when these images [of moon, among others] appear in poetry, fiction, or mythology, critics are reluctant to associate them with that most female of attributes, the menstrual cycle.”⁶³¹ Although the presumed ritual in Judges 11:40 has been interpreted as a rite of passage connected with puberty, the temporal expression in Bat-Yiphtach’s request has not been connected with menarche and menstruation, even though the moon (μηνη) is present in the etymology of menarche, menses, and menstruation.⁶³²

affirming than the narrative constructs him, I agree with her assessment that “two months” is an inappropriate understanding of Bat-Yiphtach’s request and the narrator’s description.

⁶³⁰ Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 161–99. Chapter 16 is titled, “The Bleeding Tower: Menstrual Themes in Fairy Tales.”

⁶³¹ Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 161. “In myth and poetry, much depends on the association of menstruation with the moon. The word *menstruation* means ‘moon change.’” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 194. They state that the same neglect or masking of the moon–menstruation connection applies to the menstrual symbolism that fills the universe of folktales.

⁶³² In Greek, μηνη, in the feminine first declension, is understood to mean moon, while μην, or μηνος, in the masculine first declension is understood to mean month. In Judges 11:37–39, the LXX translation has μηνας, a masculine plural accusative. Although “month” in this case is not wrong, it does obscure the feminine moon’s place in the passage and measure of time, as well as the feminine menstrual cycles that were measured and are labeled etymologically in relation to the moon. In addition, “the Juluo, from the district of Kavirondo in East Africa, believed that menstruation came with the new moon.” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 194.

A translation of “two months,” in which moons are no longer in view, conveys a contemporary relationality with time that might be out of place in interpretations of biblical texts. Biblical Hebrew has two lexemes for “moon”: ירה and חדש.⁶³³ The former refers to the moon that, textually, is always in relationship to the sun. The latter, occurring in Bat-Yiphtach’s words and the narrator’s two reports, refers to the new moon. I assume that time is experienced and marked differently in contexts not inundated by watches, clocks, and calendars to indicate its passing, in both ancient and contemporary times. As a result, translating this time period of שנים חדשים to understand its significance in the narrative requires a temporal reorientation for contemporary scholars. A translation of “two (new) moons” helps to achieve this reorientation. In the ancient Near East, the cycles of the heavens and their contents, the (agricultural) land, and bodies would have played a larger role in marking the passage of time.⁶³⁴ In addition, Dean-Jones notes that “in antiquity it was widely believed not only that the lunar and menstrual cycles were the same length, but that the one controlled the other.”⁶³⁵ Keeping in view the lunar cycle and its connection with menstrual cycles, both in folklore and in ancient Greek medical texts, influences my translation of Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child.

⁶³³ A third term, כסא, is identified in *DCH* with the meaning of “full moon.” It occurs only twice: in Ps 81:4 and in Prov 7:20. In the former, the moon seems to be connected with understandings of the moon as the heavenly throne of Yah. In the latter, the translation seems potentially problematic. NRSV has “He took a bag of money with him; he will not come home until full moon.” Meanwhile, KJV has “He hath taken a bag of money with him, *and* will come home at the day appointed.” Exploring the meaning of כסא as full moon is beyond the scope of this project.

⁶³⁴ For example, Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the new lunar month, has become “a holiday meant specifically for women; it has been observed in many periods and places.” Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 265. A full exploration of the origins of Rosh Chodesh and how its observance might relate to this occurrence of שנים חדשים in Judges 11 is beyond the scope of this project. Such a focus on a woman’s ritual is certainly worth exploring but draws attention away from Bat-Yiphtach’s menarcheal experience as transitioning child.

⁶³⁵ Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding,” 187.

With menarche and menstruation in view, I propose two possibilities for understanding Bat-Yiphtach's words, שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים. First, a literal translation of “two (new) moons” conveys a euphemistic or symbolic understanding of menarche and menstruation. Through it, Bat-Yiphtach communicates to her father that she has experienced menarche in his absence. As my review of research with menarcheal subjects has shown, and as Fuchs has noted in her interpretation of Genesis 31, secrecy can be paramount. The symbolism of moons might point to menstruation, even when references to bleeding are not explicit in the biblical texts. To illustrate, a connection is made between חֳדָשׁ and mammals' discharges and reproductive processes in Jer 2:23–24: Here, the lustful, Baal-seeking Israelite camel, is easily found by those who seek her: בַּחֲדָשָׁה יִמְצְאוּנָהּ. In her “new moon” (or in her heat (NRSV) or mating time (KJ2000)), they will find her.⁶³⁶ The three repetitions of the two new moons in Judges 11:37–38 might represent an unspeakable symbolic or euphemistic reference to menarche or menstruation in Bat-Yiphtach's request.⁶³⁷

Second, Bat-Yiphtach's request of שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים might be interpreted differently than the commonly perceived sojourn for two months because of the ambiguity in absent prepositions and in transitions. The MT allows for a translation in which Bat-Yiphtach states the need for separation from her father of two moons *before* she goes to lament upon the hills. Yiphtach's imperative לֵכִי—Go!—might be interpreted as a response to Bat-Yiphtach's imperative that her

⁶³⁶ Some mammals in heat experience this “estrus,” or fertile period, and a discharge simultaneously. Female humans experience their fertile period following their menstrual cycle rather than during it, but estrus or mating time was not fully recognized as separate from menstruation in human mammals until the twentieth century. “We now know that it is ovulation, not menstruation, that is closest to heat.” Delaney et al., *The Curse*, 70. See also Dammary, *First Blood*, 19–21. For an indication of how ancient Greek medical texts constructed relationships between lunar cycles, estrus, menstruation, and conception, see Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding.”

⁶³⁷ When Bat-Yiphtach states that a separation from her father (for or after) שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים will be done to her, the time period might be interpreted as equivalent to one lunar and menstrual cycle, new moon to new moon. Or like the Nepalese subjects who at menarche spend a longer time in the *Chhaupadi* shed, it might be interpreted as a time of separation for menarcheal transitioning children.

father withdraw from her: “Go away!” rather than “Go now!” In this case, Bat-Yiphtach is separated from her father for two moons, after which she weeps upon the hills, with her companions. In this case, too, socio-cultural and religious customs that enforce separation of menarcheal and menstruating young women become visible in the moon symbolism in Bat-Yiphtach’s request. Only after she has undertaken a period of (menstrual) separation can she return to him; then, she will lament her בתולים with her companions and be ready to face the consequences of her father’s vow.

My research does not allow for a definitive conclusion about the meaning of שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים, שְׁנֵי חֳדָשִׁים, and שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים in Bat-Yiphtach’s speech and its significance related to menarche and menstruation. However, the familial and cultural norms reported by transitioning children at menarche and regarding menstruation are helpful. First, they emphasize expectations of silence on the subject of menstruation. Whereas a euphemism was used in the Genesis narratives of Sarah and Rachel, moon symbolism might be used to convey menstrual elements in Bat-Yiphtach’s folktale. Second, ancient understandings of a connection between moons, menstruation, and estrus are apparent in Jer 2:23–4. Such connections might also underlie the conversation between daughter and father in Judges. Third, in Chapter 1, I noted my affirmation of Römer’s reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative: He asserts the narrative is a post-Deuteronomic, late Persian or early Hellenistic addition to the Yiphtach narrative, reflecting wisdom traditions and influences of the Greek tragedies of Iphigenia.⁶³⁸ Enforced separation of menstruating girls and women developed as a practice through the Second Temple period, according to Wasserfall, and it continues in some cultures today.⁶³⁹ The three-time repetition of שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים suggests a

⁶³⁸ Römer, “Why Would the Deuteronomist...?” 38.

⁶³⁹ Wasserfall, “Introduction,” 5.

significance in the phrase that has not been adequately explored, and having moons, menarche, and menstruation in view fills this gap. Moon language shows that menarche and menstruation have a bigger role to play in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, in determining this thing that is done to her as transitioning child. The feminine subject that was a statute, in Judges 11:39, then potentially conveys the strictly female experience of menstruation and the separation that was (and is) demanded in some cultural and religious contexts.⁶⁴⁰ In this light, two moons in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative alludes to familial and cultural expectations for post-menarcheal and menstruating girls.

“Womanhood” and Bat-Yiphtach’s Sexual Status

The transition into a menstruating identity and the sexual implications of it are tightly linked. Both as internally experienced and as constructed through cultural and familial messaging, menarche has something to do with “womanhood” and sexuality. The connections have implications for translations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative.

Interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative provide evidence of the complex relationships between “womanhood,” menarche, and sexual identity. Interpreters gloss over the diachronic process that happens on the way to womanhood: According to research with transitioning children, familial and cultural messaging is that a post-menarcheal girl instantaneously shifts to become a woman.⁶⁴¹ This culturally influenced messaging aligns “womanhood” with sexual and

⁶⁴⁰ Scholars have found no evidence of a ritual that reflects the description in Judges 11:40 by which daughters of Israel commemorate or lament Bat-Yiphtach four days in a year. However, customs and statutes of menstrual separation were and still are visible in some religious traditions, including in the Jewish Beta Israel villages in the Ethiopian highlands. See Anteby, “There’s Blood in the House,” 166–186.

⁶⁴¹ Although such messaging might influence contemporary scholars' views as well, I believe instead that characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach as woman rely on a gender binary. Menstruation and menarche are only rarely accounted for in light of a child–adult binary. Examples include Day, “From the Child,” and Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*. In both cases, the focus is on the assumed ritual in Judges 11:40.

reproductive aspects of female human development.⁶⁴² However, from a developmental perspective, Driscoll points to the fallacy of this messaging: Menarche “does not make a girl a woman.”⁶⁴³ Embodied developments potentially leading to reproductive capabilities are not the defining characteristics of “woman.” Bat-Yiphtach as representation of a transitioning child becomes a means to question the excluded middle of the (female) child–adult binary in biblical texts and their interpretation.⁶⁴⁴

More explicit awareness of menstruation and its relationship to sexuality and reproduction is appropriate in translations of Judges 11:29–40 for two reasons. First, scholars have determined that בתולה and בתולית, in their range of contexts in the Hebrew Bible, allude to a girl of marriageable age. Since the broader perspective was constructed, scholars have shifted away from a translation in which Bat-Yiphtach in Judges 11:37 weeps over “my virginity” (בתולי) and in Judges 11:38 over “her virginity” (בתוליה). Instead, she weeps “for her womanhood,” as Fox suggests,⁶⁴⁵ or she “bewails her maidenhood” (JPS). The corrective, in moving toward the broader view, also moves toward abstraction and euphemism. What exactly womanhood and maidenhood signify is left to readers’ imaginations. My survey of research with post-menarcheal girls reveals that menarche and sexuality are intertwined and appropriately

⁶⁴² In this case, womanhood is tied specifically to sexual maturity and reproductive capacity, even though, as Dorman Logan notes, fertility and pregnancy often are still at least a year away. Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 248. The relationships between menstruation, ovulation, and pregnancy were not accurately understood until the twentieth century. Ancient views of the reason for or explanation of menstruation and female bodies generally are gleaned from Hippocratic or Aristotelian medical texts. See Dammary, *First Blood*, 19–21; and Dean-Jones, “Menstrual Bleeding.”

⁶⁴³ Driscoll, *Girls*, 51.

⁶⁴⁴ Prout, “Taking a Step Away from Modernity.”

⁶⁴⁵ Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings*, The Schocken Bible, Vol. 2 (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 205.

considered in conceptualizations of “womanhood,” “maidenhood,” and girls of marriageable age. Second, Day’s focus on the supposed ritual in Judges 11:40, as cultural marker for menarche, prioritizes culturally assigned meanings and draws attention away from transitioning children’s embodied experience of menarche. Research with post-menarcheal subjects reveals that culturally influenced messaging about life stages and sexuality might be interpreted differently than the deliverers of the messages or the officiants at the rites of passage intend. Transitioning children are not granted subjectivity, and Bat-Yiphtach’s perspective generally is lacking from interpretations that prioritize the ritual. Both the translational shift and the ritual focus fail to account for the complexity of menarche for transitioning children and its relationship to sexual identity.

Post-menarcheal subjects have varied reactions to the cultural imposition of womanhood and the related messaging about virginity, sex, boys, men, and the attendant risks. As I have stated, what Bat-Yiphtach means to weep over (בתולי—my בתולים in Judges 11:37) and what the narrator reports she is weeping over (בתוליה—her בתולים in Judges 11:38) might refer to different aspects of בתולים. A broad lexical field is available for translating בתולים, and a child-oriented reading allows for a distinction between Bat-Yiphtach’s weeping over בתולי and the narrator’s report of her weeping over בתוליה.⁶⁴⁶ I translate the former in relation to Bat-Yiphtach’s experience of her bleeding body and the latter as an (etic) account of the cultic and cultural impurity of menstruation.

Despite my rejection of “virginity” as a translation for בתולים in the narrative, Bat-Yiphtach’s sexual status is relevant; however, it is more relevant to the vow than to Bat-

⁶⁴⁶ This distinction is available within the storyworld when the child’s perspective is sought. In making this distinction, I am not suggesting that it relates to authorial intent.

Yiphtach's request. The narrator provides information about her sexual status in Judges 11:39: והיא לא ידעה איש (and she—she did not know a man). The notice brings into view her sexuality and her transitioning body.⁶⁴⁷ Post-menarcheal girls report that their developing bodies attract attention from their male classmates and authority figures. Such sexualized attention can present risks, in that post-menarcheal bodies at some point (i.e., not immediately) can lead to unwanted pregnancies and the attendant cultural and familial judgment.⁶⁴⁸ Bat-Yiphtach has much to weep over as a transitioning child, including retaining her virginal status in a culture where male peers and men, including אנשים ריקים, might seek to take it. However, I see a stronger link between Bat-Yiphtach's virginal status in Judges 11:39 and Yiphtach's doing of the vow, which precedes the notice in the same verse. The notice indicates that Bat-Yiphtach and her sexual status were still connected with her father, rather than with another man; in that light, he enacted a (virginal) child sacrifice.

Taking my research on post-menarcheal, transitioning children into account, I offer the following child-oriented translation of Judges 11:29–40.

Translation

Judges 11:29 And upon Yiphtach was the death-dealing spirit of YHWH, and he traversed Gilead and Menasheh, and he passed beyond the watchtower (mitspah) of Gilead. And from the watchtower of Gilead, he advanced to the warriors of Ammon.³⁰ Here, Yiphtach vowed a vow: He promised a gift-offering to YHWH.

⁶⁴⁷ The questions raised by post-menarcheal subjects about virginity and its practicalities reveal that additional questioning of what “virginity” means in translations of this phrase in biblical scholarship might be warranted. However, a review of how “virginity” is constructed in ancient contexts and in biblical scholarship is beyond the scope of this project.

⁶⁴⁸ Reception histories of the narrative show that (male) artists have imagined a “nubile,” buxom, fully developed body for Bat-Yiphtach. See, e.g., David Gunn, *Judges*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 155–62; and David Gunn, “Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale Yee, 2nd ed. (1995; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 202–36.

And he said, “If you actually put the warriors of Ammon into my hand, ³¹then the one going out—whatever goes out—from the doors of my house to meet me when I return, safe and sound, from the warriors of Ammon, that will be the one! He will be for YHWH! And I will cause him to go up as a sacrifice, a burned offering.” ³²So Yiphtach passed over to the warriors of Ammon to do battle with them, and YHWH put them into his hand. ³³And he smote them from the junipers of Aroer to the wheatfield of Boak—20 villages altogether—and to the meadow of vineyards, Avel Keramim. It was a very great smiting! And the men, women, and children of Ammon were subdued before the warriors of Israel.

³⁴Then Yiphtach came to the watchtower at Mitspah, to his house, and look there! His daughter is going out to meet him, with drum and with whirling dances—only she alone. (There was neither a son nor a daughter for, or from, Yiphtach—except her.) ³⁵And when he saw her, he tore his clothes, and he said, “Aauugghh! My daughter! You absolutely force me to my knees! And you... *you* are among the ones greatly troubling me! I... I opened my mouth to YHWH, and I am *not* able to take it back!” ³⁶Then she said to him, “My father... You opened your mouth to YHWH. Do to me according to what went out of your mouth, after what YHWH has done for you, (granting) vengeance from your enemies, from the men, women, and children of Ammon.” ³⁷Then she said to her father, “It will be done to me, this thing: Withdraw from me (for) two new moons, and I will go. Then I will travel down upon the hills, and I will cry over my bleeding body—I and my girlfriends.” ³⁸So he said, “Go.” And he sent her (for) two of the new moons; then she went—she and her female friends—and she cried over her impure body. ³⁹And it happened, from the end of two new moons, that she returned to her father, and he did to her his vow, as he had vowed. And she did not know a man. Then she became a statute (of menstrual separation) in Israel.

⁴⁰Across the days (and even now), daughters of Israel will go to lament to Bat-Yiphtach of Gilead, four of the days of the year.

Conclusion: Child-Oriented Exegesis of Judges 11:29–40

In Judges 11:40, the narrator includes a postscript to Bat-Yiphtach’s death. Although I have included it in the translation, my interpretive preference is to ignore it as a distraction. A child-oriented reading that constructs Bat-Yiphtach as subject must recognize that she has no subjecthood following Judges 11:39. Bat-Yiphtach is dead; and her own voice has been silenced. Nevertheless, in light of my research, a menstrual tradition would seem to be imposed by cultic authorities on the community of *בנות ישראל*—a tradition that involves “going out,” separating

themselves. And the damage that such menstrual traditions can inflict on transitioning female children continues even now, across the days.⁶⁴⁹

In this chapter, I have supplemented Wenham's early work, which expanded the scholarly understandings of בתולים and בתולה. I have examined the extant biblical scholarship on menstruation, including evolutions in legal texts and their interpretations, as well as narratives that allude to menstruation. I suggested that interpretations of other narratives, in addition to Bat-Yiphtach's, might take into account the significance of menarche and menstruation as transitioning children's and women's universal experience. And I have argued and shown that the perspectives and experiences on menarche and menstruation for transitioning children are complex and often distinct from what is imposed by cultural, cultic, and familial norms. Finally, I have constructed a child-oriented reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, from her own perspective, that takes into account her embodied transitioning, her lament over her bleeding body, and the familial and cultic contexts that affect her.

Questions about agency—both of Bat-Yiphtach and her father—have emerged in the history of scholarship on Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, as I noted in Chapter 1. Answers to questions about whether she has the capacity to effect her will in the narrative have been mixed. Children's agency and questions of how it is constructed also have been crucial in the development of the childhood studies discipline. In Chapter 4, I focus on this question of Bat-Yiphtach's agency, constructing a child-oriented interpretation of the narrative using the concept of agency in childhood studies based on relational assemblages.

⁶⁴⁹ The number of days cited in Judges 11:40 is four, but the reasoning for it represents an unresolved question, and my research has not resulted in a satisfying answer. The gap leaves an opportunity for future research.

CHAPTER 4

AGENCY AND ASSEMBLAGES: BAT-YIPTACH AND HER INTERPRETERS

In Chapter 3 I argued that Bat-Yiphtach can be conceptualized as a transitioning child, and as such, menarche and menstruation provide a relevant interpretive lens for the narrative. In constructing a child-oriented reading, keeping her menstrual bleeding in view can be used to address ambiguities and fill gaps in the narrative. Research on menarche and menstruation provides a crucial lens for interpreting Bat-Yiphtach's weeping over her בתולים, her separation from her father, and the narrative's symbolic tower and moons.

In this child-oriented reading, with Bat-Yiphtach as post-menarcheal transitioning child, her capacity for exercising agency also bears additional study. Recognizing children's agency, giving voice to children, and acknowledging their capacity to influence their social contexts are founding goals and tenets in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. As a result, biblical scholars contributing to childist and child-centered studies also are interested in children's agency.⁶⁵⁰ With Bat-Yiphtach as bleeding, transitioning child, constructions of her agency need to shift away from the questions about and constructions of her agency that have occurred in previous scholarship. What agency does she have in view of her bleeding body? How does

⁶⁵⁰ See, e.g., Dong Sung Kim, "Children of Diaspora: The Cultural Politics of Identity and Diasporic Childhood in the Book of Esther," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie Faith Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 109–130. See also Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Elisha Cycle*, BJS 55 (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2013) 98–9, 196; Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 8, 26; and Sharon Betsworth, "Girls and Goddesses: The Gospel of Mark and the Eleusinian Mysteries," *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, SHANE, ed. Shawn Flynn, (London: Routledge, 2019), 84–6.

intertextuality with child–adult relationality in view affect what she says? How does menstrual bleeding affect her agency in the context of her storyworld and its interpretation?

In Chapter 4, I argue that Bat-Yiphtach’s speech in the narrative distracts from and disguises the limitations on agency available to Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child. I first provide a brief review of the focus on agency in childhood studies. Second, I explain theoretical moves made by Nick Lee, David Oswell, and Michael Gallagher, whose research in the sociology of childhood constructs agency relationally and contextually in open assemblages.⁶⁵¹ This work corrects for an adult-centric framework for assessing agency based on individualistic and autonomous self-presence. Third, I review some of the ways in which biblical scholars have constructed Bat-Yiphtach’s agency in her narrative. Fourth, I put a child-oriented understanding of agency in conversation with my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative in Chapter 3. I argue that, despite interpreters’ best efforts to see agency, Bat-Yiphtach is at the mercy of her body (she bleeds), her father (she echoes and obeys), and socio-cultural and religious traditions for menstruating girls (she goes).

Agency in Childhood Studies

Research in childhood studies identifies factors that both expand and constrain children’s agency. In asserting children’s agency, scholars focus on children’s capacities—both individually and as a social collective—for voice, action, influence, and meaning-making before they reach adulthood. Early in the discipline’s development, Allison James and Alan Prout

⁶⁵¹ Nick Lee, *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*, Issues in Society, ed. Tim May (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2001); David Oswell, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Michael Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency: Power, Assemblages, Freedom and Materiality,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 9, no. 3 (2019): 188–99.

provided a foundation for analyses of children’s agency, noting that when children no longer are seen or constructed as merely passive, dependent, and vulnerable, they can be recognized as “active in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.”⁶⁵² In some empirical observations, children’s agency has been clearly visible: Kay Tisdall and Samantha Punch note that numerous contemporary studies have provided “examples of children and young people as competent actors and emphasise[d] their agency.”⁶⁵³ Analysis of children’s agency has constructed “agency” as children’s capacities to influence their social contexts and their relationships through voice, choice, and meaning-making.

Such analysis also has led to examination of constraints on children’s capacity to influence their context and relationships. Constraints have both conceptual and structural origins. For example, Nick Lee discusses a dominant framework influencing presuppositions about and perceptions of children, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In this framework, children are “becoming”—physically, intellectually, rationally, and culturally. The incompleteness signified in “becoming” is contrasted with the completion of adult “beings,” who are held up as the standard against which children are measured.⁶⁵⁴ Lee asserts that this framework has been—and continues to be—used as a means to construct child–adult relationality and to justify both ignoring children’s voices and diminishing their capacity to influence their contexts.⁶⁵⁵ To be granted

⁶⁵² This definition of agency was provided in James and Prout’s paradigm-shifting work in 1990. See Allison James and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (London: Falmer, 1990), 8; cited in E. Kay M. Tisdall and Samantha Punch, “Not So ‘New’? Looking Critically at Childhood Studies,” *Children’s Geographies* 10, no. 3 (August 2012), 255.

⁶⁵³ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New,’” 255.

⁶⁵⁴ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 42–6.

⁶⁵⁵ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 44. Citing the framework’s usefulness, Lee states that “[the] dominant framework is persuasive in its ability to give order and meaning to relationships between adults and children; it is

agency and influence, the framework requires that children, who are merely “becoming,” must first achieve the standards of confident, self-present independence that are presumed to characterize adults and adulthood. The becoming–being dichotomy of the child–adult binary has negatively influenced conceptualizations of and the potential and actual exercise of children’s agency.

Constraints on children’s agency also have been analyzed using a structure–agency dichotomy in childhood studies. Structure is understood as comprising the institutions and practices that sustain social order and stability. The structure–agency dichotomy accounts for ways in which children’s agency arises and is exercised in a particular socio-cultural and familial context that both constrains and enables agency. Children, as disorderly, must be socialized into having a place and a role in a stable and orderly society.⁶⁵⁶ Cultural, social, and familial contexts incorporate diverse structures that influence how and when children can exercise agency.

Analysis of agency requires analysis of the structure–agency relationship in any particular context. Structure and agency are “two sides of the same coin,” says Oswell.⁶⁵⁷ Thus, both elements of the structure–agency binary and their underlying presuppositions need

useful to those who are involved in deciding what to make of children; and, as a supplement used in times of controversy, it is comforting to adults, especially when they are acting as experts. But at the same time the dominant framework turns children and adults into quite distinct types of human being; denies the possibility of any other view of child/adult relation; and makes it very hard to see children for what they are, if what they are is any different from *the* irrational, ignorant child. Above all it tends to reinforce the power and authority adults can exert over children.” *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵⁶ “Traditionally, growing up has been seen as a movement from disorder to order. [In models of both Parsons and Piaget], grown-ups are taken to be intrinsically more orderly than children.” Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 141.

⁶⁵⁷ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 35. The perspective reflects a more general stance in sociological inquiry, influenced by the work of Anthony Giddens. See, e.g., Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1979). Similarly, Ute Eichelkamp notes that “[a]gency cannot be isolated from structure.” Ute Eichelkamp, “Agency and Structure in the Life-World of Aboriginal Children in Central Australia,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 33 (2011): 502.

interrogation. Analysis must take into account the “tensions between recognising children and young people’s agency versus acknowledging their position of vulnerability in a context of extreme structural constraints.”⁶⁵⁸ Both sides of the coin must be in view to answer the question: Which structures constrain and which structures enable children’s agency in any particular context? To illustrate, Ute Eickencamp finds that in kinship societies, “where traditions and relationships define a sense of self and regulate behavior,” the relationship between people’s agency and structure—between the human practices and structures constitutive of “lifeworlds”—is especially visible.⁶⁵⁹ In her assessment of agency and structure in the lifeworlds of Aboriginal children in a settlement in northern South Australia—the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands—Eichelkamp argues that actualized children’s agency “is precisely their capacity to engage in a given situation because they understand interpersonal relations and structures of behaviour that afford agency.”⁶⁶⁰ Expectations of continuity in traditions and expectations of hierarchical relationships, upheld by adult actors and taught to and imposed on children, influence how children’s agency can be constructed.

In addition, because adaptation can figure into both sides of the structure–agency binary, capacities for change also are relevant. Can children’s agency be assumed when structures are presumed to be or actually are rigid and inflexible? When and how can structures change? “Much of the recent sociology of childhood... has sought not only to construe children (often in some indeterminate sense) as having agency (as making some impact on the world), but also to reconfigure our understanding of social structure as more open to the dynamic interactions and

⁶⁵⁸ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New’?,” 256.

⁶⁵⁹ Eichelkamp, “Agency and Structure,” 503.

⁶⁶⁰ Eichelkamp, “Agency and Structure,” 503.

influences of children as agentic beings.”⁶⁶¹ If children are presumed to have agency, such agency includes the capacity to influence how that agency is seen by adults, as well as to influence their context.⁶⁶² Analysis of agency requires a broad view, moving beyond individualistic constructions of a capacity to speak and to act and including assessment of both the rigid and fluid structures that can grant and constrain children’s agency.

Constructions of children’s agency—and for purposes of this project, a transitioning child’s agency in a biblical storyworld and text—must account for structures and relationships that both enhance and constrain agency. Young people certainly at times can exercise agency and influence their relationships and their context; they can “make a difference.”⁶⁶³ Meanwhile, among some cultural structures and relationships, young people’s agency is more constrained. In light of developments in childhood studies, I have argued that pronouncements about children’s agency can be problematic when perspectives that fail to account for structures, relationality, and capacity for change are operative. A complex conceptualization of agency is needed. This complexity can be constructed through relational assemblages, which I discuss in the next section.⁶⁶⁴

Agency as Relational: Assemblages and Extensions

Scholars in childhood studies have addressed understandings and constructions of agency in the field that have relied too heavily on individuation, autonomy, and fixed social structures

⁶⁶¹ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 37.

⁶⁶² Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 17.

⁶⁶³ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 6.

⁶⁶⁴ “Assemblage” language often appears in scholarly writing without a modifier. I choose to use the term “relational assemblage” to emphasize the relational aspect that “assemblage” implies.

and institutions to construct and assess children’s agency. Tisdall and Punch suggest the need for conceptualizations that offer the “potential to reclaim and consider ideas that incorporate change, transitions, contexts and relationships, moving beyond concepts that are unduly fixed and static, with unhelpful dichotomies and ignorant of cultural and contextual variations.”⁶⁶⁵ For my interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach’s agency in her narrative, taking into account my exegetical work on the narrative in Chapter 3, I rely on conceptualizations of relational assemblages. In light of the work of Nick Lee, David Oswell, and Michael Gallagher, relational assemblages and their extensions—including human, mechanical, and technological extensions—can be used to convey the workings of agency in contextualized human be(com)ing.⁶⁶⁶ This theoretical foundation underlies my interpretation of agency in Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative.

Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher construct poststructuralist and posthumanist theoretical groundings of agency. Such perspectives overcome the privileging of autonomous and individualistic understandings of (adult) human acting, speaking, and being. Oswell asserts that what is needed in place of such understandings is “a complex, recursive, multilayered, and topological sense of system, which may include different forms of materialities, cultural form, and social technology.”⁶⁶⁷ This view of relational systems helps to avoid presuppositions about agents, across chronological ages and lifestyles, as independent and autonomous actors.

⁶⁶⁵ Tisdall and Punch, “Not So ‘New’?,” 254.

⁶⁶⁶ With “be(com)ing,” I signify the presence of being and becoming as aspects of all humans regardless of chronological age, thus deconstructing the becoming–being binary by which children have been viewed as different from adults and through which power has been distributed. In any particular context or assemblage, tendencies toward being and becoming occur in different relational quantities, at varying speeds, and with diverse capacities for agency, action, and freedom.

⁶⁶⁷ Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 50.

The view of assemblages on which Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher rely is drawn in part from the vocabulary and work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In the original French writings, Deleuze and Guattari call these relational systems *agencement*, generally translated as “assemblages.”⁶⁶⁸ Thomas Nail troubles this translation because it can lead to potential misunderstandings of an assemblage’s coherence and stability. He states that:

[T]he English word ‘assemblage’ does not mean the same thing as the French word *agencement*; in fact, the two come from completely different etymological roots.... [T]he French word *agencement* comes from the verb *agencer*, ‘to arrange, to lay out, to piece together’... [while] the meaning of the English word ‘assemblage’ is ‘the joining or union of two things’ or ‘a bringing or coming together.’⁶⁶⁹

Although Nail might seem to be splitting hairs, the important distinction he makes is that “assemblages” are not a stable unity; instead, they are a collection of juxtaposed, heterogeneous elements or pieces that might disperse and then come together with other elements or pieces into a different assemblage. Exercise of agency might involve leaving or dispersing one assemblage and creating a different one. I find this assemblage terminology and perspective helpful, and I use it in my exegetical work in this chapter, as do scholars in childhood studies who construct systems in which *agencement* is in view.

All systemic, relational assemblages are temporary. Generally speaking, across the full range of chronologies and lifestages, humans are, involve ourselves in, and are involved in changing relational assemblages that both enable and constrain each one’s capacity to act and influence. Assemblages consist of connections between heterogeneous elements: humans,

⁶⁶⁸ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 190. See also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (1977; New York: Penguin Books, 2009); and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶⁶⁹ Thomas Nail, “What Is an Assemblage?” *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 22.

technologies, materialities. In addition, the term expresses a view in Deleuze and Guattari's writings by which "humans, regardless of age, are constitutionally unfinished. They are always indebted to someone or something else, and this indebtedness opens human life to adaptability and change."⁶⁷⁰ Power and agency shift and flow according to the assemblage at hand. "Each assemblage, each order, lasts for a while, but through further encounters and possibilities, each assemblage can change and become something rather different, changing the characteristics and powers of its elements as it goes."⁶⁷¹ Assemblages are not stable or stagnant.

Assemblages based on Deleuze and Guattari's *agencement* contribute to a more complex analysis of children's agency in childhood studies. The concepts regarding assemblages offer alternatives to generalizations about agency across the category of "children." They also avoid reliance on binaries in which agency is the presence (versus the absence) of children's (versus adults') capacities to speak and act. Gallagher spells out the implications:

[T]he question of whether children's agency is distinct from that of adults is unanswerable, because children's agency is not a property of children but an effect arising within relations between children and various other kinds of beings. Children will exercise agency in radically different ways in different assemblages. Depending on what assemblage is being analysed, agency might be observed flowing between children and adults, children and objects, children and machines, children and animals or among any combination of these and other kinds of bodies.⁶⁷²

Different assemblages result in varying degrees of agency. Agency for purposes of this chapter focuses on a transitioning child's capacity to influence her body, her relationships, and her social contexts through voice, choice, and meaning-making. However, it also must take into account her capacity to influence and shift the assemblages in which she participates. When and

⁶⁷⁰ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 114.

⁶⁷¹ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 115.

⁶⁷² Gallagher, "Rethinking Children's Agency," 190.

how can transitioning children, participating in assemblages that constrain their agency, then shift, disperse, or reorient their assemblages? The question is relevant to exegetical work in assemblages involving the biblical texts. As Kristine Henriksen Garroway notes, “[t]he Hebrew Bible has become a foundational document for our understandings of children. Sayings such as ‘spare the rod and spoil the child!’ and demands like ‘honor your father and mother!’ have shaped the way Western culture has historically thought about children.”⁶⁷³ This shaping is in view in my reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s agency in her narrative. Adult users and interpreters of the biblical texts who seek to construct child-oriented interpretive assemblages should keep in view the texts’ influence on understandings of child–adult relationality and children’s agency.

Complex analyses of agency among participants in relational assemblages that include the biblical texts can be built on reorientations of agency for which Michael Gallagher argues. Gallagher expands on previous theoretical work on children’s agency to argue for four shifts in perspective. First, “agency is ambivalent, that is, it has no intrinsic ethical value.”⁶⁷⁴ Although scholars contributing to the field of childhood studies have been vested in identifying children’s capacity to exercise agency and, in doing so, to effect change in their familial and socio-cultural contexts, identifying the presence of agency itself does not go far enough to allow celebration or affirmation. Says Gallagher, “[t]he ethics of power depend on how power is being exercised, through which bodies, through which relations, apparatuses and techniques. Power may have effects of liberation, domination, subversion, colonisation, persuasion, participation, co-operation, intensification, or attenuation of conflict, and so on.”⁶⁷⁵ Contexts in which agency

⁶⁷³ Kristine Henriksen Garroway, *Growing up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 12, n. 37.

⁶⁷⁴ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 188. Gallagher provides a review of developments in theoretical constructions of agency in childhood studies in the past decade.

⁶⁷⁵ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 191.

seems apparent require more precise analysis because agency itself is ambivalent; its exercise does not always produce ethical outcomes.

Second, “agency is not a property of individual children but happens within [heterogeneous] assemblages.”⁶⁷⁶ As already noted, the vocabulary of assemblages implicitly constructs children and their agency as relational. Conceptualizations of power in and among assemblages reflects “well-known affinities” between Michel Foucault’s theorizations of power and Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical reorientations of bodies and relationality.⁶⁷⁷ As an assemblage—as a body comprising heterogeneous parts—and in assemblages, a child both constructs her/him/them-self as subject and is constructed as object. This subjecthood and objecthood for children also are constructed in assemblages through which norms about how they are expected to behave are enforced. Thus, measures of children’s capacity for agency—understood here as influence through voice, action, and meaning-making—have to account for how closely their voice and action adhere to expected norms and conventions, and how that conformity expresses freedom and constraint.⁶⁷⁸ Gallagher notes that, even in a recognition of structural constraints, “children find ways to exercise something that looks like agency despite or against the dominant orientations of the power relations within an assemblage.”⁶⁷⁹ With intricate

⁶⁷⁶ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 188, 192.

⁶⁷⁷ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 189. Gallagher cites, for example, Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); and Michel Foucault, “Afterword: The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1983), 208–26.

⁶⁷⁸ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 191.

⁶⁷⁹ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 193.

assemblages of non-individualistic power relations in view, more complex analyses of agency become possible.

Third, greater analytical complexity is made possible by distinguishing between “more routine and more inventive tendencies of agency.”⁶⁸⁰ On the inventive side, Gallagher suggests that agency might be understood in one sense as a free act of self-transformation. Inventive agencies:

...break established patterns and habits, redirect forces and significantly reconfigure relations. They are unexpected eruptions that disturb the status quo, usually in situations where there is something at stake or an element of risk. Bodies through which this kind of inventive agency flows are transformed by it, and in turn transform the assemblages in which the body participates.⁶⁸¹

Acts that tend toward inventive agency have their counterpart in acts that tend toward routine agency, which comprises actions taken according to “norms, patterns of response, reflexes, habits, and skills.”⁶⁸² Although routine agency is not “slavishly deterministic,” acts of routine agency “never wholly contravene, overturn, or reinvent established rules.”⁶⁸³ As an example, Gallagher identifies a certain current technology, iPads, as extensions through which children might be seen as extending and shaping themselves and enhancing their capacity to act. Meanwhile, “the technology [also] is eliciting and shaping children’s action in a way that habituates them into its wider programme—for example, by producing subjects who willingly

⁶⁸⁰ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 188. In this section, Gallagher draws from Elizabeth Grosz’s account of subjectivity and freedom, based on the work of Henri Bergson. Grosz, in writing on “feminism, materiality, and freedom,” prioritizes women’s “freedom to” (act so as to transform) over “freedom from” (external forms of power, such as patriarchy). See Elizabeth Grosz, “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 139–57. In Gallagher’s account, the concepts of freedom and agency are related but not interchangeable. Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 193.

⁶⁸¹ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 195.

⁶⁸² Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 195.

⁶⁸³ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 195.

generate data that can be used for algorithmic processing, to serve the functions of what Deleuze (1992) calls societies of control.”⁶⁸⁴ The distinctions and interactions between routine and inventive agency engender more complex analyses of how transforming agency emerges and how it is understood in relationship to norms, habits, and assignment of meaning.

Fourth, as the iPad example illustrates, agency arises in the (indeterminate) relations between various forms of matter, which are both organic and inorganic. Indeterminacy is the key aspect of this relationality between “bodies, forces, and matter.”⁶⁸⁵ For Gallagher, Henri Bergson offers a helpful articulation of this relationship between organic and inorganic matter for childhood studies.⁶⁸⁶ Bergson asserts that the organic represents the tendency toward “movement, activity, change, surprise and the division of life into new forms”; and the inorganic represents the drive toward “stability and durability, providing life with enough regularity to persist, to anchor itself and ‘perform habitual actions with a measure of some guarantee of efficacy’ (Grosz, 2010: 151).”⁶⁸⁷ To illustrate, biblical texts are inorganic matter, but relational assemblages in which they are included affect the degree of interpreters’ agency and its indeterminacy. Assemblages might include scholars and interpreters who are comfortable with a higher level of indeterminacy; assemblages also can include scholars and interpreters who are comfortable with a lower level of indeterminacy. These interpreting, meaning-making relational

⁶⁸⁴ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 195.

⁶⁸⁵ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 197.

⁶⁸⁶ “Bergson’s distinction between organic and inorganic tendencies offers an orientation that neither sets humans apart from all other beings nor completely flattens out ontology.” Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 197.

⁶⁸⁷ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 196. For Grosz’s work on Henri Bergson, see Elizabeth Grosz, “Political Matters: Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 2010), 139–57.

assemblages can engender tendencies both toward movement and change and toward stability, rigidity, or stillness. Gallagher suggests that, although based on complex conceptualizations and language, the intent in the vocabulary of organic (change-making) and inorganic (stability-making) matter for childhood studies is to recognize that matter perceived as inert or inorganic also has agency in shaping the acting capabilities of children in assemblages.⁶⁸⁸ In addition, these categories of organic and inorganic are not distinct, but are “mutually constitutive.”⁶⁸⁹ Among relational assemblages, organic matter and inorganic matter shape and act on one another to influence capacities for voice, action, and meaning-making.

In addition to Gallagher’s four conceptual shifts, Lee’s language of extensions is helpful for reorienting views of human agency and the roles of variant materials and matter in it. Lee states that both children and adults “are incomplete, they are dependent on ‘extensions’ and ‘supplements’ for their powers and abilities.”⁶⁹⁰ These extensions and supplements can be both organic and inorganic matter that operates in and among relational assemblages. The necessity of extensions across child and adult categories helps to undercut conceptualizations of agency based on self-contained, individuated, bounded bodies. “Ideas of assemblage and extension allow us to think of all humans alike as becomings and to give account of their powers and characteristics in

⁶⁸⁸ Gallagher aligns organic matter and relations, as producers of change, with “difference” in Deleuze and Guattari’s vocabulary, and difference engenders a wider margin of indeterminacy. Meanwhile, he aligns inorganic matter and relations, as producers of stability, with Deleuze’s “repetition.” Repetition engenders a narrower margin of indeterminacy.

⁶⁸⁹ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 197. To clarify, Gallagher states that “[i]f we want to rework childhood studies’ analyses to argue that, for example, children’s eating is shaped by the agencies of food (Eber, 2017), or that groundwater is an agent that affects children’s relations with place (Horton and Kraftl, 2018), then starting with a Bergsonian distinction between the inorganic and the organic—understood as tendencies in productive tension with each other, rather than mutually exclusive categories—might help to make sense of the fact that there are clearly different kinds of agency involved in these situations, and that these agencies may not be straightforwardly comparable.” Ibid, 196–7.

⁶⁹⁰ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 106.

terms of their dependencies.”⁶⁹¹ Analysis of agency might begin with a presupposition of human dependence.

In this section, I have examined shifts in and reorientations of how agency is being conceptualized in childhood studies. Scholars working in the sociology of childhood have called for more complex analyses of agency. Oswell describes the necessary shift: “Agency is not... performed in the manner of He-Man the Master of the Universe, ‘I have the power’. If anything, it is ‘We have the power’, but both the ‘power’ and the ‘we’ are supported through human and non-human arrangements and infrastructures.”⁶⁹² Gallagher constructs four ways in which reorientations of agency can shape its analysis in childhood studies. Complexity is necessary to articulate both the intransigence of and the transformative potential in assemblages in which children participate. Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher allow for a conceptualization of relational assemblages as comprising both human (organic) and non-human (organic and inorganic) agents and leading to varying degrees of inventive and routine agency. These elements allow for a fresh analysis of previous interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach’s agency in her storyworld.

Previous Assessments of Bat-Yiphtach’s Agency

Interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative show that a substantial degree of indeterminacy exists in how Bat-Yiphtach’s agency is constructed. Her agency is seen as ranging from almost none to fully choosing her own sacrifice. This level of indeterminacy is made possible in part by the ambiguities and gaps in the narrative. Further contributions come from the methodologies, lenses, and intent of the interpreters. Interpreters themselves are participants in

⁶⁹¹ Lee, *Childhood and Society*, 117.

⁶⁹² Oswell, *The Agency of Children*, 7.

the assemblages by which Bat-Yiphtach's agency is analyzed. As a result, constructions of and questions about her agency are variously answered. These various constructions reflect the fruitfulness of conceptualizing and constructing interpretations of agency, and Bat-Yiphtach's agency in particular, according to the theorizations of Lee, Oswell, and Gallager.

Questions of whether Bat-Yiphtach exercises agency in her storyworld would seem to have a straightforward answer. In Judges 11:39, Bat-Yiphtach dies as a burnt offering at the hands of her father. The outcome might allow for quickly drawn conclusions about her capacity to exercise her voice and to make choices for herself. However, as I noted in Chapter 1, medieval Jewish scholar Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra first proposed a translation by which Bat-Yiphtach was consecrated to YHWH, rather than sacrificed. Ibn Ezra's reading is based on seeing a disjunctive Hebrew connective (vav as "or") in Judges 11:31, rather than a conjunctive reading (vav as "and").⁶⁹³ Opting for this translation results in a different construction and analysis of Bat-Yiphtach's agency. The possibility that consecration was her fate shows that her agency cannot be framed simply as present or absent because the ambiguities and gaps in the narrative invite a deeper engagement with the question. Biblical interpreters have constructed more complex and granular interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's agency and her capacity to speak, to effect her will, and to make meaning. Interpreters point to multiple elements and extensions that influence both her agency and its limits, including narrative, familial, and social structures.

Feminist scholars and interpreters have examined Bat-Yiphtach's agency and come to varying conclusions about it. For example, Bat-Yiphtach in some interpretations is able to choose her own fate. Danna Nolan Fewell, David Gunn, and Pamela Tamarkin Reis grant her

⁶⁹³ "...the one going out—whatever goes out—from the doors of my house to meet me when I return, safe and sound, from the warriors of Ammon, that will be the one! He will be for YHWH! *Or* [rather than "And"] I will cause him to go up as a sacrifice, a burned offering." My project relies on a conjunctive reading.

significant agency, constructing a reading in which she is fully aware of the content of her father's vow and goes out from the doors of his house in full knowledge of the consequences.⁶⁹⁴ This vow brings death according to Nolan Fewell and Gunn and consecration according to Tamarkin Reis. In both cases, Bat-Yiphtach acts by choosing to emerge first through the doors of her father's house. Bat-Yiphtach "chooses to take upon herself her father's vow..." according to Nolan Fewell and Gunn.⁶⁹⁵ In addition, when she speaks in her response to his blaming, "she does not choose his company. She spends her remaining days with other young women who know her, who know what it is like to be a young woman in the midst of a violent society, and who, in the end, will not forget what she has done and what has been done to her."⁶⁹⁶ Bat-Yiphtach's agency in this case is constrained by a violent social context, but it extends to forming relationships that ensure her post-death legacy.

In Tamarkin Reis's interpretation, Bat-Yiphtach is condemned as spoiled teenager, choosing for herself her dedication to YHWH and thus avoiding work.⁶⁹⁷ Tamarkin Reis grants her this agency to contrast with interpretations of her as passive; she states that "via a feminist interpretation that frees her from passivity's bonds, I show that, far from powerless, she manipulates her father, gets him to permit her even what is most offensive, and ultimately

⁶⁹⁴ In my reading of the narrative, I see no indication that she has this knowledge, as I stated in Chapter 3.

⁶⁹⁵ Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 128.

⁶⁹⁶ Nolan Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, & Promise*, 128.

⁶⁹⁷ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," *Prooftexts* 17, no. 3 (1997): 279–98.

ruinous, to him, and secures for herself a life of comfortable independence.”⁶⁹⁸ Here, Bat-Yiphtach’s agency is self-serving.

The agencies that Nolan Fewell and Gunn, on the one hand, and Tamarkin Reis, on the other hand, construct for Bat-Yiphtach look very different. The juxtaposition of these two views of her agency supports Gallagher’s first assertion: that “agency is ambivalent, that is, it has no intrinsic ethical value.”⁶⁹⁹ In both cases, the interpreters use the gaps and ambiguities in the narrative to ascribe ethical value to Bat-Yiphtach’s agency—as ethically positive in Nolan Fewell and Gunn’s case and as ethically negative in Tamarkin Reis’s case. Although the interpretations are constructed with her characteristics of youthfulness or adolescence in view, in neither case is Bat-Yiphtach’s agency constructed in light of her status as a bleeding, transitioning child. The consequence is that neither reading recognizes the limits on her agency imposed by considering the relevant intertextual connections in the biblical texts.

In contrast to Bat-Yiphtach’s significant agency in these two readings, Mikael Sjöberg points to the complexity of the narrative’s construction of actors, agents, and agency, and he sees minimal agency for Bat-Yiphtach. In the course of his detailed and “eclectic” narratological analysis, Sjöberg examines characterizations of Bat-Yiphtach and her father using a model provided by Algirdas Julien Greimas.⁷⁰⁰ In doing so, he looks closely at how agency is and is not

⁶⁹⁸ Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 298. In Tamarkin Reis’s interpretation, what is offensive to the pious Yiphtach is going down upon the mountains to consult other gods, and what is ruinous to him is her failure to produce children.

⁶⁹⁹ Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 188.

⁷⁰⁰ Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence: The Jephthah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 30. Sjöberg identifies his narratological analysis as “eclectic” and draws from a range of scholars who offer varying perspectives on the elements of narratological analysis. In Greimas’s framework, “agents that perform actions” are called actants. “According to Greimas’s model, the individual actors can be fitted into one of six classes of actors (actants), with different relationships to the goal of the story: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper and opponent.” Ibid. Any character might be put into the position of subject, and according to Sjöberg, with Bat-Yiphtach as such, the object of the narrative is the ritual in Judges 11:40. Ibid., 31. I would suggest a few additional objects or goals are possible with Bat-Yiphtach as subject, including the questioning

exercised in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative. Sjöberg concludes that Yiphtach's lament in Judges 11:35 is "a contradictory meditation about agency, whose main effect is to cloud the issue of agency."⁷⁰¹ Through Yiphtach's words, the daughter is "transformed from Jephthah's sacrificial victim to the vilified agent of his physical and symbolic descent."⁷⁰² In light of Sjöberg's analysis, Yiphtach assigns his daughter agency, interprets her actions as agential and, in doing so, casts blame for what had been his own action and agency upon her. His words "cloud the issue" of whose agency actually leads to Bat-Yiphtach's sacrifice. Sjöberg's analysis of Yiphtach's words allow for recognition that meaning making and interpretation are aspects of agency even within the storyworld. Bat-Yiphtach acts, and her father assigns meaning to her actions. Thus, the imbalance between father and daughter in their capacity to assert agency by assigning meaning becomes visible.

Sjöberg also addresses Bat-Yiphtach's response to her father's blaming. Her words further contribute to the narrative's ambiguous construction of agency: "The verbal agency of the daughter is ambiguous in that she, on the one hand, explicitly supports her father in the decision to carry out the sacrifice, while, on the other hand, implicitly guarding herself against his accusation."⁷⁰³ Nevertheless, this "implicit guarding" has no effect, thus resolving the ambiguity

of vows, as Thomas Römer has noted, or of child sacrifice, as Tikva Frymer-Kensky has suggested. (See Thomas Römer "Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter?" *JSOT* 77, no. 1 (1998), 27–38; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories*, unabridged (New York: Schocken, 2013), 115. In light of additional intertextual connections, other objects (e.g., menstrual separation or rigidity in biblical interpretive traditions) might arise as objects as well.

⁷⁰¹ Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61.

⁷⁰² Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61.

⁷⁰³ Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61. Tamarkin Reis notes similarly, but in a starkly contrasting interpretation, how Bat-Yiphtach takes over as agent in her response to Yiphtach: "...her response is fresh. The six repetitions on the 'you' theme seem an attempt to cast the onus for her fate onto him; that is, 'You did it. It was your vow, your mouth, your revenge, your enemies.'" Tamarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child," 285. Note that my interpretation of the narrative in Chapter 3 does not construct her response as guarding against the accusations or "casting the onus."

of agency; in Sjöberg's analysis, "Jephthah determines every one of his daughter's acts. Her freedom lies solely in the attitude with which she carries out what her father allows her."⁷⁰⁴

Sjöberg's focus on narrative elements and structure identifies how ambiguity is created and where it is absent. He draws a connection between agency and freedom to act, constructing a reading in which Bat-Yiphtach's agency is almost completely absent. In this chapter, I agree with this ultimate assessment, but I argue that seeing a bleeding, transitioning child results in an alternative assemblage, incorporating elements to consider that Sjöberg's feminist narratological analysis has ignored.⁷⁰⁵

Bat-Yiphtach's agency and capacity to act are significantly heightened in some rabbinic and midrashic interpretations and interpretive assemblages. In early and medieval rabbinic readings, the daughter is portrayed as "a Torah scholar, a wise woman, an active seeker of justice, a friend to other women, a woman who seeks to fulfill her expected role as a wife, and a woman who mourns," says Barbara Miller.⁷⁰⁶ Gallagher's reorientation of agency as assemblage is helpful in articulating how Bat-Yiphtach gains such agency. Rabbinic interpreters' assemblages involve a relationality with the biblical texts characterized more by inventive

Instead, Bat-Yiphtach accepts his assignment of meaning and conveys through the repetition of "you" that his actions and words rightly dominate.

⁷⁰⁴ Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 68.

⁷⁰⁵ Sjöberg includes in his work an analysis of interpreters' agential choices for dealing with the (discomfort of) the narrative. These choices include: 1) condemnation (pronouncing judgment on certain elements); 2) identification (recognize elements and try to understand them "from inside the diegetical world"); 3) glorification (make a positive value judgment of certain elements); 4) alienation (implicitly distance self from certain elements); and 5) censure (deny or eliminate certain elements—linked to coherence). Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 209. His goal in doing so was "to discuss tentatively how we may, at present, act as ethically accountable interpreters.... To use feminism as a standard for this evaluation means to take the issue of power seriously and to side with the oppressed party." Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 210.

⁷⁰⁶ Barbara Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain: The Daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11*, Interfaces, ed. Barbara Green (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 75.

agency than by routine agency. Certainly, both inventive agency and routine agency for interpreters rely on the rules and norms pertinent to each. However, inventive agency and the weight attributed to organic matter in midrashic interpretation (e.g., authoritative rabbis) results in a greater range of indeterminacy.⁷⁰⁷ In rabbinic assemblages, Bat-Yiphtach can remain alive, become a Torah scholar, and, with knowledge of the law, can advocate for herself. Through their own more inventive agency, rabbinic interpreters grant Bat-Yiphtach greater agency. In these interpretive assemblages, Yiphtach's request and the related vow generally take priority.⁷⁰⁸ Thus, rabbinic interpretations have not constructed Bat-Yiphtach as a transitioning, bleeding child; neither have they constructed intertextual relations between Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and the menstruation regulations of Leviticus 15.⁷⁰⁹ My reading of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative results in an assemblage in which these elements, based on my review of comparative ethnographic resources, shape the construction of her agency.

Feminist scholars also have warned against interpretations that assign Bat-Yiphtach agency, given the narrative's context in patriarchal biblical texts. In this case, feminist users and interpreters of the biblical texts have in view the texts' influence on understandings of gender-based relationality and women's agency. Because biblical characters exist in narratives

⁷⁰⁷ Meanwhile, routine agency and the weight attributed to inorganic matter in, for example, text critical or source criticism (e.g., rules of engagement with the text) can result in narrower margins of indeterminacy because of the assemblage within which interpreters with different goals and methods participate.

⁷⁰⁸ See, e.g., *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis II* (60.3), trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 527; and *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus* (37:4), trans. Judah J. Slotki (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 470–1. See also Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. William Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 109.

⁷⁰⁹ In her review of feminist interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach, Miller specifically connects Lev 15:19–33 to the narrative, although the separation of menstruants she envisions is related only to a rite of passage at first menstruation. Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 86–7. Miller seems not to account for the likelihood of separation at each menstrual cycle—an oversight that my review of comparative ethnographic research with menarcheal girls reveals.

constructed by male elites for a male audience, these scholars recognize the limits of agency for female characters, including Bat-Yiphtach. Thus, Cheryl Exum and Esther Fuchs, for example, critique interpretations that allot too much agency to Bat-Yiphtach or that construct her as a hero.⁷¹⁰ As an obedient daughter, she serves patriarchal purposes. Equally problematic are interpretations that valorize her victimhood. As Exum states, praising a victim can be as dangerous as blaming a victim.⁷¹¹ Sjöberg asks: “If the only agency allowed for a *woman* in this system is to submit to patriarchal authority, even when it means submitting to her own death, should such an absolute self-effacement be praised as a model?”⁷¹² In each of these interpretations, Bat-Yiphtach has been constructed on the basis of a gender binary, as a woman; she is not viewed as a transitioning child. In my reading of Bat-Yiphtach as bleeding,

⁷¹⁰ Cheryl Exum, “On Judges 11,” *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 140; and Esther Fuchs, “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 116–130. Some retellings and rewritings—for example, in both *LAB 40*, and Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews* (5.7.10)—make Bat-Yiphtach heroic. (See *LAB 40.1*, in D.J. Harrington, “Pseudo-Philo (First Century A.D.): A New Translation and Introduction,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 297–377; and Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 144, cited in Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 122–23.) Also for valorizing of Bat-Yiphtach, see Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 114. Mary Ann Beavis identifies ancient cultural practices that valorize sacrificial children, as well as contemporary resistance to her reading of Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative. Mary Ann Beavis, “A Daughter in Israel: Celebrating Bat Jephthah (Judg. 11:39d–40),” *Feminist Theology* 13, no. 1 (2004): 11–25.

⁷¹¹ Exum, “On Judges 11,” 140. Peggy Day’s reading, in which Bat-Yiphtach is read as morally immature, crosses over into victim blaming. Day suggests that as archetypal adolescent, Bat-Yiphtach “resolved a moral dilemma by completely ignoring her own well-being.... Adolescent morality [total self-sacrifice] must be abandoned along the road to full maturity.” Peggy Day, “From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in *Gender and Difference*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 66–7. Day’s analysis suggests that if Bat-Yiphtach had been morally mature, she wouldn’t have died at her father’s hands. Although I find the hypothetical suggestion problematic, Day creates the opportunity for further exploration of when, where, and how inventive agency, allowing for free acts of self-transformation, overtakes or outweighs routine agency, or free acts of rule-following, in child–adult relationality.

⁷¹² Emphasis added. Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 213. Here, the gender binary provokes Sjöberg’s question. To my ear, the same question posed in relation to children leads to different visions of the potential for agency, even if the answer is the same: “If the only agency allowed for a *child* in this system is to submit to patriarchal authority, even when it means submitting to her own death, should such an absolute self-effacement be praised as a model?”

transitioning child, views of the texts' effects on child–adult relationality and on menstruating, transitioning children influence the interpretive assemblage, as I discuss in the next section.

Bat-Yiphtach's narrative has been masterfully constructed as a timeless story that invites and engenders troubling (and troubled) questions and abundant interpretations. The narrative, its ambiguities, and its gaps provoke questions regarding agency and responsibility, as well as questions about the conservation of and alterations in traditions. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann observes that, "[a]lthough there is much about Jephthah, his unnamed daughter, his wife, and the society he is said to have been part of that we do not understand or do not know, it is clear that almost anything can be taken in one sense or another, as restrictive or as liberating."⁷¹³

Assessment of how agency is enacted in interpretations of the narrative depends on how interpreters account for "the system's restrictions" and the "degree of freedom within those boundaries."⁷¹⁴ Thus, the narrative is timeless as interpretations of it change according to the assemblages and contexts in which the interpretations happen. "Again and again, her story is invoked to suit the ideologies of the time," asserts Valerie Cooper. "She is one age's martyr, another's tragic heroine, today's battered woman."⁷¹⁵ The changing contexts within which interpreters engage the story and the gaps and ambiguities in the narrative give rise to the range of views about Bat-Yiphtach's agency that I have examined in this section.

⁷¹³ Mercedes L. Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, Wisdom Commentary, ed. Barbara E. Reid, OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 148–9.

⁷¹⁴ Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, 148–9.

⁷¹⁵ Valerie Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, ed. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, SemeiaSt 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 190–1.

What Agency? Bat-Yiphtach's Bleeding Body Assemblage

Children's agency is not measurable as a zero-sum equation. Greater complexity is needed to avoid an either/or, yes/no view of agency for interpretations of children in biblical narratives. The various constructions of Bat-Yiphtach and her agency that I have reviewed illustrate the fruitfulness of conceptualizing and constructing interpretations of agency using Gallagher's framework. Gallagher reorients views of agency to emphasize its ambivalence; and he underscores how the exercise and analysis of agency occurs in a mutable, relational assemblage that comprises organic and inorganic elements and along a continuum ranging from inventive to routine. The relational assemblages in which assessments of Bat-Yiphtach's agency happen vary based on interpreters' own inventive and routine agency, influenced by their chosen methodology, the interpretive genre, and the interpreters' context. The analysis of her agency shifts as the assemblage shifts.

To construct a child-oriented understanding of Bat-Yiphtach's agency in this section, I synthesize my review of research with post-menarcheal subjects, my exegetical work on the narrative in Chapter 3, and my construction of Bat-Yiphtach as bleeding, transitioning child. I argue that Bat-Yiphtach is at the mercy of her body (she bleeds) and exercises only routine agency related both to her father (she echoes and obeys) and to imposed socio-cultural and religious traditions for menstruating girls (she goes). Her weeping and my two different translations for בתולי (my bleeding body) and בתוליה (her impure body) support these analyses of agency. Bat-Yiphtach, seen as a bleeding child in transition, has only a very narrow routine agency. This restricted, routine agency contributes to the narrative's ability to engage and trouble readers and interpreters.

Bat-Yiphtach's Bleeding: Agency and a Menstruating Body

As a girl of marriageable age, Bat-Yiphtach in my reading has a bleeding (menstruating) body. Some scholars have constructed interpretive assemblages in which Bat-Yiphtach's body has begun to bleed. However, this bleeding body as an element of *agency* has not been in view in previous interpretations. In my reading, menarche and menstruation are relevant to Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition. A bleeding body is both surprising and distressing. "For the female adolescent, [menarche] is a sharply defined, sudden, and distinct biological event," says Ayse Uskul.⁷¹⁶ Research subjects report the potentially traumatic effect of discovering their first flow of blood. Fear and worry, reflecting an inability to control the blood flow and its arrival, are primary reactions.⁷¹⁷ Like these subjects, Bat-Yiphtach has no agency to control her own bleeding body. Her response is to weep upon בתולי (my bleeding body).

Using Gallagher's framework for analyzing agency, I see Bat-Yiphtach's bleeding body assemblage as having both organic and inorganic elements that influence her agency. Organic participants in a relational assemblage might include family members who heighten a transitioning child's preparedness and thus her sense of agency. For Bat-Yiphtach, a degree of routine agency might have come from knowing about and preparing for her bleeding and understanding what to expect from her bodily changes through time. Research has shown that preparation for the onset of blood flow is critical in diminishing the trauma of menarche for transitioning girls, as I discussed in Chapter 3. However, in Judges 11:29–40, Bat-Yiphtach's

⁷¹⁶ Ayse K. Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories from a Multicultural Sample," *Social Science & Medicine* 59 (2004): 667.

⁷¹⁷ John McMaster and Kenna Cormie, "Menstrual and Premenstrual Experiences of Women in a Developing Country," *Health Care for Women International* 18, no. 6 (November 1997): 533. doi:10.1080/07399339709516309; and Laura Fingerson, "'Only 4-Minute Passing Periods!' Private and Public Menstrual Identities in School," in *Geographies of Girlhood: Identities in Between*, ed. Pamela J. Bettis and Natalie G. Adams, Inquiry and Pedagogy Across Diverse Contexts (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 121.

absent and inattentive father and her (narratively) absent mother fail to prepare her for the trauma of blood flow. She bursts through the doors of her father's house without readers having received any previous clues to her existence. She is out of sight and out of mind for Yiphtach, as the narrative focuses on his perspective alone. As a result, this interpretive assemblage comprising daughter/father/mother constrains her agency in relation to her blood flow. Agency heightened by knowledge of and being prepared for menarche and menstruation is lacking for Bat-Yiphtach. She responds by weeping upon בתולי (my bleeding body).

Assemblages that include the inorganic tools and implements for managing blood flow (i.e., “extensions” in Lee’s articulation of agency) can contribute to a bleeding, transitioning child’s sense of routine agency. The narrative is silent on this issue, but I recognize in this project that Bat-Yiphtach would need access to the necessary cloths and rags to successfully manage the hygienic aspects of her bleeding body. Access to such implements might be taken for granted by economically secure scholars in Minority World countries.⁷¹⁸ However, in more traditional cultures in Majority World countries, research shows that such tools or tokens of menstruation are not always easily accessible.⁷¹⁹ Expanding the assemblage, Bat-Yiphtach might have gained access to menstrual cloths through רעיתי (my girlfriends). The proposal would require that the friends themselves have rags available and enough to share. The routine agency

⁷¹⁸ Menstrual implements are taxed as luxury items in some minority world countries. However, lobbying efforts have intensified to reduce the tax rate on these implements: “Campaigners say women have no choice whether to get their period or not and therefore shouldn’t have to pay a high tax on menstrual items. Activists say this particularly burdens poor women, creating a phenomenon known as ‘period poverty,’ in which women can’t afford sanitary items.” Miriam Berger, “Germany has slashed its tax on tampons. Many other countries still tax them as ‘luxury’ items,” *Washington Post*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/11/09/germany-has-slashed-its-tax-tampons-many-other-countries-still-tax-them-luxury-items/> (accessed January 2, 2020). Tampons and pads are provided free of charge in some public places in the United States. In December 2019, I found them in the restroom at a movie theater, Alamo Drafthouse, in Austin, TX.

⁷¹⁹ See, e.g., Sally Dammary, *First Blood: A Cultural Study of Menarche* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2016), 117.

that Bat-Yiphtach can exercise when the interpretive assemblage expands to include the extensions of both (inorganic) rags and (organic) friends can be calculated as limited.

A sense of routine agency for menarcheal, transitioning children also occurs as time passes and they know what to do and what is expected of them when their menstrual flow begins. One subject described knowing what was expected of her: “Immediately after I get my period, I leave the house for the shed, quietly without touching anything or anyone.”⁷²⁰ Another subject also reported hearing from others that “[i]t’s not much fun, but you get used to it.”⁷²¹ In Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, time is not on her side, and there is no “getting used to it.” Before her father does to her his vow, she seems to have only שנים חדשים (two cycles, or two new moons). In addition, recall that in the set-up and translation I offered in Chapter 3, Bat-Yiphtach has only recently experienced menarche: Her body began bleeding as her father was out smiting the Ammonites, and she perhaps conveys this new information to him euphemistically upon his return. Thus, time to accumulate knowledge about how to manage menstruation is inadequate, and any hope of accumulated knowledge is destroyed by her father’s vow. The passage of time before her sacrificial death—as שנים חדשים—suggests that here, too, Bat-Yiphtach’s capacity for routine agency is limited.

Yiphtach’s Echo: Routine Agency, Obedience, and Silence

When Bat-Yiphtach is recognized as transitioning child, the dialogue between Bat-Yiphtach and her father illustrates that her voice functions to allow only routine agency in the

⁷²⁰ Prabisha Amatya et al., “Practice and Lived Experience of Menstrual Exiles (*Chhaupadi*) Among Adolescent Girls in Far-Western Nepal,” PLoS ONE 13, no. 12 (2018), e0208260, 8/17. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208260

⁷²¹ Deanna Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience in Twenty-Three Foreign Countries,” *Adolescence* 15, no. 58 (1980): 252.

narrative. Childhood studies research has documented that discourses of agency and voice, ostensibly designed to facilitate inclusion and empowerment, often function in a regulatory way, enforcing norms about how children should behave.⁷²² If “voice” alone is considered an adequate indicator of undifferentiated agency, then focusing on Bat-Yiphtach’s speaking overestimates her capacity for inventive agency.

Bat-Yiphtach’s initial response to her father simply echoes his words to her, making her voice a vehicle of routine agency. My translation of Judges 11:35–36 conveys the first part of the exchange:

³⁵And when he saw her, he tore his clothes, and he said, “Aauugghh! My daughter! You absolutely force me to my knees! And you... *you* are among the ones greatly troubling me! I... I opened my mouth to YHWH, and I am *not* able to take it back!” ³⁶Then she said to him, “My father... You opened your mouth to YHWH. Do to me according to what went out of your mouth, after what YHWH has done for you, (granting) vengeance from your enemies, from the men, women, and children of Ammon.”

He says, “I opened my mouth to YHWH”; she says, “You opened your mouth to YHWH.” He made a vow, and she repeated and echoed the priority and force of the vow. “I am not able to take it back,” he says. Her response merely accepts his pronouncement. “Do to me according to your vow.” As I noted previously, some interpreters see in Bat-Yiphtach’s words an agency of resistance. With this potentially inventive agency, she undertakes a free act of self-transformation, with which she refuses the blame that has been cast on her by her father.⁷²³ I suggest instead that, in echoing her father and prioritizing his concerns, including the vow to the deity, the transitioning child’s words convey a routine, regulated agency. The agency in her voice is extremely circumscribed.

⁷²² Gallagher, “Rethinking Children’s Agency,” 191.

⁷²³ See, e.g., Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 61; and Tamarkin Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 285.

As Bat-Yiphtach continues to speak to her father, her deferential, obedient tone in Judges 11:36 continues in Judges 11:37. Her request adheres to expected norms for bleeding, transitioning children, and her bleeding body excludes a capacity for communicative and inventive agency:

³⁷Then she said to her father, “It will be done to me, this thing: Withdraw from me (for) two new moons, and I will go. Then I will travel down upon the hills, and I will cry over my בתולים [my bleeding body]—I and my girlfriends.” ³⁸So he said, “Go!”

Research with transitioning children about their menarcheal experiences provides a helpful lens for reading Judges 11:37: Silence, secrecy, and self-censorship limit post-menarcheal girls’ speaking about their bleeding body. In some familial spaces, transitioning children are prohibited from speaking to their father about their bleeding experiences. “In response to questions about their early experiences, a theme of secrecy seemed to run through the responses...: ‘She/they told me it was my secret,’ and ‘[n]o one must see the blood, especially boys and men.’”⁷²⁴ Subjects from Asian contexts noted that “little talk of menstruation occurs. Discussions with men are taboo.”⁷²⁵ In addition, customs in some cultural contexts also constrain menarcheal girls’ ability to speak to their mother.⁷²⁶ In these contexts, the necessity of extensions for transitioning children to achieve even routine agency (e.g., in terms of self-presentation to family members) becomes apparent. When the transitioning child’s agency to communicate about her blood flow with a parent is prohibited, a grandmother steps in to lend her a voice.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ McMaster and Cormie, “Menstrual and Premenstrual Experiences,” n/p.

⁷²⁵ Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 248.

⁷²⁶ McMaster and Cormie, “Menstrual and Premenstrual Experiences,” n/p. In Dorman Logan’s study, her interviewees from Zambia spoke with neither their mother nor their father. Dorman Logan, “The Menarche Experience,” 253.

⁷²⁷ McMaster and Cormie, “Menstrual and Premenstrual Experiences,” n/p.

Bat-Yiphtach has no mother or grandmother in the narrative—no extended family at all—to speak of her bleeding body or to convey her concern with it.⁷²⁸ In obedience to cultural expectations, Bat-Yiphtach’s concern with her bleeding body is expressed to her father only in coded, figurative language: בתולי acts as synecdoche, the whole that represents the (bleeding) part. Through my translation of בתולי (my bleeding body) in Judges 11:37, I translate and interpret the figurative language in her speech to reveal Bat-Yiphtach’s concern for her bleeding body.

In addition to seeing the coded language, I read Bat-Yiphtach’s words in Judges 11:36–37 as having a tone of subservience. This subservience is evident in three ways. First, Bat-Yiphtach diminishes herself and subtracts from her self-presence, in that no first-person “I” is present or expressed in her response to her father in Judges 11:36. Instead, her repetition of the second person—you, your, your, you, your—points to the one whose viewpoint matters. She simply echoes the self-aggrandizing and self-interested perspective of Yiphtach, as I have interpreted him. Second, as I noted in Chapter 3, Bat-Yiphtach calls the Ammonite men, women, and children “your enemies” when speaking to her father. She diminishes her belonging among the Israelite people by referring to the Ammonites as “your enemies” rather than “our enemies.” Third, her subservience is apparent in the prepositional phrase, לי, which occurs in both verses. In both cases, I translate the phrase “to me.” She states that Yiphtach must do *to her* his vow, and the separation from Yiphtach, as customarily demanded of bleeding bodies, also is done *to her*. The custom must be upheld. Thus, what is done in both cases is done *to her*, rather than *for her*. In this dialogue between Bat-Yiphtach and her father, Yiphtach’s mouth and voice dominate.

⁷²⁸ Before Bat-Yiphtach arrives in her narrative, readers are introduced to her absent (or possibly unidentified) grandfather, Gilead (who begat Yiphtach in Judges 11:1); her זונה (sex worker or follower of a foreign god, rejected) grandmother, who is “another women” not mentioned again after Judges 11:3; and her step-uncles on her father’s side, the sons of Gilead who drive her father out in Judges 11:2.

Bat-Yiphtach simply echoes his words, mirrors his dominance back to him, and abides by social customs. Her agency is fully regulated.

Bat-Yiphtach's voice and routine agency reinforce expected norms of children's obedience. In some interpretive assemblages, the assemblage that includes daughter, father, and deity incorporates extensions of intertextual refrains that establish child–parent power differentials ostensibly demanded by the deity.⁷²⁹ As my literature review in Chapter 1 showed, Bat-Yiphtach's character and words have been interpreted as communicating societal and cultural norms expected of children. She is painted as a model obedient daughter and citizen for child audiences of children's Bibles.⁷³⁰ Because of the filial obedience that characterizes her “voice,” she serves as a daughter worthy of emulation for children whose own agency to construct meaning from the narrative has been circumscribed. Bat-Yiphtach's routine agency is representative of the agency that some readers and interpreters of the biblical texts comfortably allow children in their midst.

I have argued that in the dialogue with her father, Bat-Yiphtach's words express a routine agency, with which she simply adheres to established norms, customs, and expectations. The words the narrative assigns to Bat-Yiphtach in Judges 11:36–7 are not expressing the views, effecting the will, or assigning the meaning of this transitioning child. Her words in Judges 11:36 represent an echo of her father, and the request she makes in Judges 11:37 reflects normative expectations for an obedient, bleeding, transitioning child. Although Bat-Yiphtach's voice is present in her narrative, it conveys a response and a notification that accord with familial and

⁷²⁹ For example, “honor your father and mother,” and “spare the rod and spoil the child.” Henriksen Garroway, *Growing up in Ancient Israel*, 12, n. 37.

⁷³⁰ “[C]hildren's Bible stories teach far more than Bible content... [they are] an important part of the transmission of cultural norms and values from one generation to the next.” Ruth Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), xi–xii.

cultural expectations of obedience and of menstrual silence. Her bleeding body is that which must not be named, until she participates in assemblages involving interpreters who play with the figurative language to transgress customs regarding menstrual silence.

“Go!”: Bat-Yiphtach’s Agency and Menstrual Separation

Bat-Yiphtach’s request to her father in Judges 11:37 has complicated the analyses that interpreters have constructed of her agency. Interpretations presume that this request for separation from her father reflects Bat-Yiphtach’s own preferences and desires: She is presumed to request it from her father “לִי” (for me). However, my translation of the verse and the research I reviewed in Chapter 3 with menarcheal subjects offer another option, as I noted above: The requested separation, like the vow, is done *to* and imposed on her. From this perspective, Bat-Yiphtach’s words in Judges 11:37 present an example of routine agency, by which the bleeding, transitioning child adheres to cultural customs and traditions. As a result, her father emphatically says, “Go!”

I hear in this dismissal a harsh, disgusted tone from Yiphtach. His “Go!” reflects a long history of repugnance that discussions of menstruation have inspired. In her review of menstruation and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, Tarja Philip describes a more contemporary example: She cites Assyriologist Karel van der Toorn, who translates Akkadian *ulapu lupputu* as “a filthy rag” and observes that “[p]eople do not like such dirty underclothing: gods and demons do not want to have any part of it, either.... In general, a menstruating woman filled the gods with repugnance.”⁷³¹ Rahel Wasserfall and Barbara Miller state that menstrual separation became

⁷³¹ Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Women*, trans. Sara Denning-Bolle (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 54, cited in Tarja Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 6.

a custom during the second temple period in contexts influenced by the biblical regulations for menstruation.⁷³² Jonah Steinberg reviews rabbinic repugnance for menstruation from the early rabbinic period to the medieval period:

The rabbis of late antiquity and of the Middle Ages called upon notions of physical danger and disgust to vindicate the laws of menstruation and to exhort their followers to compliance. The menstruating woman was cast as a physical and spiritual hazard all in one, a pernicious threat to the wellbeing of her mate and other men. Fear and revulsion were the responses these early rabbis sought in the defense of meticulous observance.⁷³³

With Lev 15:19–24 in view, I suggest that Bat-Yiphtach’s words and request for separation signals her participation in cultic expectations regarding transitioning children’s bleeding bodies. In some contexts, cultural norms and cultic regulations demand that transitioning, bleeding children be separated to avoid contamination of their everyday contexts. They follow the normative behavior established by adult menstruating women who adhere to cultural norms and expectations of separation. In the relational assemblage I construct, the inorganic element of biblical texts regulating menstrual practices and perspectives and the organic elements of familial and cultic authorities influence the bleeding Bat-Yiphtach’s capacity to exercise agency along the routine–inventive continuum.

Shaping my interpretation of Bat-Yiphtach’s voice and her acting are the familial and cultural practices that constrain the voice, choice, and meaning-making of menstruating, transitioning children. Although biblical menstrual regulations and their interpretation have evolved, as I explained in Chapter 3, menstrual separation continues as a ritual in some

⁷³² Rahel Wasserfall, “Introduction: Menstrual Blood into Jewish Blood,” *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, Brandeis Series on Jewish Women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 5; and Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*, 86–7.

⁷³³ Jonah Steinberg, “From ‘Pot of Filth’ to a ‘Hedge of Roses’ (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism,” *JFSR* 13, no. 2 (1997): 7.

contemporary traditional and religious communities. The separation experiences reported by menarcheal and menstruating subjects reveal their ability to exercise only routine agency by adhering to familial and religious expectations. For example, Lisa Anteby studied contemporary practices of ritual menstrual separation among Ethiopian Jewish girls and women as they navigated changing contexts.⁷³⁴ Ethiopian families were relocated to Israel during a mass airlift, called “Operation Solomon,” in 1991. In three different locations—a large hotel, a caravan site (mobile homes), and permanent housing (apartments)—the Ethiopian immigrants were “confronted time and again by the difficulties in continuing the practice of isolating women during menstruation and after childbirth, which is not practiced as such among most Israelis.”⁷³⁵ In each of the three settings, the Ethiopian girls and women had to find ways to continue the ritual practice of separation, which they had practiced in *hä-däm gojjo* (huts of blood) in Ethiopia.⁷³⁶ The elder generation of Ethiopian Jews sought to continue the separation practices because of purity ideologies by which they established and understood their identity. Meanwhile, the “ideological and symbolic compromises [did] not arise as major issues among the younger generation.”⁷³⁷ In Ethiopia, the menarcheal and menstruating transitioning children would have simply continued the practice of menstrual separation. But their arrival in Israel resulted in a wider range of indeterminacy and a greater possibility for inventive agency in light of the norms in a different cultural context.

⁷³⁴ Lisa Anteby, “‘There’s Blood in the House’: Negotiating Female Rituals of Purity Among Ethiopian Jews in Israel,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, Brandeis Series on Jewish Women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 166–86.

⁷³⁵ Anteby, “‘There’s Blood in the House,’” 167.

⁷³⁶ Anteby, “‘There’s Blood in the House,’” 169.

⁷³⁷ Anteby, “‘There’s Blood in the House,’” 184.

Transitioning children have noted a desire for change, as I reported in Chapter 3. In the study of adolescents in Nepal, six of the seven adolescents who spoke of their separation experiences of *Chhaupadi* would end the practice, given the chance.⁷³⁸ In addition, a South Asian subject eventually was able to convert her routine agency to inventive agency; exercising a free act of self-transformation, she rejected her religious tradition and its theology because of her experience of menstruation-related restrictions as a transitioning child.⁷³⁹ Her religious tradition's role in her relational assemblage necessarily meant abiding by menstruation customs. Because changing these customs did not appear to her to be possible, she constructed a different relational assemblage. For some menstruating young women, eventual abilities to practice inventive agency allow for self-transformation and opportunities to construct new meanings of their menstruating body.

In Judges 11:37–38, Bat-Yiphtach constructs a different relational assemblage involving her companions, but the new assemblage offers only the same routine agency. Her companions, when their bodies bleed, must adhere to the same customs and norms of המצפה (the watchtower⁷⁴⁰ or Mitspah). Readers know almost nothing about these female friends. They might be friends who comforted Bat-Yiphtach during the time of the battle. They might be younger friends, who have yet to experience menarche, or they might be older friends, who know the discomfort of a bleeding body. Bat-Yiphtach's words, ואבכה על־בתולי אנכי ורעיתי (and I will cry

⁷³⁸ Amatya et al., "Practice and Lived Experience," 11/17.

⁷³⁹ Uskul, "Women's Menarche Stories," 675–6.

⁷⁴⁰ In Chapter 3, I noted the common symbolic meaning of towers and their connection to menarche and menstruation in folktales and fairy tales. In their review of Grimm fairy tales, Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth point to "[t]he unseemly haste with which nubile maidens were locked away in towers in the land of Grimm," which "seems to be a direct narrative analogue to the custom of seclusion at menarche in most early societies." Janice Delaney et al., *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 161.

over my bleeding body—I and my girlfriends), primarily indicate to me that she wants not to weep alone in her menstrual experience. She wants her companions with her as she laments over her bleeding body. I see these empathetic female companions—who are with her in her weeping—as transitioning children and adolescents like her; their bodies might currently be bleeding⁷⁴¹ or they might simply be post-menarcheal.⁷⁴² Their primary characteristic is their empathy. What is telling is that, in contrast to Bat-Yiphtach's words, the narrator's words, תלך ותרעו עליה (and she went—she and her female friends—and she cried over her impure body), serve to emphasize (etic) expectations of separation. These words shift the focus of the friends' participation from Bat-Yiphtach's weeping to their going. Whenever female companions have impure bodies, they also must go.

⁷⁴¹ Consensus on menstrual synchrony (i.e., a situation in which transitioning girls and women in the same living quarters eventually bleed in synchrony) is lacking. Some scientists suggested in the late twentieth century that biological factors (i.e., pheromones) provide scientific explanation for the phenomenon. However, other studies complexify and question these findings. For a review of the literature, see Jon Abbink, "Menstrual Synchrony Claims Among Suri Girls (Southwest Ethiopia): Between Culture and Biology," *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 55, no. 218 (2015): 279–302. www.jstor.org/stable/24476707. Abbink argues that "while menstrual synchrony—in terms of a full overlap of periods, progressively over time—is unlikely, a tendency to synchronize periods, is in some conditions highly likely to occur and can be demonstrated. Ultimately, the interactional perspective is needed on how biological and socio-cultural phenomena combine to establish a possible synchronization pattern." *Ibid.*, 282. Abbink's study of unmarried Suri girls suggests that cultural scripts and sexual norms influence experiences, perceptions, and claims of menstrual synchronization. The Suri girls' claims of menstrual synchrony, which they explain by pointing to the moon (as a timing indicator), have been a form of routine agency for them, although for observers from different cultural perspectives, their control over their sexuality and reproductive capacities would seem to represent a measure of inventive agency. The Suri context and Suri girls' sexual culture and agency seem to differ considerably from the ancient Israelite context: "Suri women, while in many respects dependent on males—husbands, brothers, or fathers—are well-versed in sexual matters, and independent in their control of fertility and sex." *Ibid.*, 280. The question of period synchrony is interesting to consider in relation to Bat-Yiphtach's narrative and the role of the companions; however, I do not assume that Bat-Yiphtach has lived in close enough quarters with her companions for menstrual synchrony to be present in this relationship. I emphasize their empathy. Note also that when the time of separation arrives, no words appear to be necessary among companions who bleed simultaneously to indicate their status. Recall from Chapter 3 the Nepalese girl heading to the *Chhaupadi* shed: "Immediately after I get my period, I leave the house for the shed, quietly without touching anything or anyone." Amatya et al., "Practice and Lived Experience," 8/17. Those who bleed learn simply to leave.

⁷⁴² From Bat-Yiphtach's perspective, the primary characteristic of these female companions seems to be empathy. For purposes of my reading, these female friends would likely be most empathetic if they already are post-menarcheal and thus know the experience of a bleeding body and menstrual separation. Her companions are with her as she cries; only if their menstrual cycles are perfectly aligned does their separation occur simultaneously.

Whether they are seen as simply accompanying Bat-Yiphtach as she weeps or as also bleeding themselves, the companions in this new assemblage do not offer sufficient inventive agency to Bat-Yiphtach to revise regulations demanding her menstrual separation. Bat-Yiphtach and her companions have routine agency to abide by cultural rules and regulations regarding the menstrual impurity taboos. They do not have inventive agency to transform these requirements or to assign revised meaning to their lived, bleeding experiences. In this case, my translation takes advantage of the third-person suffix of בתוליה (her impure body) to take the etic perspective into account. Custom says, and she is told, that menstruation means impurity. The meaning-makers who would only look from a distance and not ask the reason for her tears see this impurity as the motivation for her grieving. When she returns to her father, he then does to her his vow:

^{38b} And he sent her (for) two of the moons; then she went—she and her female friends—and she cried over her impure body. ³⁹And it happened, from the end of two new moons, that she returned to her father, and he did to her his vow, as he had vowed. And she did not know a man. Then she became a statute (of menstrual separation) in Israel.

In this interpretive assemblage, the combination of organic and inorganic elements results in a narrow range of agential indeterminacy. In other words, the possibilities for inventive and transformative agency for Bat-Yiphtach are predictably limited. The texts justifying the customs of separation are inflexible. In Judges 11:38, her father says “לך!” (go). Only familial or religious authority figures whose inventive agency enables them to reinterpret or do away with cultic and customary menstrual restrictions of separation can say to Bat-Yiphtach, “Don’t go.” Yiphtach is not constructed as such a character. Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, in this reading, conveys cultural and religious customs demanding that transitioning bleeding children be separated from their home and social context. She has routine agency only to abide by the norms and customs that an intertextual assemblage involving menstrual regulations imposes on her.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how analyses of children's agency arose in childhood studies and how the discourse has shifted in the past decade. I considered how scholars Nick Lee, David Oswell, and Michael Gallagher have contributed to the discourse, resulting in more relational and nuanced analyses of children's agency. After reviewing how some biblical scholars have interpreted Bat-Yiphtach's agency in her narrative, I applied aspects of Lee, Oswell, and Gallagher's work to my reading of a bleeding, transitioning child in Judges 11:29–40. I conclude that bleeding, transitioning children have no agency to stem the flow of blood.⁷⁴³ In addition, Bat-Yiphtach's speech reflects only her capacity for routine agency. Her primary capacity for acting is to abide by and obey the norms and customs established by her self-serving father, to echo his voice, and to follow the cultic and cultural regulations for menstruating transitioning children, as interpreted by priestly authorities.

⁷⁴³ In contemporary, modern contexts, medication does allow for this level of inventive agency. See, e.g., Paula Adams Hillard, "Menstrual Suppression: Current Perspectives," *International Journal of Women's Health* 6 (2014): 631–7. doi:10.2147/IJWH.S46680; and Anna Altshuler and Paula Adams Hillard, "Menstrual Suppression for Adolescents," *Current Opinion in Obstetrics & Gynecology* 26, no. 5 (2014): 323–31. For an analysis of how such agency is marketed to contemporary girls and women, see Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, "Pills, Periods, and Postfeminism: The New Politics of Marketing Birth Control," *Feminist Media Studies* 13, no. 3 (2013): 490–504; and Laura Jones, "Anthropological Fantasies in the Debate over Cycle-Stopping Contraception," *Women's Studies* 40 (2011): 127–48.

CONCLUSION

In this project, I have constructed a child-oriented interpretation of Judges 11:29–40. Using an interdisciplinary lens from the field of childhood studies, I argued that relevant aspects of the narrative have been overlooked because Bat-Yiphtach has not yet been read as a child in transition—as a character who is neither (girl) child nor (adult) woman based on a child–adult binary. My interest and questions focused on aspects of this transitioning female child that have received less attention—in particular, the experiences of menarche and menstruation. I argued that menarche and menstruation have a larger role to play in interpretations of the narrative than has been assigned in previous work. Turning to ethnographic and qualitative research with post-menarcheal subjects about their bleeding experiences, I constructed a framework for analyzing relevant aspects of the narrative, thus seeking to account for the perspective of the transitioning child. In contributing a child-oriented reading, I also argued that her capacity for agency in a relational assemblage is limited to routine agency. In this conclusion, I retrace the trajectory of my arguments, identify the limitations of my project, and point to opportunities for future research.

The Trajectory of My Research, Exegetical Observations, and Arguments

In Chapter 1, I located my questions and argument in the history of the discourse on Judges 11:29–40. Variations in scholars' interests regarding the narrative clearly influence their readings. As my review of the literature showed, concern with Yiphtach's vow dominated some readers' views. Early and medieval rabbinic scholars were particularly interested in critiquing Yiphtach's vow and his ignorance of religious tradition, while valorizing Bat-Yiphtach. Among

historians, reconstructing Israelite history during the presumed period of the judges dominated concern with the narrative. Among readers focused on children's moral development, interpretations encouraged emulation of Bat-Yiphtach's filial obedience. In addition, following the rise of feminist and literary methods for studying the narrative and its context, scholars interpreted Bat-Yiphtach as woman or young woman and constructed her according to a gender binary as (adult) woman.

The ambiguity and gaps in the narrative are widely recognized and also have contributed to the range of possibilities in Bat-Yiphtach's characterization. When readers' interest is in feminist discourse and in deconstructing the gender binary, scholars call Bat-Yiphtach a woman, filling in gaps in her characterization with adult imagery. When readers' interest is in children and in promoting moral behavior, Bat-Yiphtach is an obedient child/offspring. In my review of this scholarship, it became clear that the child–adult binary subliminally influences interpretations of the narrative. In reading Bat-Yiphtach's status as transitioning child, I engaged with the excluded middle of the child–adult binary. Thus, I have argued that constructing Bat-Yiphtach as a child in transition allows previously unrecognized aspects of the narrative to emerge, producing a more fruitful interpretation of her narrative. My child-oriented reading of Bat-Yiphtach adds to the extant interpretive possibilities for the narrative and to the expanding field of childist and child-oriented biblical scholarship.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the heuristics and theoretical perspectives in childhood studies that shape my project. In the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies, scholars have brought the natural sciences and humanities together in the study of childhood and children. I reviewed the driving tenets for scholars contributing to the field—tenets that have revealed the following perspectives: (1) changes across time and geographies in constructions and realities of childhood;

(2) problems with dominant developmental frameworks; (3) complexity in children's agency; and (4) the absence of children's voices in knowledge production. This work also has revealed underlying presuppositions in adult-centric perceptions of children and child–adult relationality. As a result, scholars in the field of childhood studies acknowledge that both childhood and adulthood are socially constructed and that, as with the gender binary, deconstructing the child–adult binary means querying both elements of it. Scholars have examined and problematized presuppositions by which “adult” implies rationality, stability, and independent autonomy, and “child” implies their absence. Such presuppositions underlying the child–adult binary are then used to justify oppressive forms of child–adult relationality. As the field has matured, scholars have called for shifts in theoretical underpinnings so that subjectivity and the subjecthood of children are constructed relationally and conceptual dichotomies are deconstructed.

Biblical scholars attentive to children and contributing to childhood studies have recognized a previous neglect of both historical and literary children in the biblical studies discipline. The field of child-oriented biblical scholarship is developing and growing, and participants have posed questions related to the structure and terminology for the field. What are the major trajectories of the extant scholarship? Broadly speaking, can categories of historical research and literary scholarship provide helpful classifications? Does “childist” terminology suffice? I explored the development and current status of these discussions and examined the priorities for those engaging in this work. Three priorities drive the field: interdisciplinarity, ethical advocacy, and seeing what scholars previously overlooked. My project has been influenced by each of these priorities, as well as by previous works by childist and child-oriented biblical scholars who attend to Bat-Yiphtach's narrative. In biblical scholars' research, questions have focused on the constructedness of childhoods, on children's value in ancient society—

considering both emotional and economic value—and on children’s agency, among other subjects. Regarding Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, Heath Dewrell contributes to the discourse on ancient practices of child sacrifice and says of the Bat-Yiphtach narrative that as folktale, its genre cannot bear the weight of historical reconstructions of practices of child sacrifice. Kristine Henricksen Garroway points to Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative as one example of authors’ patriarchal judgment over the failed management of girls of marriageable age. Danna Nolan Fewell’s Levinasian reading grants Bat-Yiphtach agency so as to save the entire community. I have expanded on child-oriented interpretations of Judges 11:29–40 by picking up the threads of literary, transitional, and agential concerns in these works and constructing a fresh reading fully influenced by the voices of transitioning children and the perspectives they offer on their bleeding bodies in traditional and religiously influenced contexts.

Chapter 3 offered a more detailed look at lexical issues in biblical Hebrew related to transitioning children and menstruation. Current understandings of בתולה and בתולים have shifted in the past several decades. As a result, restricting all occurrences to a translation of virgin, virginity, and tokens of virginity is no longer appropriate. Instead, as synecdoche for a stage of life, בתולה and בתולים now are seen as referring to girls of marriageable age and aspects of this stage. I explored through my exegetical work and research how menarche and menstruation relate to this stage of life. Similar to these contemporary shifts in meanings of בתולה and בתולים, the meanings of נדה as menstrual flow and menstrual impurity shifted in ways that are visible in the biblical texts and their interpretation. Although much of the biblical scholarship on menstruation focuses on Levitical texts and regulations on impurity, scholars also have noted that euphemisms for menstruation (e.g., דרך נשים) appear in narratives. Following the example of Wilma Ann Bailey, I argued that menarche and menstruation should be in view in other

narratives as well. Conceptual shifts in the meaning of בתולים/בתולה potentially offer a wider array of narratives in which menstruating is relevant, including in Judges 11:29–40.

Seeking to offer child-oriented perspectives on Bat-Yiphtach’s narrative, I then reviewed the childhood studies research on menarche and menstruation to access the voices of post-menarcheal girls. The research revealed four elements of transitioning children’s experience of menarche and menstruation that I deemed relevant to the narrative: (1) emotions inspired by the experience of a bleeding body (Bat-Yiphtach says “אבכה”); (2) familial roles in preparing for the experience of and knowledge about how to manage a bleeding body (Bat-Yiphtach’s nontraditional family and the absence of a mother in the narrative, as well as of a בית עב and משפחה); (3) familial and cultural expectations of secrecy about a bleeding body and of separation (exploring whether שנים חדשים, repeated three times in Judges 11:37–38, serves as euphemistic reference to Bat-Yiphtach’s bleeding body, calling for a necessary separation from her father); and (4) cultural impositions on transitioning children of “womanhood” and a heteronormative sexual identity (in light of interpretations focused on and explicit reference in the narrative to Bat-Yiphtach’s sexuality). The research conducted with post-menarcheal subjects allowed me to construct Bat-Yiphtach as embodied, bleeding transitioning child—one whose transitioning is apparent in bodily effects. In addition, I examined these bodily effects as experienced in socio-cultural contexts that influence both the effects and their meanings. Using ethnographic and qualitative research with post-menarcheal girls has forced attentiveness to menstruation and blood flow and to the voices and perspectives of girls who can directly report on how menstruation, blood flow, and cultural norms influence their lives and opportunities. I argued that these voices give new depth and meaning to Bat-Yiphtach’s words, “ואבכה על־בתולי.” They also reveal the inadequacy of interpreters’ assumptions that the transitioning child’s perspective

simply mirrors the cultural and adult-centric perspectives and assigned meanings. While menstruation for priestly purposes came to signify (and in some contexts still signifies) impurity, I argued that Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning child weeps for a different reason. The revelations made possible through research with post-menarcheal subjects are reflected in the translation of Judges 11:29–40 that I offered at the end of Chapter 3.

A child-oriented reading of this biblical narrative required a final chapter on agency. In Chapter 4, I reviewed how concerns with agency have influenced the work of scholars contributing to childhood studies; defined agency using assemblage language and conceptualizations; examined biblical scholars' previous interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's agency; and analyzed agency in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative using a framework constructed by sociology of childhood scholar Michael Gallagher. My use of assemblage terminology allowed for a relational orientation, correcting for adult-centric presuppositions behind the child–adult binary that assess agency based on individualistic and autonomous self-presence. Gallagher's framework for agency further explicates the assemblage perspective; he states that agency is not a property of individual children (or adults) and provides three additional observations that influence my reading of Bat-Yiphtach as bleeding, transitioning child: (1) agency, *per se*, is ambivalent, so that simply noting the presence of agency is not adequate analysis; (2) agency can be exercised to achieve both routine and inventive ends, and the distinction offers analytical nuance; and (3) agency arises in the (indeterminate) relations between various forms of matter—both organic and inorganic. My assessment of agency in Bat-Yiphtach's narrative drew into the analytical assemblage the perspectives from post-menarcheal subjects reviewed in Chapter 3, as well as biblical texts and their interpreters. I argued that Bat-Yiphtach's speech in the narrative distracts from and disguises the limitations on agency available to Bat-Yiphtach as transitioning

child. Thus, Bat-Yiphtach has no agency to control her bleeding body and temporally limited (שנים חדשים), routine agency to adjust her reactions to and management of it. Her words to her father reflect routine, intertextually influenced agency to obey and echo his priorities and perspectives, and routine agency to abide by intertextually influenced and socio-cultural expectations of separation for menstruating bodies.

In light of my work, biblical scholars assessing children's agency for child-oriented interpretations might consider children's ability to engage in transforming relationships with their bodies, their parents, and religious traditions, especially when scholars' concern is with biblical texts that are used to justify and sustain practices that limit children's capacity for voice, choice, and meaning-making. In addition, my analysis of agency in Chapter 4 showed that translators and interpreters who analyze Judges 11:29–40—a masterfully crafted narrative that includes copious gaps and ambiguities—might envision a complex assemblage in which they participate and exercise agency. In our work, biblical scholars participate in an assemblage in which our interests and research influence the ways that textual gaps are filled and ambiguities are resolved. Interpretations of Bat-Yiphtach's narrative thus should take into account interpreters' awareness of our own inventive and routine acts of agency and the organic and inorganic materials that influence the assemblage's findings and capacity for ethical outcomes.

Limitations of My Research and Future Research Opportunities

I offer this analysis, interpretation, and translation of Judges 11:29–40 acknowledging that my interest in child-oriented biblical interpretation constrains and limits my view. As with any other child, attending to Bat-Yiphtach has required tenacity and a willingness to resist distractions and other interests that have surfaced as I engaged with the research and the texts. As

I have noted, adult-centric contexts present challenges to adults' abilities to stay focused on children. I note three limitations in my work that might create opportunities for future research.

First, my exploration of potential inferences in the phrase, שְׁנַיִם הַדְּשִׁים, does not lead to a conclusive argument about its meaning. My review of research with post-menarcheal subjects and some of my research into historical views on menstruation certainly indicate the ancient mythologies that connect menstrual and lunar cycles. However, additional research into ancient views in the Afro-Asiatic context is needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn about the three-time repetition of the phrase in Judges 11:29–40. This future research might look more specifically at ancient understandings of the relationship between menstruation, ovulation, and conception. Bat-Yiphtach's sacrifice in Judges 11:39 precluded my interest in looking further into these historical perspectives.

Second, in my research and analysis of Bat-Yiphtach and her narrative, I focus with intention on one transitioning child, and I do not delve into other narratives in Judges. Therefore, I do not explore whether my methodological lens and my research accessing the views of post-menarcheal subjects might provide relevant material for interpreting other transitioning children in Judges, or whether a broader view of transitioning children in Judges might then contribute to what I have proposed about Bat-Yiphtach's narrative. A focus on menarche and menstruation among transitioning children might reveal aspects in texts of Judges that have been overlooked in previous scholarship and that tie together the stories in Judges related to בתולות, בתולים, and transitioning children.

Third, a child-oriented interpretation of Judges might consider the text's productivity for further deconstructing the child–adult binary and the presuppositions that sustain the binary. Based on still-operative understandings influenced by Piaget and Parsons (see Chapter 2),

children are presumed to need education and enculturation so as to become rational and to become aligned with adult expectations and interpretations of their context. However, Judges poses another question: What happens when unstable worlds and contexts already problematize reproduction of adults' "rational" social, cultural, relational, or religious expectations? What happens to younger generations? Deuteronomic perspectives would have the adults and leaders in Judges realign with doing the right in the deity's eyes. However, Bat-Yiphtach's narrative can be seen as posing questions about the degree to which cultic norms and interpretations of previous (priestly) generations regarding the "right" in the deity's eyes are indeed still right—whether these norms and interpretations are related to vows, child sacrifice, obedience, or menstrual impurity.

In the course of this project, the societal instability that escalates in the narratives of Judges—conveying a spiraling down into social chaos as all humans do the good in their own eyes—initially seemed to present fruitful ways to address these generational questions. As menarche and menstruation took on more relevance and dominated my research in relation to Bat-Yiphtach's narrative, I focused in on only one aspect: transitioning children's experience of menarche and menstruation and the social, religious, and cultic norms that can influence it. Additional questions remain for future research related to Judges and the biblical texts more broadly. Questions that might influence future scholarship include the following: How does dramatic social (and technological) change, both in Judges and in our contemporary context, influence valuations of stability and conservatism vs. adaptability and progression? How do these valuations shape the presuppositions that underlie the child–adult binary and child–adult relationality? How does presumed social stability affect adult-centric views on social conservatism and on the biblical texts' Deuteronomic demands to "teach your children"? How

does a perspective on a transitioning child's or transitioning children's agency need to shift when interpreters can assume neither stability—whether in the textual world of Judges or our contemporary social world—nor a desire simply to reproduce a social world? How does cavalier acceptance of the texts' demands to indoctrinate children into religious traditions constrain questions about who gets to proclaim the “right” in the deity's eyes, and why? What can biblical scholars learn by incorporating more of children's and transitioning children's meaning-making into their research? And how does meaning-making by already-indoctrinated children differ from that of less “informed” children? Judges offers a particularly interesting literary context for wrestling with questions related to the child–adult binary and to children's roles in reproducing social worlds—or to their role in recovering a previous version of deity-desired social worlds that perhaps never really was.

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