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"The constant illusion of Revolution consists in believing that the victims of force, being innocent of the outrages that are committed, will use force justly if it is put into their hands. But except for souls which are fairly near to saintliness, the victims are defiled by force just as their tormentors are. The evil which is in the handle of the sword is transmitted to its point. So the victims thus put in power and intoxicated by the change do as much harm or more, and soon sink back again to where they were before."
-Simone Weil, from *Gravity and Grace*

Cloaked Kings, Revealed Brothers: Reading the biblical Joseph alongside Oedipus and Judah

In large part in order to establish the anti-mythological character of the Hebrew Bible, Rene Girard reads the *Genesis* Joseph chronicles (chapters 37-50) within what I will call the frame of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The closing, climactic chapter of his book-length study *Oedipus Unbound*, entitled "The Myth of Oedipus, the Truth of Joseph," is, as the title indicates, devoted to establishing the biblical chronicles of Joseph as an inversion of *Oedipus*.

Inevitably, a comparative analysis will isolate certain textual data that reveal parallels of optimal similarity and difference. Girard sees his structuralist theory of the scapegoat mechanism as incarnate in the biblical account, concealed in *Oedipus Rex*. Both the myth and biblical account begin with childhood narratives. In Sophocles' play, an oracle announcing that Oedipus will one day commit incest and parricide provokes his parents to oust him. In Joseph's case, his brothers' jealousy arouses the hero's exile. Both narrowly escape death. "In the parallel beginnings we recognize what we expected to find, a mimetic crisis and a single victim mechanism. In both instances a community gathers unanimously against one of its members and violently expels him" (Girard 106).

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Both stories follow with second crises. Oedipus escapes the Sphinx's claws by rightly reading a riddle, and in so doing saves the entire city of Thebes, whose people make the riddle-solver king. The resolution is, of course, temporary. Apollo levels a plague upon Thebes, intent on Oedipus' exile: for the latter's incest and parricide, both committed in ignorance, have brought about that same plague. Joseph uses a talent common to Oedipus when he deciphers the Pharaoh's dreams. His hermeneutic clairvoyance both saves him and protects Egypt against the famine. For this foresight Joseph is appointed prime minister, a position that is, in praxis, far more powerful than king, as the victim turned ruler indicates when he later says to his brothers, "God...has made of me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household and ruler over the whole land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:8).

Girard notes that, "because of the initial expulsions, Oedipus and Joseph both have to become foreigners and are thus always a little suspect in the principal place where they perform their exploits" (Girard 107). They are also suspects in their families of origins. And yet, as Girard illuminates, Oedipus' parents Laius and Jocasta have every reason to expel a son who will commit crimes that are both of the highest taboo and personally dangerous. The city of Thebes is right to spit him out: he is the real source of their strife. Joseph, on the other hand, is innocent again and again. He is a victim of his brothers' rivalry and jealousy. Later, when he is in Egypt, the wife of his owner Potiphar tries to force him into sexual relations with her and when he refuses she projects her desires onto him and publicly accuses him of trying to seduce her: he is jailed. While the famine is revealed to him through a divine lens of dream-reading¹, Joseph is not responsible for the drought.

Again: the hero in *Oedipus* deserves to be expelled. The hero of *Genesis* does not, and the

¹ Joseph admits to Pharaoh that, "It is not I but God who will give Pharaoh the right answer" (Genesis 41:16).

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text identifies with Joseph *as victim*. Girard continues: “The fundamental nature of the contrast between the myth and the biblical account suggests that the latter is the expression of an anti-mythological inspiration. And this inspiration discloses something essential in the myths that would remain invisible outside of the perspective the biblical narrative represents” (Girard 110).

While Girard’s analysis is acute and revelatory, his fixity on the specific *characters* of Oedipus and Joseph prevents sensitivity to a remarkable episode easily alleged as “out of place,” as the incongruous fruits of a redactor. For Girard never mentions the episode of Judah and Tamar, even as it occupies an entire biblical chapter (some thirty verses which might be mistakenly read as tangential)².

And yet the chapter’s contents, beginning with Judah's self-exile, beg important questions. Firstly, is Judah’s self-exile an inverted mimesis of Joseph’s forced exile? Before the brothers murder Joseph outright, Reuben negotiates, pleading, “‘We must not take his life. Instead of shedding blood...just throw him into the cistern there in the desert; but don't kill him outright.’ His purpose was to rescue him from their hands and restore him to their father” (37:21-22). The brothers strip Joseph of his long tunic, toss him into the dry, emptied cistern, and, sitting down to eat, see an Ishmaelite caravan headed toward Egypt³. Judah initiates the idea of selling Joseph into slavery when he asks, “What is to be gained by killing our brother and concealing his blood? Rather, let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, instead of doing away with him ourselves.” (His question conceals the incongruence of his feigned concern for Joseph’s life. Already, prompted by Reuben, the brothers had decided not to kill him and therefore had no need to conceal his blood: Judah’s rhetoric

2 In “Genesis 37–50: Joseph Story or Israel-Joseph Story?” Friedmann W. Golka proposes that for too long Genesis Chapters 37-50 have been interpreted as the “Joseph” stories instead of the “Israel-Joseph” stories. Importantly, Golka uses the presence of chapter 38 as evidence against the narrative's exclusive concern with Joseph.

3 Inevitably, we are reminded of Ishmael's exiled fate, brought about also through jealousy and rivalry.

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suggests his underlying knowledge that his ends are not innocent. Again: is his self-exile self-punishment?))))

At this point in the Bible we are faced with two converged, variant accounts. In the second (verses 28-36), Elohist story, Joseph is pulled from the cistern by Midianite traders and taken (not sold) into Egypt. The Elohist account does omit Judah's involvement in the crime, and, as it is distinct from the Yahwist account that both indicts Judah and follows him in Chapter 38 as he parts from his brothers, we should hold to its separateness, even as one strikingly symbolic detail—the slaughtered goat and the blood-blotched coat—may enforce Girard's reading. We will return to the Elohist insertion later.

In the first account, from the Yahwist source, “They [the brothers] sold Joseph into Egypt for twenty pieces of silver” (Bible 38). If we read directly through the Yahwist source (omitting momentarily the Elohist) we find a linked line from, “They sold Joseph...for twenty pieces of silver” to, “About that time Judah parted from his brothers...” (Genesis 38:1). The causal correlation becomes even clearer without the redaction, without the Elohist events. The text, then, does seem to partially obscure the events of this meaningful moment. Even if our interpretation includes the Elohist events, Judah's departure is linked with Joseph being sold into slavery. In the latter case, Judah (most likely, although the text doesn't explicitly admit this) witnesses his father's mourning words: “No, I will go down mourning to my son in the nether world” (37:35). Is he worried that his brothers will betray him to their father—that he himself will become the group's scapegoat at a future time, serving the cult just as Joseph has?

Chapter 38 requires a brief summary: Judah settles near and marries the Canaanite Shua. She births three sons—Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah gets a wife for Er, but Er offends God and dies,

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leaving his wife Tamar to his brother Onan, who also offends the lord by spilling his seed on the ground instead of inside Tamar. Judah tells Tamar to return to her father's house and await Shelah's age; we are told that Judah fears his last son will die if he marries Tamar. Judah's wife Shua dies, and, while he is still in mourning, he passes Tamar who has dressed herself as a temple prostitute. He begs her for sex, and she asks what he will pay. He promises a kid from the flock, but she demands he leave his seal and cord as a pledge. Judah later sends the kid through his friend but cannot locate Tamar ("the prostitute"), and soon he learns that his daughter-in-law played the harlot. Judah threatens to burn her until she sends him his pledge and a message indicating that she is pregnant by the man to whom it belongs. Judah confesses that she is in the right, he is not. She gives birth to twins.

The Jerome Biblical commentary suggests that, "there is no easy answer to why the story [of Judah and Tamar], characteristic of J [the Yahwist source], is inserted here, interrupting the Joseph narrative" (38). And yet the text, even if it is not explicit, intimates strong answers. Chapter 38 begins when Judah parts from his brothers, "about that time." (((M. Perry argues that, "it is erroneous to consider that only the 'distortion' of a 'natural' order can have rhetorical effects" (Perry 42).)))) The chronicle of Judah and Tamar, which interrupts the sharp focus of the Joseph chronicles, does not, at least in its beginning, diverge from fidelity to a "natural" or chronological order. On the contrary, it is faithful to a relatively linear sense of timing; indeed, the timing of the Judah and Tamar episode is essential to our understanding of what comes before and after it.

Secondly, if Girard is right and the Joseph story is a remythologization, we see a clear inversion of the Oedipus myth. Unknowingly, Oedipus, the son, has sexual intercourse (and bears children by) his biological mother, who is equally ignorant. Knowingly, Tamar has sexual

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intercourse with her father-in-law, even as the father in law is ignorant. The “incest” is only so by legal standards in the latter, while in the former it is quite direct.

Richard J. Clifford argues that chapter thirty eight rightfully belongs where it is, noting that, “there are impressive thematic and linguistic connections to the main narrative, many long noted in traditional Jewish exegesis and increasingly taken seriously by modern scholars” (Clifford 521). As we might expect, Clifford makes his argument by drawing parallels between Joseph and Judah, who “went down’ from their brothers (38:1; 39:1), were involved in deceptions involving a kid from the flock and an article of clothing (37:31-33; 38:15), [and] married foreign women and fathered two sons who became rivals for firstborn status” (Clifford 521). These similarities make objections to chapter thirty eight’s proper placement difficult to defend, and demand that an analysis of the Joseph chronicles consider its contextual meaning. (((((Further, Clifford calls attention to the import of *chronology*, arguing that, “The opening phrase, ‘*About that time* [that Joseph is sold]’ (Gen 38:1), correlates Judah and Joseph and implies that the chronology of their stories is important” (Clifford 526).)))) Chronologically speaking, it is “dramatically important that all the events of chap. 38 have taken place before Judah meets Joseph in chap. 42...because those events enabled Judah to come to the crucial insight that God is able to transform the brothers and their sin” (Clifford 526). It is also no coincidence that Judah’s unrighteousness is followed by Joseph’s resistance to Potiphar’s wife. But to create a dichotomy that dismisses Judah and robs the dreaming brother in glory is to mute Judah’s verbal admittance of Tamar’s righteousness. The verse in which Judah turns from rage to confession is typically, “translated as ‘she is more righteous than I’ (*KJV*, *RSV*, and *NIV*) or ‘more in the right than I’ (*NRSV*, *NAB*, and *NJPSV*), a more exact rendering is ‘she is righteous, not I’ (Clifford 530). Jenkins sees the latter as remarkably different: Judah is not less righteous; he is not

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righteous *at all*. Not righteous, righteous. In what sense?

Wenham interprets the exchange between Judah and Tamar in strictly judicial terms: "Her prosecutor acknowledges that he is the guilty party, not she. In judicial contexts [the verb] often has the sense of innocence (e.g., Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1), so here Judah declares her innocence and admits his own guilt." The scene is not a trial, however; Judah does not stand accused, and there is no legal questioning (Clifford 530).

Here I depart from Clifford; the scene is not a trial, but Judah does stand accused, by the reader, by levirate precepts that required him to give his son to the widowed Tamar. My stance is supported by a long line of midrash and tradition, as the scholarship of C.E. Hayes makes clear⁴.

Certainly he is not on trial in a literal sense, just as Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* is not literally on trial: each stands on a threshold, first projecting his guilt upon others, inviting a trial (Judah is ready to burn Tamar, Oedipus begins an empirical investigation in order to uncover the murderer).

Peter T. Kopfer describes *Oedipus* as one of Western culture's "foundational texts" in that it "dramatizes the passage from the primitive response to crisis, which is sacrificial violence, to a new kind of response, in effect, rational analysis of what the problem behind the crisis actually is" (Koper 94). We find in the chronicles surrounding Joseph and Judah a consistent differentiation between scapegoat mechanisms and empirical evidence that demands a more rational approach to the offense.

4 Already in the targums we find-in various stages of development and detail-an interpretation of Judah's words as courtroom testimony brought in defense of Tamar. By confessing to his sexual intercourse with his daughter-in-law (the meaning of "from me"), Judah is able to clear Tamar of the charge of harlotry (the meaning of *sdqh*- "innocent"). This interpretation responds to various stimuli within the biblical text and exploits to the full (a) the legalistic overtones of the root *sdq*; (b) the implication of innocence of a charge of sexual transgression in the Aramaic translation of the root *sdq* (*zk'ly*); (c) the courtroom atmosphere conjured by the use of Judah's pledges as evidence against him (v. 25); and (d) the lack of detail in the original text concerning the whole process by which Tamar is accused, "tried" and eventually delivered from death. A direct comparison of the past actions and righteousness of the two protagonists is obscured in this reading and the clause which serves to explain Judah's relative lack of righteousness in the biblical text is rendered difficult. Consequently, the targums find alternative meanings or uses for this clause. Many of the rabbinic midrashim continue the targums' courtroom tradition of interpretation. *Sdqh* is construed primarily in the sense of innocence of a charge of sexual wrongdoing (Hayes 185-186).

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After Joseph's brothers leave the second time, with "the silver goblet...from which Joseph drinks, and which he uses for divination" is planted by Joseph's servant in Benjamin's bag. When the servant overtakes the exiting brothers and accuses them of theft, Judah proposes a punishment: "If any of your servants is found to have the goblet, he shall die, and as for the rest of us, we shall become my lord's slaves" (Genesis 44:10). The suggestion contains a dynamic parallel to but is further revelatory of scapegoat politics. Firstly, Judah, only one among the group, proposes the punishment as though all have consented. Further, without any analysis of the crime, without investigation into the possibility that though one brother's bag may hold the goblet, others may have consented to its theft, Judah thrusts a punishment upon one that may exonerate the rest. Also, his suggestion seems to give us insight into the subconscious guilt contained within scapegoat mechanisms, for he proposes that the rest, who are not killed, will remain slaves. We may depart from the literal possibility of slavery and see that slavery as symbolic of the state Judah is already in: one of his brothers has been "killed" and, interconnected to this death, the rest are enslaved. Joseph's servant is the first to bring a rational corrective to Judah's proposal: "Even though it ought to be as you propose, only the one who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you shall be exonerated" (Genesis 44:10).

Later, after the goblet is found in Benjamin's bag, Judah says to Joseph: "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead or how try to prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. Here we are, then, the slaves of my lord—the rest of us no less than the one in whose possession the goblet was found" (44:16). Here the symbolic reading reaches its height: each of the brothers, including Benjamin, is presented by Judah as Joseph's slave. It seems as if, because the "guilty party" is Benjamin, the youngest, Judah is reminded of both his father's attachment to the

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boy and the brothers' earlier guilt: even though Joseph has not revealed himself, their prior enactment of the scapegoat mechanism is revealed as inefficacious. Though one's bag held the actual goblet, this detail is now presented as arbitrary.

Significantly, Joseph sees the need to further reveal the violence enforced by the scapegoating: "Far be it from me to act thus!" said Joseph. "Only the one in whose possession the goblet was found shall become my slave; the rest of you may go back safe and sound to your father" (Genesis 44:17). Joseph too is appalled at the idea of condemning a group for the wrongdoing committed by one. He demystifies the hyperbolic contagion of unjust punishment: one stole, one shall be punished. Judah's words are spoken in part out of self-preservation, in part out of concern for his father—for he knows neither he nor his brothers can return home without Benjamin. To do so would be to enjoy freedom and safety at the expense of their father's probable death: the group/individual dichotomy persists, and again we see Judah's growing terror in the face of any knowing sacrifice of one for the sake of many.

Judah, unable to bear the inevitable anguish Benjamin's absence would bring his father, offers himself: "Let me, your servant, therefore, remain in place of the boy as the slave of my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers" (Genesis 44:33). Girard notes that, "this dedication of Judah stands in symmetrical opposition to the original deed of collective violence which it cancels out and reveals. As he hears, Joseph is moved to tears and identifies himself" (Girard2 113). I am unsure whether the dedication "cancels out" the original act of collective violence; if it were to, then the repentant sacrifice of one would be sufficient to cover the sins of a group. Joseph, by revealing himself as brother at the moment when Judah offers himself as sacrifice—and thus by preventing such a substitution—rejects the idea of Judah as sin-offering.

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Joseph is traditionally presented as hero, victim who is beyond reproach, but in the whole of the Bible only one is absolutely beyond reproach—only Jesus of Nazareth is presented as sinless, as scapegoat and perfect sacrifice—and this because he is more than human. Joseph, though he overcomes vengeful desires, is tempted to avenge himself. The first time his brothers go down to Egypt for grain, Joseph recognizes them and at once is, “reminded of the dreams he had about them. He said to them, ‘You are spies. You have come to see the nakedness of the land’” (Genesis 42:12). Girard is right in reading Joseph as, “engineering a sort of scapegoat testing of his brothers. He wanted to test the possibility of a change of heart in them” (Girard2 112-113). Yes he did, but his methods are far from blameless, even if they speak to us of Joseph’s position as an authentic victim. Unlike the infamous plays within plays of Shakespeare, wherein a staged, fictionalized analogy is acted out in order to test the guilt of a given spectator, Joseph engineers a fiction that requires the brothers to unknowingly play out their guilt before the lone spectator—Joseph. In this way his accusation that they are, “spies” is actually a projection of his own position with regards to them: concealed, he spies on them. He speaks with them through an interpreter, disguising his ability to hear their interpretation of his accusations: Amongst themselves, in their own language, they say, “Alas, we are being punished because of our brother” (42:21). Then—and this is all part of the “testing”—punishing them for being spies even though he knows well they are not, Joseph has Simeon bound before their eyes and thrown in prison. This mimics Joseph’s own earlier imprisonment grounded on false accusations.

The word “testing” conceals too much: Joseph is having his revenge. Certainly he is not subjecting them to death, to match his own supposed death, but he is unwilling, yet, to forgive them fully. If he were willing, he would reveal his artful vengeance as just that, rather than allowing the

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brothers to believe the myth that they are being punished because of their brother. The once victimized brother's vengeance continues: even though his brothers paid money for the grain, Joseph plants that same money in their sacks, so that when they arrive at home they see the sacks and know well they are likely, according to the pharaoh and his prime minister, doomed. What are we to make of Joseph's ongoing artifice? When the brothers return and present him with the money, saying, "We do not know who put the money in our bags," he seems to lie: "Be at ease...you have no need to fear. Your God and the God of your fathers must have put the treasures in your bags" (Genesis 43:23). Or, does he *not* lie? Is this a saturated yet subtle admittance that God has worked through him to transform thirst for vengeance into the gift that is refraining from outright violence?

Until he reveals himself as Joseph at the moment of Judah's self-offering, we do not know that he has forgiven the brothers fully. It is not exclusively the hero Joseph, but the heroic self-offering of Judah that incites full reconciliation. We return to Clifford's claim that chapter 38 is inserted before the Egypt narrative because it is the Judah/Tamar episode that defines and foreshadows the prominence of the son who through his confession moves from near murder of the innocent to offering his innocent self on behalf of the condemned, who by his confession that Tamar is righteous and he unrighteous moves from exploitation of the law (in ordering her to be burned) to fulfillment of the family line. For only guided by Judah does Joseph, unable to control himself, admit that he is their brother whom they once sold into Egypt, but tells them "do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here," because, "It was really for the sake of saving lives God sent me on ahead of you...So it was not really you but God who had me come here; and he has made of me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:1-8).

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We may be rightfully confused. If Girard is right, and the Joseph chronicles reveal the scapegoat mechanism where the *Oedipus* myth does not, then why does Joseph attribute his ousting *solely* to God? His speech would be far more revelatory if it went something like, “While you have done evil deeds, God has used them for good,” and indeed much exegesis reads the story as such: all things work together for the good in those who love God. But forgiveness requires an admitted offense, and Joseph’s speech conceals the offence and defers an open apology from those who sold him. It is, I would like to suggest, only the actual scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16 that can completely uncloak Joseph’s position as scapegoat and, in so doing, demand from the people of God—even more so than Joseph’s brothers in particular—confession of sin and therefore the more explicit possibility of forgiveness.

We must return to the Elohist insertion in Chapter 37, (((in which traders, not brothers, sell Joseph into slavery. After the brothers discovered that the Midianite traders have taken Joseph, they,)) “took Joseph’s tunic, and, slaughtering a goat, dipped the tunic in its blood” (Genesis 37:31). The intertextuality of Joseph and the Day of Atonement can be established if we observe the Levitical scapegoat ritual.

And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two he-goats for a sin-offering, and one ram for a burnt-offering. And Aaron shall present the bullock of the sin-offering, which is for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and set them before Jehovah at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for Azazel [believed to be a demon of sorts]. And Aaron shall present the goat upon which the lot fell for Jehovah, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall he set alive before Jehovah, to make atonement for him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness (Lev. 16:5-10).

The association of Joseph and the goat is obvious: what is left of him (his coat) is dipped in the animal’s blood. Explaining the ritual, Charles L. Feinberg notes that, “After the sacrifice of the

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first goat, Aaron laid both his hands on the head of the live goat, confessing over him the sins and transgressions of Israel. Then the goat was sent away into the wilderness by a man ready for the occasion” (Feinberg 322). But there is more than a mere symbolic interrelation between Joseph and Leviticus 16. Calum Carmichael argues that the Book of Jubilees (xxxiv 18, 19) a Pseudepigraphal work, “ views the Day of Atonement[’s]...institution as [commemorating] a profoundly significant occasion in the nation’s history when Joseph’s brothers caused their father Jacob to grieve because they deceitfully presented him with Joseph’s bloodstained coat as evidence that he had perished” (Carmichael 169)⁵.

Carmichael’s main thesis is that the Levitical lawmaker scanned accounts in Genesis in order to find idiosyncratic instances from which to form laws and rituals applicable to all of Israel. The Joseph story, root of the scapegoat ritual on the Day of Atonement, is the first instance in biblical history in which forgiveness is sought and granted for an offense. Carmichael argues that the Levitical ritual accomplishes the role of the brother’s confessions of sin by, “telescoping all the individual transgressions of all the Israelites living at any one time into the manageable form of their ancestors’ offense” (173). In this way, I add, Joseph’s brothers do not become a scapegoat for the righteous, but their confession is “ours.” That said, Carmichael believes that the ritual fulfills the incomplete confession made by the brothers. During their first two trips to Egypt, they admit wrongdoing but offer no apologies:

It is not until after Jacob’s death that the issue of forgiveness explicitly comes up. Fearing retribution for their original wrong against Joseph, the offending brothers tell him that their late father had ordered them to seek his forgiveness. They ask of him, “Forgive, I pray you, the transgression

⁵ On the tenth day of the seventh month, supposedly the day on which they slaughtered a kid of the goats, dipped Joseph’s coat in its blood, and presented it to Jacob, the Israelites have to atone for this offense and all their other offenses (Carmichael 169-170).

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[pessa'] of your brothers and their sin [hatta't], because they did evil to you...
forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father" (Carmichael 171).

Joseph receives their petition, forgives them. Even still, even after they request forgiveness, the brothers never directly reference the fact that they slaughtered a goat and dipped it in blood, feigning Joseph's death-by-beast. It is for this reason that the Joseph chronicles can only find completion in Leviticus 16.

While Joseph's scapegoat status may be validated by the Levitical Day of Atonement, we can again turn to Chapter 38 to validate the scapegoat mechanism's centrality to the chronicles. After Judah's first two sons die, he tells Tamar to, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up," but we are told by the text that he tells her this because, "he feared that Shelah also might die like his brothers" (Genesis 38:11). We are not told *why* Judah transfers his fears onto Tamar, but Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that, "commentators ancient and modern have assumed that his troubles stemmed from his marriage to a Canaanite. But the story itself contradicts such an assumption: it does not comment negatively about the marriage" (Frymer-Kensky 265). Frymer-Kensky also notes that, "perhaps to forestall the assumptions that readers nevertheless continue to make, the narrator explicitly states that Judah's sons died because of their own actions" (265). Perhaps the unjust accusations of so many commentators are shared by Judah. We are told that Judah is afraid his son will die upon marrying Tamar. I read here a scapegoat mechanism: Judah imposes guilt on the innocent Shua and Tamar through xenophobic displacement. The biblical text, as Girard is keen to point out, works against characters or readers who wish to conceal such a mechanism. Further, we are familiar with Judah's specious motives from his treatment of Joseph in Chapter 37.

The scapegoat mechanism is externalized more fully in that Judah offers a young goat as

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payment for Tamar's prostitution. The sinless goat is sent into the wilderness (out from his settled land, towards where the sheep are sheared) in order to pay for—yes, but more so to *atone* for Judah's sin. Judah sends the young goat through his friend the nameless Adullamite, who learns not only that Tamar is absent, but that, “There never has been a temple prostitute” (38:21). Judah's failed attempt at the scapegoating process prefigures the fact that his temporarily successful use of scapegoating in the case of Joseph is also ultimately ineffective. The Joseph narrative reveals the despicable details of Joseph's coat dipped in blood, of his body exiled from the community. The Levitical scapegoat rite is brought to completion by the confessed contrition of the sinners. Judah's scapegoating is revealed as despicable: it is inefficacious. The scapegoat does not meet its intended Azazel [demon] in the wilderness. There is no demon to cast out. The evil is inside of Judah, not externalized. Additionally, as Clifford calls to our attention, “Judah, without any judicial inquiry, decreed a cruel and excessive sentence for his own daughter-in-law” (Clifford 526). The lack of any manner of judicial investigation is abrasively felt as we read the text. Unlike Oedipus, whose guilt is established through an investigation he demands, Judah's guilt is established by evidence, but not by chosen trial. He is only exonerated when he confesses his unrighteousness *and* Tamar's righteousness, absolving her from the xenophobic accusations made earlier. All of these elements extracted from the Judah/Tamar episode show that it holds an essential echo of the scapegoat mechanism. (((Perry contends that, “the systematic repetition of a particular element in a typical position in the text-continuum...will bring it into prominence in the semantic hierarchy of the text” (Perry 41). The motifs, if somewhat imperfect parallels, are a significant contribution to exegesis that sees the Joseph-coat scapegoat moment as origin of Leviticus 16.)))

But Joseph is more than mere hero or mere scapegoat-single-victim. Reduce him to either

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archetype would hide the greatness of the biblical story. Before he is exiled into Egypt he is favored, spoiled even. His symbolic, abstracted dreams are doubly problematic in that they both tempt him to gloat over his brothers and father, and they tempt his brothers' jealousy. Only by the end of the chronicles does the complexity contextualizing the dreams become clear. Yes Joseph becomes king, but not by any means in order to tower over his family and demand homage. Yes his role is central to familial salvation, but centrality does not signify privilege so much as excruciating demands of forgiveness. And it is only this forgiveness that unbinds the knot enslaving Joseph and his brothers: "Joseph then kissed all his brothers, crying over each of them; and only then were his brothers able to talk with him" (Genesis 46:15). Just as it is not enough that we read Joseph as innocent victim, it is not enough that we read Judah as emblematic of brotherly jealousy. This biblical narrative ultimately uncloaks any sense that Joseph can, alone, achieve salvation. Both the placement and content of Chapter 38 speak boldly what Clifford has concluded: "As might happen with the larger-than-life characters in a Flannery O'Connor story, the outlandish Tamar and her bizarre deed shock Judah into seeing divine purpose at work in the world and enable him to become an example to his brothers" (Clifford 532).(((The ritual of the scapegoat, founded upon the chronicles of Joseph, is likewise founded upon the episode of Judah;))) it is not the direct intervention of God so much as the empirical evidence offered by Tamar that bleeds Judah's confession. But, though this section of Genesis grants empirical evidence great import, the artificial trials Joseph at first vengefully engineers, exploiting his brothers' vulnerability, turn on him the way Tamar's evidence transfigured Judah's exploitative trial. In Joseph's case, the show-trial's evidence is not a cloak or object, but a whole human life offered up in sacrifice and repentance. It is evidence that makes both Judah and Joseph bow to truth. Yes Joseph is an inversion of Oedipus, but the latter is more than a foil for the

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former. Joseph's brothers are for a time doomed by the near-fateful force of his unforgiving engineering. Peter T. Koper, quoting Girard, reminds us that:

“the tragedian’s version of the Oedipus story [*Oedipus Rex*] differs radically from the myth’ (72). The paradigmatic ‘exchanges of mutual incriminations’ (72) between Oedipus and Teiresias raise the question of ‘whether the accusation [by Teiresias] is simply an act of reprisal arising from the hostile exchange of a tragic debate’ (71) rather than a prophetic truth. The play is an investigation of killing. In the myth, the killer is Oedipus” (Koper 87).

Just so, the story of Joseph is in large part an investigation, and the exchanges between Judah and Tamar, and Judah and Joseph, verge quickly towards tragic ends. But in the “investigation” Joseph undertakes, he knows in advance that his brothers are not guilty of the charges he thrusts upon them. Koper, commenting on Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, argues that, “The play is not about guilt at all. It is a request that we abandon quests for guilt, the ‘privileging of the empirical question,’ in the face of a human condition in which we are all always guilty” (88). Joseph’s investigations, concerned at first with guilt, give way to the glory of reconciliation after a rather grueling double bind of scapegoat mechanisms that has left he and his brothers, like Oedipus, doubly blind. Our gaze tells us this so clearly when we read Oedipus next to Joseph. But Joseph’s story, again more than a mere anti-myth, is brought to its fulfillment in the ritual of Leviticus 16, where, more than momentary, historical scapegoat, Joseph’s fate ritually reminds all humans of their persistent need of forgiveness. This ritual meets its eschatological end in Jesus, innocent yet condemned criminal, whose cloak, many colored by the stains of blood upon it, is divided among men. Only uncloaked, like Joseph, can Jesus enact the scapegoat ritual for the final time. Only then, crucified, can reconciliation be confessed by the master and brother of a humankind who has sold him for silver: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

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