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THE RHETORIC OF SUBJECTIVITY*

MIEKE BAL
General Literature, Utrecht

"L'homme parle, mais parce que le symbole l'a fait homme."

Jacques Lacan

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I will approach the problem of reality in fiction within the framework of the basic subjectivity of all discourse. The notion of "subjectivity," both as the opposite of (illusory) objectivity, and as subject-dependency, but in the first place considered as *activity* of *subjects*, will be amply discussed.

First I will briefly present the rather commonplace view that all discourse is subjective. As far as the relation between reality and discourse is concerned, there is no basic difference between history and fiction (see also Smith 1978). The fallacy of an "objective" difference is rooted in our traditional interpretation of Aristotle's notion of mimesis, seen as *fiction*. This concept has been open to recent interpretation. It is precisely on the basis of our revision of Aristotle's ideas as well as of the theoretical work done in the field of narratology that I wish to make a claim for the case that all presentation of reality in fiction should be seen in its subjective aspects. The mediation brought about by the use of language has its source in the process of interaction of subjects that aspire toward the being taken for granted of certain meanings by all parties concerned.

This effort cannot be but rhetorical. The unavoidable use of rhetoric in social behavior is a political act. Criticism of this process requires a detailed analysis of discursive subjects and the way they communicate meanings. The case of the Samson and Delilah tale (*Judges* 13-16) serves to illustrate the point.

* This paper was presented at the Ossabaw conference on "The Structure of Reality in Fiction," 1-6 October, 1981. I wish to thank the participants for their helpful comments. I am very grateful to Christine van Boheemen for correcting my worst mistakes in English; to Jan Fokkelman, to Menakhem Perry and to Eugene Vance for valuable advice on the Hebrew text and the interpretation; to Fokkelien van Dijk and Grietje van Ginneken for indispensable help and support in various matters concerning the spirit and the letter of this paper.

L'avenir nous tourmente et le passé nous retient. Voilà pourquoi le présent nous échappe.
Gustave Flaubert

I. THEORY: SUBJECTIVITY AND THE NOTION OF SUBJECT

1. *The Structure of Reality in Fiction*

Even if there is such a thing as reality, as opposed to fictive worlds — which radical sceptics doubt — that does not necessarily entail a corresponding difference in its symbolization. In a brief analysis of *Genesis 2*, in which he shows how “an etiologically /is/ intended to account for the existence of woman, for her subordinate status, and for the attraction she perennially exerts over man,” Alter (1980:146) demonstrates the priority, in terms of power, of semiosis over reality when he states: “This image of man as passive matter is bracketed on both sides by his performances as a master of language” (1980:148).

Alter's statement not only leads to the conclusion that semiotic competence makes masters, thus establishing a causal link between the possession of signs and that of power, but also to the recognition of the priority of “form” over “content.” For it is not what Adam says, nor even the mere fact that his words have semiotic power as their very content, and are highly performative, that makes him powerful in spite of his initial existence as passive matter. What makes him powerful is the bracketing itself, the formal framing of his material powerlessness by the exercise of semiotic power.

This seems paradoxical, however. Adam's words are quoted, thus embedded in the narrator's discourse and therefore subordinated to it (for a theory of embedding see Bal 1981a). The more subordinated a discourse is to another discourse, the less reliable, the more fictive it is, and this in spite of the pseudo-documentary character of quotation. The paradox is resolved when Alter states:

Adam and Eve are not the fixed figures of legend or myth but are made to assume contours conceived in the writer's *particularizing imagination* through the brief but revealing dialogue *he invents for them* and through the varying strategies of presentation he adopts in reporting their immemorial acts (1980:149; italics mine).

Alter's point that it is the invention of the dialogue that gives the character its existence and its importance, can only hold good if a basic monologous structure of narrative is recognized as its main feature. For then, and only then, the first speaker can be assigned full responsibility for not only his own discourse, but also that of the quoted characters. This leads to the problem of narrative subjects, their status in relation to one another and their relation to the narrative content, the represented states and events. In other words: the construction of reality in fiction is in the first place a problem of *subject-(ac)tivity*.

As a matter of course, there is no reality in fiction. Nor is there reality in discourse on “reality.” There is, however, a *structure* of

reality, that can be brought about by narrativization, one possible particularizing strategy that conforms to a set of formal and semantic rules known implicitly and sometimes partially explicitly by every human being. I understand a structure of reality as a reductive, selective and particularizing view of the world (e.g., the world common to all partners in the discursive process) as it is symbolized in a semiotic system.

2. *Mimesis as a Semiotic Concept*

La convention est une règle qui a pour législateur son propre destinataire.
E. Ortigues

Theoretically, this view can be accounted for even within the critical tradition of *mimesis*. The excellent new French edition of the *Poetics* by Dupont-Roc and Lallot (Aristotle 1980) provides ample material for a reinterpretation of the concept of *mimesis* within a semiotic framework (for a more extensive account see Bal 1982).

The most important footnote in the commentary on Chapter 1 is the discussion of the ambiguity of *mimesis*. The accusative that accompanies it can indicate the “model” as well as the “copy,” the pre-existing object and the resulting creation. This is the very reason why the two parties opposed in the discussion of realism (let's say, the *creatio* and the *imitatio* fans) are both (or neither of them) entitled to claim this text as their source. Western binary thinking has always made people *choose* between two possible meanings, and this “*horror ambiguitatis*” has proven to be a most shocking misconception. The problem of the absence of any definition of the concept in Aristotle's text can be turned, and has been turned, into an interesting testimony of its self-evidence in the Ancient Greek context, which forces us to accept the use made of it here, including the ambiguity of object.

It is an easy and satisfying solution to interpret the concept in terms of Peircian semiotics. *Mimesis* is then regarded as the representation of an *interpretant*, which makes the question of the object irrelevant. This will be elaborated on below.

The same chapter relates the rhythm of music and dance to the representation of characters, emotions and actions. However easy it may seem now to emphasize dance, since dance can be “mimetic” in the realistic sense, it would be misplaced here. The text speaks rather of *figures* in the rhetorical sense, which can be, in a choreographical context, *schemes* (*schēmata*). A figure, then, is both a *representation* and a *simplification*, and hence a *particularisation*. These are also the characteristics of the Peircian interpretant, which is, as a new sign, a representation, in a simplified and adapted form, of the object originally intended. This conception of *mimesis* in dance and music implies as its epistemological background the

possibility of a semantic feature-analysis, and of the symbolization of those features. The latter possibility implies the conventional nature of representation, an interpretation which puts into perspective both positions in the discussion on realism.

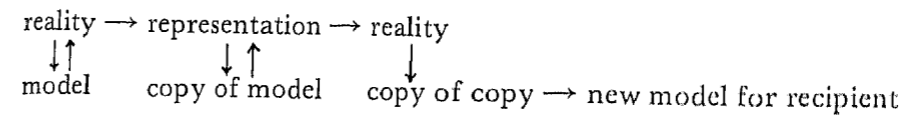
If we proceed to the comparison of literature and science, illustrated by the case of Aristotle's favorite Homer, the criterion is still *mimesis* but the meaning of the concept shifts slightly toward the well-known opposition that forms one of Genette's "Boundaries of Narrative" (1969): (argumentative) *discourse*. Scientific texts even if written in verse, are, for Aristotle, not poetic because they are not mimetic, an opposition which also leads us back to the necessity for characters and action. We are close now to the concept of fictionality as one of the features of *mimesis*. In science, subjects are *exposed*; in literature they are *represented*. Rather than fictionality we should again take the semiotic status of representation into consideration. Narrative and drama are more iconic, argumentative discourse is more symbolic; this might entail an opposition between *schematic* and (more or less) complete. Thus discourse needs more redundancy (Suleiman 1980) than literature. This criterion could be related to the still-valid norm that can be found in the rejection, on artistic grounds, of *littérature à thèse* (Suleiman 1983).

This semiotic interpretation should be related to *Rezeptionsästhetik* and psychoanalysis. It is only in terms of these approaches that we can understand Aristotle's remarks on the pleasure of *mimesis* in relation to his enigmatic concept of *katharsis*. In the first place, this pleasure is based on the process of *abstraction*, which enables us to generalize. And generalization is a necessary condition of semiotic communication. Hence, the perception of *mimesis* is not an aesthetic but a cognitive event. The abstraction that constitutes *mimesis* is thus logically independent of qualitative transformation. Secondly, the pleasure of *reconnaissance* which originates in its being different (*ailleurs*) in the symbolic order, is a combination of surprise and learning. The unexpected discovery of the nature of the resemblance is based on the abstraction by which only a limited number of features of the model reappear. Hence, thirdly, the pleasure is in the (re)construction of the model by means of signs reversed by a detour via the recipient.

This argument supports the view that the realism-debate is irrelevant: if mimetic reception is a (re?)construction by the recipient of the semio-sized model, the difference between figurative and non-figurative art is negligible as far as the relation of art to reality is concerned, for in the case of an "emergency," the receiver just makes up a "model" if no existing one is available.

It is in this context that the kathartic effect can be accounted for (see Verhoeff 1981 for a detailed discussion of its psychoanalytical implications).

Katharsis is an aspect of *mimesis* in its effect on the recipient, which closes the circuit of the different but coexistent objects of *mimesis*. This influence, by a sort of psychoanalytical transfer of the *katharsis* onto the recipient, thus completes the relation between reality and art:



This effect is brought about by unpleasant emotions. Aristotle names two disturbing emotions, *phobos* and *eleos*, fear and pity. These two emotions specify the possible emotive reactions of the recipient, according to the direction of the identification. Fear results from direct identification, while pity is aroused by a general feeling of discomfort we have when someone else is suffering. The common feature is *malaise*. This feature is in opposition with the aforementioned pleasure (*hèdonè*) of representation, which was merely a cognitive pleasure. The cognitive is thus opposed to the emotional, while the good (pleasure) is opposed to the bad (*malaise*). These four features cross in *katharsis*: the *purification* of (unconscious) *bad* feelings clears the way for the (conscious) *knowing* of *good* feelings, a process that elevates the cognitive to a higher level by the effect of the emotional. *Katharsis*, as a strong but congenial form of *mimesis*, necessitates a rethinking of the relevance of fiction for reality. Being goal-oriented, source and destination of the mimetic effect are to be examined. It is here that the *subject* comes to the fore, as a temporarily fixed center of mimetic power. The social implications of *mimesis* are related to, though not identical with, the distribution of semiotic power in general.

3. The Relevance of Fiction for Reality

The content of man's vision has always been expressible only through a set of ready-made simplifying forms. Paolo Valesio

All we can speak of is a symbolized view of reality in fiction and that, at least, is something. Made intersubjectively accessible by the semiotic process, this view tends to be partially fixed in the subsequent uses of texts, that is, in the social reality of human interaction. When readers agree with what they read, when they prove to be susceptible to the strategies of presentation, something happens that the early Barthes would have called mythification: "Forms of representation that naturalize certain meanings, eternalize the present state of the world" (1957). Barthes adds to this definition of myth: "in the interest of the bourgeois class," but there is nothing

against a generalization like "in the interest of a dominating group." In the case of literary texts, this can only happen if both author and readers are willing to insert themselves, if only temporarily and partially, into that dominating group. If the author is not, his or her text will be critical towards it. Consequently, it will de-naturalize meanings, at least those meanings that serve the interests of the dominating group by representing the state of the world from that group's point of view. If the readers are not willing to insert themselves, they will fight the text, argue against it and thus undo the intended naturalization of meanings. Both this form of mythification and any action against it function by discourse.

Is, then, all discourse mythical? It is useless to strive towards transparent language, the very notion of it being suspect, since it points to a binary, sign-oriented view of language. One can, on the other hand, strive towards successful use of language. If success is accounted for in terms of minimal mythification, one can try to symbolize in as unambiguous a language as possible (a possibility that does not go very far) a view of reality as conscious and as clear as possible. The latter effort necessitates a thorough self-knowledge and a skill in self-examination. The former effort demands a constant criticism of one's own discourse, and thus an attempt to avoid the naturalization of one's own meanings into myth. In order to avoid or actively prevent naturalization of meanings, other meanings have to be used and taken for granted. The difference between discourses, as far as their rhetorical contribution to mythification is concerned, can only be relative, and a matter of proportions. Thus, not every discourse is myth, but there is myth in every discourse.

Myth is then obviously ideological by definition, if we conceive ideology as "a practice to produce a specific articulation, that is, producing certain meanings and necessitating certain subjects as their supports" (Coward and Ellis 1977:67). In order to become "real," that is, to be accepted by the partners in the semiotic process as in accordance with their view of reality, meanings must be made self-evident, naturalized. Hence, in order to become "real" they must become mythical. This is how "reality" coincides with, is determined by, depends on *fictiveness*. This is why realism and fictiveness join in mimesis. In this view, katharsis as a practice of mimetic power, is a device for ideological manipulation.

This process, as Coward and Ellis see it, necessitates subjects, "authenticating" (Doležel 1980) subjects; subjects communicating meanings to other subjects. Many subjects are required, for meanings are complex and contradictory. In the case of narrative, a whole cluster of subjects involved determine the complexity of what is referred to in this article as narrative subjectivity. This subjectivity is complex in spite of, or due to, the technically monologous structure of a narrative text (see Bal 1977).

It is obvious that the manipulation of these structures in subjectivity is a political act (see also Jameson 1981). Political, in the sense of tactics used for the control of social, public, intersubjective processes. Thus conceived, politics is a conscious use of rhetoric, and a broad (e.g., social rather than individual) use of it. Sampson (1981:5) therefore considers meaning a political concept:

the choice of behaviour in a given society or group at a given moment /is/ made in reference to the choices left open to coordination in (documents of) an other group/period, such as an ambiguous literary text.

The fact that some choices are left open and other choices are not, and the fact that the limits so constructed are accepted, is due to the process of naturalization of meanings.

The Bible, and in particular those stories that are widely known in vulgarized forms, presents a very interesting case. First of all, no other text in our culture has had such a long, thorough and documented history of reception, so it is relatively easy to make statements about its influence. Its religious and ethical impact facilitates at the same time the awareness of ideological features in both text and reception. I intend to demonstrate in the second section that the very rhetorical strategies, including the strategy of silence, displayed in the Bible's subjectivity at the same time convey a highly ideological, that is, stereotyped and not otherwise justified view of women, and conceal, in the same process, the sources of that view in the subjects concerned, making the de-naturalization of these meanings extremely difficult. Hence, myth becomes reality.

4. Subjectivity and Narrative Subjects

Il faut garder ensemble les définitions qui font du sujet l'effet du signifiant, et du signifiant le représentant du sujet. J. A. Miller

The view of the subject as a whole human being, consciously endowing objects with meaning, has been generally abandoned by now (in fact, overviews like Coward and Ellis 1977 and Culler 1981, both representative surveys of poststructuralist criticism have abandoned it). It has been replaced by a conception of the subject as a position, a *locus* where different systems cross. The subjective feeling of the human subject of its own unity can be accounted for, within this view, in terms of the illusion of constancy, caused by the action of memory. One of the systems that cross in the subject-position is language. The discourses it produces are (located in) common places, be it institutions, groups or, sometimes, and by accident, individuals. Those common places are the places where meanings meet. As Culler recently put it, "the self is dissolved as its various functions are ascribed to impersonal systems which operate through it" (1981:33). Those systems are not only impersonal, they are also and in the first

place interpersonal, for their existence as systems is based not only on their impersonal structure but also on their function as connectives between persons. Precisely because human subjects are split, unstable and dependent, meanings are conveyed by and to them and partially fixed in them at the moment they participate in semiosis, thus contributing to their permanent (de)formation.

The instability of the subject is represented in a surprisingly convincing way in that Common Place of language, the dictionary. After these considerations, one of the definitions of *sujet* in the *Petit Robert* as "être pensant, considéré comme le siège de la connaissance" (thinking being, considered as the seat of knowledge), with reference to Kant, sounds at first hilariously idealistic. One detail however, is interesting. This definition is the very last one of the entire lemma which occupies the space of half a page (a whole column) in the dictionary.

The first definition of *sujet* is, significantly, the one that insists on the subject's dependency: "qui est dans la dépendance d'une autorité supérieure" (who depends on a superior authority) (le Père? Dieu?) and then "soumis à une nécessité, à une loi" (submitted to a necessity, a law) (the law of the Father?). However problematic this may be, we will have to at least take up the challenge and try to account for the possible relations between this first and the above-quoted last definition, the dependency of laws and the "siège de la connaissance." The second cluster of definitions is less important for our purpose, though not totally uninteresting: "matière, point, question, thème" (matter, point, question, theme) and other similar synonyms of "topic." Since topic is a semantic concept, it may be helpful too. Third comes the logical or syntactical definition; it runs like this: "Terme considéré comme le point de départ de l'énoncé" /.../ (Term considered as the starting point of the sentence). Only the fourth group is concerned with humans, without, however, overacting its humanism. It starts with "Être individuel, personne considérée comme le support d'une action, d'une influence" (Individual, considered as the support of an action, of an influence). This list seems inspired by Freud's statement that man is no master in his own house, for it includes again passive and dependent subjects in the first place, like persons subject to an examination, or, worse, patients in the medical sense, guinea pigs and test objects, until only at the very end the Kantian definition already quoted comes to close the list.

This brief excursion to the Common Place where users of French language meet, can serve as a starting point for a reconsideration of the concept of subject and subjectivity in all its aspects. Though I am not particularly fond of paradoxes, a striking resemblance between the first and the last definition is brought about by the word "siège." If the human subject is no more than a "siège," the Kantian Robert seems to agree with Lacan and the post-struct-

turalists, for a "siège" is no more than a place, a *locus* where things happen. For the moment, I shall indicate the different conceptions of the notion of subject by numbers, conforming to the order they have in the dictionary. Subject₁, then, means "what or who depends on an authority or law." Subject₄ is "a thinking being, where knowledge is located." As for "topic," it holds the idea that the briefest summary of the meanings that will be retained after the actions of all the subjects involved have come to a stop, is the subject₂ of a text, ready to become myth. The subject in this sense is a product of the various and interconnected activities of the narrative subjects as they will be defined below, and therefore the use of the same term in common English or French is understandable. The more so, since this subject₂, the meaning of the text, (de)forms the subject₄ in the human(istic?) sense. Subject₃, the grammatical subject of a sentence in the syntactical, or of a proposition in the logical sense, is not directly at issue here. That does not mean that it is irrelevant. The starting point of a sentence is in most cases the center of the proposition, and thus very easily becomes that of the statement that leads to the determination of subject₂. In a more abstract way, however, we may retain from this definition the idea of starting point. Instead of taking the *énoncé* as the basic unit, we then take the narrative text and look where it starts. Subject₄ is interesting, as we saw, for the "siège" idea. Taking it up in that way and only then, is it possible to understand that the same item contains "Être individuel, personne considérée comme le support de l'action, d'une influence." Turning at last to narratology, we may consider the juxtaposition of "action" and "influence" as complements of "support" as an indication that both sides of the semiotic process must be included: the support of action at the sender-side, the support of influence at the receiver-side. In both cases, *support* is taken as a synonym of "siège," that is, *locus*, through which impersonal/interpersonal systems operate.

Considering these definitions, we cannot but conclude that the very notion of *subject* as it functions in our society gives evidence in favor of the generalized though perhaps subconscious acceptance of the above-mentioned view. Obviously, we feel our subjectivity as dissolved.

Central aspects of the notion of subject are:

1. dependency of law
2. center of meaning
3. starting point
4. support of action and influence

It is possible to comprehend all these aspects in a working definition of the subject which aims at accounting for the way in

which we project our feelings about our own subjectivity into our semiotic products' structures, in particular in mimetic fiction. Such a definition would specify the subject as *the support of semiotic action, the starting point of its pragmatic dimension and the center of its semantic dimension, which combines, produces, conveys and retains meanings according to the rules of the systems in which it functions. The subject so conceived is an agent in the first place.*

Now, action can be executed on many different levels of semiosis. As soon as a verb can be used to describe what happens in semiosis, the verb can be attributed to a subject. Usually, we summarize our description of semiosis. What we summarize then, is a complex cluster of semiotic events that we can try to analyze into its components. The goal of such analyses is to account for the semiotic process in the most subtle, refined and thus most complete way possible.

If the analysis aims at an account of the semiotic process, its first steps shall logically be the splitting of the different subjects that act under the summarizing heading of /author/. The basic distinction to be carried out which is still extremely coarse, is that reported in Bal (1981a:44-45) which I shall not repeat here. That distinction between narrator or voice, focalizer or subject of vision, and actor is quite well known by now. These positions determine, in their relation to the subject-topic of the text, its ideological influence. The case of the Samson-tale gives evidence to the claim that questions about the subjects (who speaks? who focalizes? who acts?) bring crucial problems to the fore. The very problems that thus come to light are those the unconscious blurring of which makes up the naturalizing of painful moments in the text. Only psychoanalysis can interpret this unstable subjectivity, which appears through a narratological questioning of the text, in a way that accounts for the gaps in the text *and* the way recipients deal with those gaps.

The author is, as an author, also considered as no more than a support. The fact that we cannot know him or her is not accidental but agreed upon by principle. Readers, however, can become "known" only insofar as they project the influence they support into new actions, that is, become authors in their turn, of written or spoken utterances in which the influence is represented. In the case of the Bible, we have many such utterances at hand. In accordance with the view presented in the preceding paragraph, I will not consider scholarly comments as documents of such evidence of influence, but only documents that can be supposed to represent *naturalized* meanings. For a feature of influence is its implicitness, and though any text, even including scholarly ones, contains traces of influence, the more vulgarized forms of reception make a clearer case.

II. PRACTICE: CRITIQUE OF SUBJECTIVITY

A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.

William Shakespeare

1. Delilah's Innocence, or How to Go Beyond Prejudice

In our culture, the story of Samson and Delilah is a paradigm of woman's wickedness. The combination of seduction, unfaithfulness and treason is an unavoidable and fatal one. However strong a man is, and Samson *was* strong, he will always be helpless against woman's strategies of enchantment. Once seduced, he will be betrayed. This is how the myth of Samson and Delilah is naturalized.

I chose a few children's Bibles randomly, one of which is a classic in Holland, written by the most popular author of children's books (W.G. van der Hulst, v.d.H.). It dates from the beginning of this century, but it is still the most widely read of its kind. The others are: another classic (Anne de Vries, A.d.V.) by an author of regional novels; one newer but still orthodox text (Evert Kuijt, E.K.) and two "modern" children's Bibles (J.L. Klink, J.K., and Gertie Evenhuis and Nico Bouhuys, E.B.) of the kind in which Jesus wears jeans and helps his mother wash the dishes. In addition, I took one commentary written for adults (Naastepad 1970). The aim of this book, which is exclusively devoted to *Judges* 13-16, is to present a popular, modern interpretation. It is not an exclusively theological discussion and it is easily accessible; there have been several reprints of it, and it is very well known.

The most striking feature common to these documents is that they all pronounce a moral judgment about the characters at the same diegetical moments. What interests me here is the reaction of the readers (the authors of the documents) to events about which the Bible itself gives no comment.

This process shows a *va-et-vient* in the mythification. Events that are not understandable without moral judgment, hence not naturalizable, are provided with a motivation by the readers; that very motivation naturalizes in its turn the moral judgment itself, thus enabling it to do its job and make the events not only understandable but perfectly unavoidable. Criticizing the myth demands, then, undoing the popular reading of those judgments and replacing those pseudo-self-evident motivations by others, since any attempt to "purity" would be followed by a relapse into the same myth. By its very mythical nature, it is already accepted and therefore stronger than a "nude" text (impossible in any case).

My strategy is based on the opposite move: opting for *replacement* of motivation, my interpretation will be deliberately partial.

There is another reason why undoing extras is not enough. Of course, the "bare facts" are not innocent either. There are meanings that the text and the subsequent readers already have in common

and have a good head start on the others. Therefore, there cannot be "bare facts" but only previously naturalized meanings. What I wish to demonstrate is not *what is really written* but *why what is written is thus read*, in other words, the interaction between the subjects, the subjectivity of the text, and the myth. Of course, this interpretation would contradict its own foundations if it claimed exclusivity. Other interpretations of this tale are possible and in fact exist. I claim that this one provides solutions where others remain inconsistent, insofar as there is indeed competition between interpretations. The justifiability of my reading lies there. To justify my interpretation is not, however, my main goal. It is, on the contrary, the interpretation that justifies the underlying theory of subjectivity. And it is that theory that aims at accounting for the particularly ideological effect of mimesis, in the integration of narratological praxis in psychoanalytical semantics.

In this view, the leading question derived from the previous theory and the narratological model is simply: *Who does what?* Which subject is the agent of which activity? The activities distinguished are speech, vision and action. Speech includes all utterances by a linguistic subject (the explicit or implicit "I"); vision includes perception and thought, feeling and memory; action includes any activity involving a change in the situation between actors in the diegesis. This question provokes as its answer the following problems.

1. Speech: when actors speak, it is Delilah who has the initiative. Samson only reacts. This fact is in conflict with the common expectation that in a narrative the main character is the one who takes the initiative.

2. Vision: when the actors are in conflict, the view of the events given is Delilah's. Samson's view of the main events is never represented.

3. Action: application of the actantial model (Greimas 1965, 1970) poses the problem of the subject. If Delilah is considered the subject, then there is not much left of Samson's "officially" recognized heroism, since, then, he does not act, strive nor accomplish. On the other hand it is difficult to fill out the whole model if we consider Samson as the subject.

These problems can be transferred without difficulty to a non-scholarly level of reading. The questions raised are then:

1. Why does Samson not reproach Delilah for her betrayal?

2. Why does he accept Delilah's reproaches without giving his own view?

3. Why does he finally give the crucial information, thus sealing his undoing, instead of acting to prevent it?

These three problems combine in forming a most crucial question raised by the catastrophe: why does Samson expect to be saved when he is shaved? Knowing that he has broken his contract with

God, why does he still expect the other party to respect the contract and help him?

2. Samson's Birth and His First Adventures

L'art de l'analyse doit être de suspendre les certitudes du sujet, jusqu'à ce que s'en consomment les derniers mirages. Jacques Lacan

In the beginning, Samson's mother is childless. Sterility was, at the times where the fabula is situated, a disaster for a woman. It deprived her of her status. One day, however, while her husband is absent, a messenger comes to tell her that she will be pregnant and give birth to a son. The messenger has the appearance of a man. He commands the woman to abstain from wine and unclean food, because the child shall be a Nazarite, a man devoted to God. No razor is to touch his head. The commands will be in force "from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7).

The motive of late conception with God's help is quite frequent in the Bible. It occurs in two variants either separately or combined: (1) the late conception of a previously sterile woman; and (2) the (a-sexual?) conception by God, in the absence of the husband.

The first happens for example to Rachel. She conceives only after giving up her sexual monopoly in favor of her sister Lea. Sara conceives, extremely late, after the visit of a messenger, at the moment she feels no longer any desire for her ageing husband, as she explicitly says ("Shall I have pleasure my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12)). The messenger belongs to the second variant. Of course this is repeated at Jesus' birth. In that case, the a-sexual nature of the conception is explicitly mentioned in *Matthew* 1:18.

Naastepad (24) insists on the absence of the husband. He interprets it as a sign of an unsuccessful sexual relationship between husband and wife. The children's Bibles hardly mention this whole episode. Whether or not this omission may be considered as a form of censorship, the non-sexual conception seems a problem to all recipients. In the text, insistence on Manóach's absence, the command of purity and the concordance with similar cases where non-sexuality is more overtly stressed, may be considered as a symbolic expression of a negativity. After all, purity and absence are as negative as are omissions. This negativity concerns the *genesis* of the subject Samson. It is a sexual negativity.

The First Woman. Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman. This creates some trouble at home. His parents would rather have him marry a woman of his own tribe. They resign themselves to his choice and the three of them go to Timnath, where the woman lives. Naastepad (35) reminds us that Timnath is the place where Juda (Gen. 38) deviated from his path to go whoring. The woman he

visited turns out later to be Juda's daughter-in-law. This remark gives evidence of the recipient's sensibility to a central problem in this episode: the intermingling of sexual and familial relations. This will be elaborated upon below.

On their way, Samson tears a threatening lion to pieces. "And he rent him as he would have rent a kid" (14:6). His parents do not notice this act, and he does not tell them. Not long after this, they return for the marriage. Samson "went out of his way" (cp. Juda) to look at the carcass of the lion. Now there is honey in the body. He takes some of it and eats it. He gives honey to his parents without saying where he had found it. Then there is a wedding.

A few details are striking here. Samson marries for love, or, to be more precise, for sexual attraction. He has only seen the woman, and she pleases him immediately. He marries a Philistine woman, among "the uncircumcised." The marriage is against his parents' wish. Marrying a foreigner, for sexual reasons, against his parents' will: isn't he emancipating himself! But we will have to return to the tearing of the lion, and the motives it contains: Samson's strength, its sweet reward, and secrecy. In bringing up Juda, Naastepad evidently sensed some conflict here.

The wedding ceremony takes seven days. Thirty young men feasted with Samson: a bachelor's party. Samson asks them a riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (14:14). The stake consists of clothes. The young men persuade the bride to entice "her groom into telling her the answer." They threaten her. They feel misused as guests. The woman asks Samson, weeps, persists. Her argument: love. If Samson really loved her, would he keep the answer a secret from her when her fellow countrymen are involved? (14:16). The recipients all insist on the element of *love* in the argument, and they do not mention the kinship argument at all. Probably they consider it one and the same argument, understandably as we shall see. Samson defends himself by alleging his secrecy to his parents: "I have not told it to my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?" (14:16). Finally he gives in, the woman divulges the answer to her fellow countrymen, and on the seventh day they can reply to Samson: "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" (14:18). But Samson is not fooled: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle."

A few motives that occurred before return in these strange events, in a more explicit manner. At the same time, they foretell what will happen again later. The motive of the *riddle*, the keeping of a secret and its being divulged to male Philistines for the sake of love all reflects the secret between Samson and Delilah. The relation with the *parents* comes up again in the very last sentence of the text. The meanings symbolized by the *lion* and the *honey* crop up in other

expressions and contribute considerably to the overall meaning conveyed.

Asking riddles and finding the answer is a widespread motive in myths and fairy tales. The case of the sphynx in *Oedipus the King* is only one case in a tradition. Bettelheim (1976) relates riddles in fairy-tales to sexual maturity: whoever knows the answer knows the mystery of woman and sexuality. In this view, the fact that Samson asks the riddle of bachelors, the night before his own wedding, could symbolize his claim of being, as a groom, better informed in sexual matters than his virginal companions. The young men do not know the answer: they are not yet mature. Their only resource is the woman. They threaten her into betraying her groom's secret.

The strategy used by the woman conforms to stereotyped female behavior. She whines. Here, all the recipients are ready to blame. They agree that her love falls short: "Her fear was greater than her love"; "trying to flatter him, cheat him, being nasty to him" (AV). "As soon as he had told her the answer, she stopped crying, smiled and went away" (JK). Naastepad, writing for adults, insists on the sexual side of the event: Samson has not yet possessed his bride, and it is doubtful whether he ever will. He is tricked by his desire. All documents mention the comparison, in Samson's reply, between parents and bride, but none of them specify its meaning.

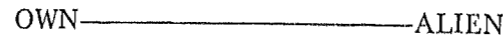
This proof of immaturity, in spite of his brave efforts to defy his parents, makes him unfit for marriage. But that meaning enters into conflict with the image of Samson as a hero, as a unified and unique subject of action. The conflict between desire and accomplishment, and the problematic effect of the desires of others (parents who "own" him by authority, a woman whom he is to own, companions who resemble him too much) upon his own desire again create problems for him as a whole subject.

The woman manages to have her will, or rather, the young men's will. Samson is explicit: they have plowed with his heifer. Plowing is a traditional symbol of sex; a heifer is an immature cow: a virgin. That heifer was Samson's property, a right that has been violated by the men. It looks very much as if adultery is at stake. There is a verb in Dutch for "to commit adultery" which is literally "to go strange," to go with a stranger. That verb suggests an equivalency between Samson's behavior toward his parents, and his bride's behavior toward him. The parents wanted him to stick to his own people; his bride teaches him a lesson in sticking to hers.

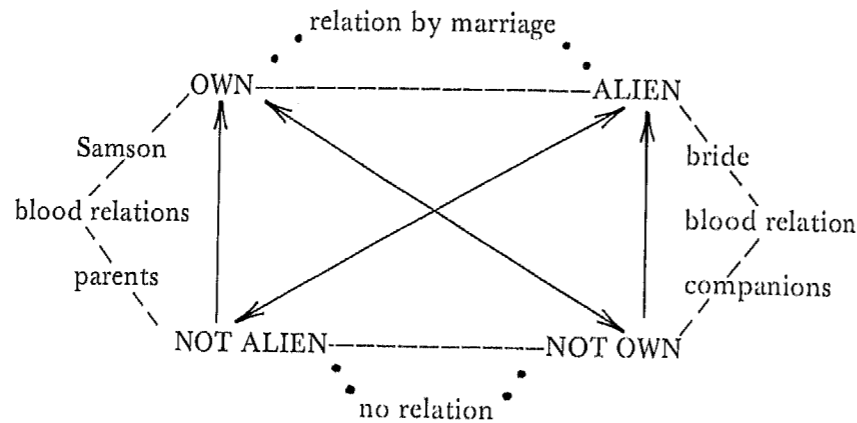
Thus a tension develops between *own* and *alien*. We can say that Samson's behavior shows a lack of semiotic competence. He is only aware of the simple opposition between two positive sides of the same *family relations*. He overlooks the fact that the negative sides act also. The complications called into being by this feature of meaning (according to Greimas 1970:141) create problems in the

relations between all the parties involved. For Samson, the separation between kinship and affinity is not carried out clearly enough (Lévi-Strauss 1949). He involves his parents too much in his sexual relation: it is not to them that he offers the honey. The sexual symbolism of honey is common, in the Bible (The Song of Solomon) and in other cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1966). On his bride's side, Samson underestimates the same kinship attachments. Schematically, this misunderstanding can be summed up as follows: family relations are built up.

for Samson:



for society:



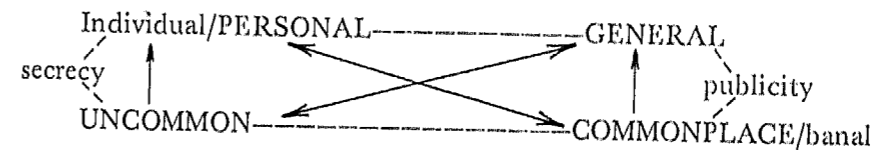
The complexity of this problem seems repressed by Naastepad, who simply skips the kinship problem in both the honey-episode and the riddle, while he gives a comprehensive comment on almost every word of the text. His selection is sexually oriented, which is justified, but he leaves out the element that makes sex a problem, in order to be able to preserve Samson's sexual heroism.

Samson has understood this semiotic lesson, now that it is too late. He reacts in two ways. The Philistines shall have their price, the clothes (another maturity symbol) for they have after all discovered the secret of sexuality. But the clothes will be acquired by the death of thirty other Philistines. The theft will be revenged by another theft, by another violation of the right of property. Second, Samson leaves his bride. He returns home. The woman now is given to his best man. This confirms the sexual interpretation: the companions keep more than clothes.

This leaves one other riddle: the riddle itself. As opposed to the riddle of the Sphynx, this one is not logical, even after its answer is known. There are four features: there is no logical link between riddle and answer; the riddle refers to Samson's secret meetings with the lion; the answer has the form of a question; it is about strength and sweetness.

Sweetness is related to lust. Also, the honey is found in the belly of the lion. Samson wants to take pleasure in the belly of the torn lion, without telling his parents. There is a common feature between this tearing and defloration, that other tearing that gives pleasure. Samson was not willing to tell his bride the secret. This can be interpreted as follows: It is Samson who, in the riddle, relates pleasure to strength; but he wants that connection to be kept a secret from others. In spite of what he seems to think, the secret is in fact kept. For the answer, though correct, is extremely common and leaves out the most interesting detail. It only mentions the cliché: strong as a lion, sweet as honey. What is left out is exactly this: that Samson's strength leads to pleasure; that the strong lion must be torn before his (or her) belly delivers pleasure. This connection between physical strength and sexual pleasure, and the violence involved, which is Samson's real secret, must have sounded too familiar to the recipients to be a problem worth mentioning. There was no explanation needed here, the meanings were naturalized "naturally."

There is, however, a logic which relates the riddle to its answer at an unconscious level. That is the relation between the individual or personal and the uncommon on the one hand, and on the other hand, the general and the commonplace. The meaning that the whole riddle-and-answer game represents for Samson, and for the recipients, is then as follows:



This complex shows that for Samson there is a problem that impedes his socializing. He cannot make the transition from highly individual, personal experience to its intersubjective acknowledgment/recognition.

The interpretation of these details is based on yet another connection. Comparing the features of the lion to those of the bride, there is a striking resemblance.

character	LION	BRIDE (specification)
feature		
tearable	+	+ (hymen)
sweet in belly	+	+ (sex)
detached from parents	+	+ (alien tribe)
elsewhere	+	+ (Timnath)
strong	+	?

The number of common features makes it plausible to extend the resemblance to the last feature too. Then the identity of the "strong one" becomes problematic. Who is the strong one in the riddle? who in the answer? Not necessarily the same person. Intimidated by woman's mystery, Samson fears her as too strong. So strong, that he needs his own enormous strength to acquire her honey.

The riddle-answer game and Samson's failing effort to keep his secret lead to the conclusion that the riddle was too pretentious. In spite of his successful practice with the lion, Samson is not yet fully capable of tearing his bride's hymen. For he offered his honey to his parents, signifying that way that his sexuality was still too much oriented to his parents. Instead of answering a riddle, as it becomes a young man who is to be initiated into the secret of sexuality, he asks one.

One formal feature of the game raises a problem of interpretation for Naastepad. The riddle has the form of a declarative sentence, while the answer has the form of a question. This inversion of the usual forms is interpreted by this recipient as proof of the companions' immaturity: they can only ask questions, being not yet capable of answering. This argument can only hold if it also holds for Samson, that is, if he too is still immature. This contradicts his supposed superiority and is therefore repressed by the recipient. Considering the symbolic meaning of asking riddles, I assume that the form of the sentences should be taken as a sign in both cases. After Samson's too pretentious asking, he is taken aback and corrected by the companions. Since they are the woman's relatives, the initiative is theirs. They show him how his semiotic knowledge is lacking, and why his victory over the lion is not yet sufficient, not definite.

What exactly has happened between the people at the wedding? The real Event behind these fictive events seems to be the destruction of Samson's strength by publicity. As soon as it is

known, he is powerless. I will suggest later on, that what is symbolized here is the origin of the so-called *double moral*, according to which man has sexual freedom while woman has to stay strictly monogamous. In this moral, then, fear of knowledge about man's sexual performance could very well lead to the fear of its becoming banal, a fear that would make man feel so insecure that it would destroy his "strength."

The Second Woman. The second relation between Samson and a woman is represented very briefly. The limited interest of this woman is symbolized by her anonymity. The former woman was "his (legal) wife," this one is a prostitute. Thus the two extremes on the scale of values woman can derive from her relation to man, are represented. The sequel is interesting in the light of Freud's remarks on the taboo of virginity. If respectable women make men impotent, the prostitute, because she claims no respect, can cure the problem. I will not dwell on the social implications of this separation between affection/respect and sex, obvious but no less disastrous. It seems to appeal to Naastepad. He celebrates her continuous sexual availability and therefore finds her an example to the Philistine bride who "refused" Samson. VdH does not describe the woman, only her house, as "a dangerous place"; AdV indicates her as "a woman Samson knew" and EK as "a bad woman." The two women have not only anonymity in common, but also adultery. The bride committed it symbolically, by betraying the secret of Samson's alleged strength. The prostitute is defined by it. The bride did it for safety, but indirectly for money; the companions' money. The prostitute is defined by doing it for money. The bride was committed to her blood-relations; the prostitute is defined by a complete lack of commitment, lack of relations.

Again, there is a secret, betrayed to the men: "And it was told to the Gazites" (16:2). The betrayer is not mentioned. It is plausible to assume that it is the prostitute. Samson was in her house, she knows the secret. This leads to yet another point the women have in common. In both cases, Samson goes to the other's house. Samson does not bring his women into his own house, but settles in theirs. This direction points to a further effort of emancipation from his family; at the same time, however, it makes him vulnerable.

The betrayal, the danger, the ambush: it all takes place during the night of love. Two reasons can be alleged for the anonymity of the traitor. The most superficial reason is the prostitute's base position. As a person lacking respect, she would be denied the important narrative positions of actantial subject and narrator. A second reason could be the self-evidence of the culprit's identity: woman. Symbolically, however, the traitor could be Samson himself. He betrays himself by choosing once again a foreign woman, he again

dares try to have sex without his parents' consent. Whoever actually betrays him, the fact is that love makes Samson vulnerable, weak. These symbolic identifications between Samson and woman, as subjects of guilt, here, as subjects of violence, in the episode with the lion, make Samson's subjective position, as it is expressed in his sexual identity, more and more problematic.

This time too, the knowledge, the publication of Samson's sexual activities seems to destroy his strength. Again, the only way to recover it is to leave the woman prematurely. This recovery of his strength is symbolized by the tearing up of the city gates. Thereby, at least symbolically, the woman is broken open. Then, the city-woman is not dangerous anymore. The symbolic equivalence of woman and city has been evident since Freud; in the Bible the symbol occurs extensively. Jerusalem is often referred to as a woman, often a prostitute. Breaking the city gates is a rehearsal of the crucial scene in the temple when Samson breaks the pillars. In order to be able to guarantee his safety with women, he had to leave her prematurely. So he still does not know the answer to the companions' question: "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?"

3. Samson and Delilah

Man wird offenbar in die Irre geführt, wenn man diese Zeichen nach ihrem Bilderwert anstatt nach ihrer Zeichenbeziehung lesen wollte.
Sigmund Freud

Samson falls in love for the third time. This third woman does not have a specified social status: she is not the respectable wife, nor the despicable prostitute. But she has a *name*. Contrary to tradition, she is not presented as somebody's daughter. She is just Delilah, a woman that Samson loves. This suggests that Samson is at least capable of loving a woman for herself. According to most commentaries, she is also a Philistine, so a foreigner. She possesses her own house, and she is in contact with the Philistine chiefs. So, though she is not defined in relation to men, she seems to be well-to-do.

The relation between Samson and Delilah is not commented upon. Samson fell in love with her. More details are not called for. Samson seems mature for love, for the definite separation from his parents. The ellipsis, the striking silence about the nature of the relationship, seems to represent its self-evidence. But Samson is a Nazirite, devoted to God, and that pact is not that easily dealt with. The ellipsis might as well represent the repression of a problem: Samson in love with Delilah is in conflict with Samson bound to God.

The Philistines take action as soon as they find out that Samson is in town. They offer Delilah money to find the secret of Samson's

strength. She accepts their deal and begins her efforts. Now Delilah has some traits in common with the two previous women. With the bride she shares a willingness to make a deal with her fellow countrymen, who want to destroy Samson. With the second woman, the prostitute, she shares the motive of money. In fact the riddle of Samson's strength is repeated, symbolically signified the first time, explicitly now. The difference is in the actantial subject: the first time Samson took the initiative of asking the riddle; this time it is his enemies. They have an idea where to look for the answer: again they turn to the woman.

Delilah's acceptance of the trade is *the* shocking detail in this episode. It gives evidence of Delilah's wickedness, and, through a comfortable generalization, of woman's unreliability. The documents are most explicit. In the children's Bibles, Delilah is immediately presented as a bad woman. She is beautiful (how would the hero fall in love with her otherwise?) but incapable of love (EB). She is false (VdH), a cheat (VdH), a hypocrite pretending love (AdV). Her likeness with the prostitute is stressed: she has many lovers (EB), is engaged to many men (EB) and greedy (VdH, AdV); she is a slut (EB). Naastepad insists on Delilah's desirability, her beauty, and begins by defending Samson's stupidity in falling into her trap: she is simply irresistible (64) and behaves concomitantly. She provokes him with *coquetterie*, pretending to refuse him and thus exciting him all the more (64). Needless to say, the text does not give the slightest information to justify these assumptions. No judgment is pronounced, but the ellipsis, the simple mention of Samson's falling in love without any particular reason, makes naturalization problematic. Additions have to be made, and they have to be negative for Delilah and defensive for Samson. But the actantial initiative, his power as a subject, is thus removed from him.

The resemblance between Delilah and the prostitute is, however, merely superficial in the text. It is just obvious enough to set the said naturalization in motion. It might even be motivated by that simple rhetorical strategy. On closer inspection, there is even an opposition: A prostitute receives money for her love, therefore the love must be without commitment. However, Delilah was already committed when she was asked to *give up* love for money. A second difference concerns social status. We have seen that with a name of her own, in possession of a house, and associating with high-placed people, she could be considered a prototype of the socially successful, independent woman. Her deal with the chiefs looks more like a business-transaction than as a low betrayal. It is a fact that the issue is rather lugubrious, but in time of war, and it is such a time, no blame is attached to patriotism. Delilah is just doing what she can do to help her tribe and she makes enough money out of it to preserve her financial independence. Only JK gives patriotism as a possible

motive. Naastepad obviously is in trouble here. He has to blame Delilah in order to defend Samson, but at the same time she has to be worth his love. Samson's subjective wholeness depends, in his eyes, on Delilah's value.

Concentrating his commentary on the love-theme, this recipient simply ignores the relation between Delilah and the chiefs. He warns against moralistic response. The reason for this striking commentary is that he interprets the whole episode as a lesson about love, presenting Samson as an expert (strength is for Naastepad as well as for the hero proof of good love-making) and Delilah as a perfect because desirable woman. Several times, this interpretation enforces oblique reasoning on him. In order to deal with the bribery, for example, he argues: "The text of this chapter does not especially aim at teaching us how deceitful the sly seductions of woman can be. *For that we know already by other sources, if experience has not taught it to us yet*" (64; italics mine). In this way, the recipient enables himself to both preserve the stress on sex, and the hero's heroism, and naturalize Delilah's guilt even stronger than the others do. For not only is woman in general held responsible for what happens, but her wickedness is presented as self-evident, beyond discussion, even beyond particularization, and apparently not very important. Wicked by nature, woman is thus denied participation in the narrative events.

The First Attempt. Delilah asks Samson where his strength is located. Her question is surprisingly outspoken. She wants to know how he can be mastered. The Hebrew verb used here, significantly, is the verb which is also used in the sense of to *rape*. (For an analysis of the story of the rape of Tamar by Amnon in 2 Sam. 13, see Fokkelman 1981 ch. V). Samson's reply is: "If they bind me [. . .]." The third person pronoun indicates clearly that Samson has understood the goal of Delilah's question. He knows perfectly well that she is not talking about some love-game but about his being mastered by the other, the enemy. None of the recipients account for this frankness, and the consequences it implies as to Samson's responsibility as a subject (of betrayal).

Samson replies with a lie. In this lie, however, he uncovers more of himself than we might think. He says: "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings not yet dry, then I shall become as weak as any other man" (16:7). He still conceals in this answer the exact location of his strength, but he does reveal its exceptional nature. That strength will be destroyed as soon as the other finds out how relative and restricted it is.

Bowstrings are organic binders. Their structure is simple, in opposition to the binder Samson will mention the second time. Samson insists that the strings must be fresh. Delilah now binds

Samson with fresh bowstrings. There are Philistines in her room. Clearly, Delilah cannot bind Samson unless he is asleep. That reminds us of the Gaza episode, and its meaning: love makes weak. Delilah wakes Samson up with the words, which are to be taken literally: "The Philistines are on you, Samson," words that she will repeat three more times. Here again, Delilah makes not the slightest attempt to conceal her betrayal. Samson is lucky that he had lied to her. He can unlink himself easily. We could even say: he had not yet completely surrendered to love, so that he can still unbind the engagement; at least that is how Delilah will reproach him later.

The Second Attempt. In 16:10 Delilah indeed blames Samson. "You have been laughing at me and telling me lies." The main reproach is that he has not taken her seriously, and Delilah feels hurt. Hearing such a reproach would suggest that Samson has at least been unfaithful to her, or disdained her love. The only crime he is guilty of is trying to save his life responding to betrayal by lying. He does not, however, allege that to his defense.

This leads to one of the reading problems derived from the narratological problems. Why does Samson refrain from defending himself against such unjust reproaches? Why does he not attack Delilah in turn, just as the subsequent readers do? In narratological terms: why does he not take the initiative of speech? Why does the text not present his view of the events, while he is the hero? Significantly, none of the recipients notice a problem here. For the moment, there is but one plausible explanation, that is, silence signifies consent. Samson says nothing because he has nothing to say, no reproach. His vision is not given because it has been given, in that of Delilah.

Samson's reply to Delilah's renewed question for the source of his strength is almost a repetition of his first reply. Again a new, unused binder is needed, this time ropes. Again he stresses that, when the appropriate binder is used, he will be weak "like any other man." Delilah believes him. That means that she must be sensitive to the difference between the two binders: simple and complex. The intertwined rope suggests a bond between the constituents that is not easy to loose. The meaning of these details is not difficult to see. The new, the unused is related to virginity. It is hardly likely that this independent and desirable woman is a virgin. Who is, then? Indeed, Samson has paid a visit to the prostitute in Gaza — a visit that was, however, prematurely interrupted — and he is already involved with Delilah, but somehow, according to the logic of metonymia, he must be virginal. How? The link with the binder's symbolic meaning is easy to establish.

Binders allow bonds. Samson's virginity could then be related to his impotence in emotional involvement. This interpretation is

confirmed by further events. The bowstrings were insufficient because of their simple structure. The rope symbolizes both in its feature of binder and in its structure as such, the intertwining of love that is not only sexual, a symbol that we recognize from other cultures (e.g., the Indian snake *-metuna*, the lovers-snake gods with intertwined tails). The shift from bowstrings to rope indicates a progress in Samson's emotional development. Therefore, Delilah believes him.

The Third Attempt. The third time she succeeds. Third time — success is a deeply rooted symbol found in the Bible as well as in other sources. An instance is presented in II Sam. 9 and II Sam. 14: 5–11, analysed by Fokkelman (1981, ch. II and VI). The number three has different symbolic meanings, two of which may be interesting here. Bettelheim (1976) explains it as the position of the child in the nuclear family. A less specific but related meaning is completeness in general. According to this symbolism, the third attempt should succeed. This is not the case. Or is it, in some sense?

Delilah makes the same reproaches to Samson as she did the previous time. Again Samson says nothing to his defense, nothing to blame Delilah. Again he lies. This time his answer is: "If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web" (16:13). This answer is still a lie, but it is closer to the truth. The first striking detail is the use of the second person pronoun, making the discursive situation a personal one (Benveniste 1966, Tamir 1976). Both lovers are aware that the issue of the struggle is Samson's extradition to the Philistines. The shift from impersonal to personal language points to an awareness, on another level of consciousness, that the relationship with Delilah is the "real issue" at stake. Will she be able to bind him, and so help him to overcome his reserved attitude toward a complete relationship? Let us take a look at the binder.

The binders show a progression, not only in their capacity of binding, but also in the complexity of their symbolic force. *Seven* is the number representing fullness in a variety of cultures. Locks (the Hebrew specifies that the locks are tressed) consist of hair; it is possible to say that they have a phallic form. Weaving is a stronger way of holding things together than binding; stronger because more complex. The weaving loom is traditionally a metonymical symbol of woman. It points to domestic labor, family life and spatial confinement.

This symbol can be analysed into a psychoanalytical and a social meaning. Socially speaking, the loom represents private life, as opposed to social life. Psychoanalysis allows us to think of the long hair of woman. There are fairy tales in which women weave her own hair. Integrating both meanings we might suggest the following interpretation: Traditionally, woman is the master-subject indoors,

man in society. In such a view it becomes understandable, that man is afraid of being bound too long, too definitely, to private life. For many men work is as safe a harbor as the private binding attachment. Fear of emotional attachment because it means imprisonment can make such a man reserved. Hair is often considered a constitutive feature of woman's sex-appeal (Baudelaire and Mallarmé, both in their own symbolic network, demonstrate the ambivalence of this appeal, and Freud explains it). The web comes, then, close to Delilah's hair. The weaving represents the interlacing of the hair of both lovers during sleep.

These interpretations, which could be hazardous if there were not such a rich tradition of symbolism of this kind, make plausible the assumption that Samson is expressing his own fears. Is hair the attraction of woman, so much so that it can entangle one? Freud implied the truth of this idea in comparing pubic hair to the vagina, as a representation of the dangers of too engaging a love: the *vagina dentata*, that fantasmatic horror for those men who have a fear of losing their penis and, synecdochically, their selves. On its social side, the psychoanalytical meaning includes the trap of the permanent relationship that imprisons the victim. The traditional symbolism: city-house-room-vagina receives in this tale an absolutely renewed, concrete force.

Again, however, there is uncertainty about the subjects. Delilah's hair has been brought to the fore, in the loom, as a symbol of her dangerous attraction. But the tale is about Samson's hair. The reader who knows the tale is already aware that his hair is the source of his strength, a strength that seems to be connected with masculinity. *Samson and Delilah resemble each other*: she is feminine and dangerous, because of an engaging attraction; he is masculine and dangerous, because of a tearing strength; and both of these traits are located in the hair. According to Freud, the cutting of hair is a symbol of castration, and one look at the middle-aged gentleman who fears that he will no longer be taken seriously in sexual matters because of his receding hairline shows the social implications of this psychoanalytical symbolism. The Nazirite vow relates the growing of hair to abstinence. In that vow, the fear of castration receives a symbolic expression.

The forbidden razor comes very close now. So close, that we can safely say that Samson has indeed betrayed his secret already. He senses it himself, for he does not finish his sentence. The translators of the Jerusalem Bible edition have neglected this sign (or repressed it) for they finish the sentence that is incomplete in Hebrew. The children's Bibles also do so. Naastepad, however, carefully translating from the Hebrew, notices the incompleteness of the sentence, and significantly explains it as a sign of *Delilah's* impatience. That interpretation shows that this recipient is sensitive to the similarity

between the two protagonists; he even interchanges them. Samson is speaking, not Delilah. Her supposed impatience is not explained any further, but the author is aware of the confessional nature of the lock-symbol, since he finishes: "The crucial element is now introduced. Death is imminent" (69). So does the third time do the trick? Samson's surrender to woman is symbolized as unavoidable, experienced as it is as imprisonment in the *vagina dentata*, private life, love. That love is symbolized this way, signifies that Samson's attitude toward it is still very ambivalent. He surrenders, but reluctantly. For Samson the tearer is himself a torn man.

The Fourth Attempt. Returning to the initial questions, we may again ask: why does Samson give the crucial information, aware as he must be of the use Delilah will make of it? This reading problem is related to the narratological question of the actantial subject: who is, in this episode, the subject, who the *destinateur*? If we attribute the actantial subjectivity to Delilah, her object is the acquisition of the desired information. Attribution of the *destinateur* function is then not self-evident. A theoretical problem inherent to this actant is the difference in interpretation it allows. Between the incentive at the beginning of the fabula and the *arbiter* at the end, there is an enormous difference. Delilah's incentive is the Philistine proposition, the *arbiter* is Samson himself. For he is the only one who knows the secret, and Delilah's success depends on him. This problem sheds a different light on Delilah's narrative program. She remains the subject of this episode, but as such she is, in the fabula as a whole, only the executor of a struggle between two male forces. Her function is to bring those two together.

This interpretation is not wholly satisfactory. The Philistines are uncircumcised men, and as such they represent impurity. As blood-relations of all Samson's sexual partners, they represent pleasure as well, the pleasure that was until now represented by women only. This link between women and the uncircumcised will turn out to have a specific meaning. The likeness is stressed in the name: "Philistine" means "undifferentiated."

Meanwhile Delilah feels deceived. She does not only reproach Samson that he does not take her seriously. She blames him for not loving her. "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?" We recognize this reproach, Samson's bride harrassed him with the same one. It is not absolutely new in this case either, if we realize, along with Lacan, that "toute demande est demande d'amour" (all demand is demand for love). Love, in this view, has two features: it is full, whole, absolute, and it is surrender.

For several days Delilah harrasses Samson with her demand for full surrender. Samson says nothing. His heart shrinks, "his soul was shortened unto death" (16:16). This very pointed expression is to

be taken in all its strength. Samson is in mortal danger. What exactly is the danger? Delilah's demand, her conception of love, scares him. Psychoanalytically, the demand for total surrender inspires the fear of being completely absorbed, swallowed. That fear has already been symbolized in the loom.

Rank (1924) explains that fear by the birth-trauma. This explanation allows us to account for the ambivalence of the fear too. For the fantasma of the return to the womb is also attractive. The fear, then, applies to the inevitable new separation that is to follow the return. Escape from woman's vagina, room, house, city is also a way of keeping ahead of fate.

Socially, Delilah's conception of love is the traditionally feminine one. It is woman who is supposed to surrender to man. Samson knows very well that the surrender demanded is to the Philistines. This attracts attention to the unclear differentiation of sexes: the Philistines are men. So much ambivalence places Samson in an as yet psychologically impossible situation. As we have seen, it was very difficult for him to actualize his heterosexuality. He thought he had reached maturity with Delilah. Now new ambivalent tendencies, new drives, new aspects come to the fore. Samson has to surrender if he wants to love, but to whom or to what? Samson is so troubled because he is confronted with a split in his self. What he knows but comfortably keeps unconscious, thanks to the fact that "the story is a revelation and a concealment at once" (Mooij 1975:93) is simply not explicit enough for the Other. Samson's problem is the problem of language.

There is an unspannable gap between the ego and the other. That gap is symbolized in numbers. He has spoken three times, and thus attained completeness. For Delilah, who represents the Other, a fourth time is needed in which it is necessary that unconscious conflicts, even if destructive, be made explicit. Three times for Samson, four times for the Other. The trinity of the nuclear family is sacrificed to the alienating relationship with the other, the fourth person. Only then can man attain maturity. The myth of Samson symbolizes the entry into the symbolic order.

Samson's definite answer displays a few significant motives. I quote the passage in full: "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (16:17).

The surrender of "all his heart" (16:18) starts with the mention of the razor. That instrument of castration is the fatal weapon. What is needed is not an increasingly stronger tie but the opposite, absolute separation. The mention of the Nazirite vow points to the vow of purity of this man devoted to God. The vow holds "from my mother's womb." Samson himself relates these details to the already

mentioned relative nature of his strength. Without his seven (phallic) locks he is weak, like any other man. Consequently, *with* these locks he has a very special relationship with God, based on purity. But this relationship is crossed by another one: with this lock he is also bound to woman. Without locks, there remains very little of his masculine force. What have these two motives to do with one another?

First there is the question of Delilah's belief. Three times she has been cheated. Then the text continues: "And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart" (16:18). The verb *to see* is important, since it thematizes focalization. Delilah has insight into the nature of Samson's love. She has seen something that she had not seen the third time. The third time Samson had, however, mentioned all the crucial elements: the link with hair, fear of bonds, fear of woman. One element was still lacking which is now mentioned. That is the mother's womb. This new element shows her the link between haircutting, powerlessness and becoming like any other man. For Samson, she sees, it is not an even tighter bond with woman that helps him out of his problem, but the separation of a bond the precise nature of which is not yet quite clear, but which has to do with the mother's womb, castration and the Nazirite vow.

4. Samson's Death

and he did grind in the prison house (Judges 16:21)

Samson knows by experience that Delilah betrays him. Nevertheless, he falls asleep quietly, "on her knees," an expression in Hebrew that also allows the translation "between her knees." This attitude on Delilah's lap shows that he has completely surrendered to her indeed. The attitude suggests in the first place rest after love-making.

Again, the castrator is embodied in knowledge of the secret. This castration-by-intersubjectivity is now directly personified by the Philistines in the room. Looking back at the wedding, we notice the same motifs, represented more explicitly this time. The woman betrays Samson's secret to her male blood relations, and thus saps his special strength. By cutting off his locks, the temporary weakness of the penis is made definite.

Samson's attitude on/between Delilah's knees with his hair next to her pubic hair has still another meaning. When Samson is awakened by Delilah with the words "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," he says that again God will help him escape like the previous times. This confidence, this absolute absence of guilt feelings, is surprising. Samson knows very well that this time he has betrayed his secret. He can be sure that when he wakes up, he will find himself shaved, like he was bound and woven earlier. Still, he has gone to sleep with Delilah, and he still expresses his confidence in God. The

solution the recipients chose is his lack of intelligence. There is not the slightest indication in the text that Samson is stupid, but this naturalization is understandable in cultures where ideology prescribes an opposition between nature and culture — strength and intelligence for men, beauty and intelligence for women. If Samson does not feel guilty, however, if he does not take into consideration that on his side the pact has been broken, this is, within the fabula, the truth, then he is not guilty, and then he *is* entitled to God's help. How is that possible?

The expression "on/between the knees" (of a woman) is used in other places in the Bible. In *Genesis* 30:3, Rachel, who, like Samson's mother, was initially sterile, says to her husband Jacob: "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her."

This quotation shows two things. The expression is related to childbirth. Women gave birth on their knees, midwives are said to hold women on their knees. Secondly, it proves that the expression can be used symbolically. If the maid will give birth, that delivery will be symbolically Rachel's and it will enforce her position. Use of the expression in the crucial scene of the Samson-tale gives the key to the interpretation of Samson's strange confidence in God. He *is* innocent. We now remember the words he uttered when betraying his secret: "from my mother's womb." This too has to be taken textually. *From* means *after* birth, not before, nor during. Picturing the character Samson at the moment of the haircutting, he displays a strange likeness to a baby: he is bald, weak, sleeping, speechless, and he is resting on/between the knees of the one woman in the story who is defined in relation to him, not to others. He wakes up *after* the haircutting. It is also possible to say: he is born after the haircutting. This is acceptable in the framework of the psychoanalytic theory of the birth-trauma and the fantasma of the rebirth.

Reacting to Freud's remarks on the subject, Rank devoted a book to the birth-trauma as early as 1924. The first feature of birth is radical separation. This is related to the solution of Samson's secret: no bond is strong enough, separation is needed. The traumatic experience of this fundamental event can lead to different consequences, in which fear, desire and repression are combined. Fear to be swallowed again, which would necessitate a renewal of the traumatic separation. Desire of being adopted again in the safe and warm womb. Fear of being stuck there. This fear and this desire are often intermingled inextricably. Fear signifies desire as desire signifies fear. Repression easily leads to repression of the role of woman in the event, to minimizing it, or to trying to take away in other fields the power she apparently has over human reproduction. Rank states it explicitly: repression of the birth trauma leads to oppression of women.

An explanation of Samson's inward peace, his confidence in God and his acceptance of Delilah's betrayal is now available. Delilah has not betrayed him. She has helped him to be reborn. The bond with God was a symbiotic one: God is part of the self. This close bond between Samson and his own self is what he wanted to escape from. Therefore, he tried to live with women. Woman represents in this case the Other who gives access to the symbolic order. Lacan (1966:445) stresses the social, the intersubjective and also, the pre-existent and hence impersonal of the symbolic order. "C'est à l'énormité de cet ordre à quoi nous sommes, si l'on peut dire, nés une seconde fois [. . .]: soit l'ordre symbolique constitué par le langage, et le moment du discours universel concret." (It is to the enormity of that order that we are, so to say, born a second time [. . .] that is, the symbolic order of language, and the moment of concrete universal discourse.)

This relativization of the romantic myth of the individual subject helps to insert Samson's mythical but secret strength into a wider problem. The symbolic order is intersubjective, it enables one, but also forces one, to go outside oneself. Lacan speaks of a *birth* into the symbolic order, a rebirth. We have already noticed how Delilah's being other, being the Other, forced Samson to complete the pseudo-completeness of the nuclear family with a fourth position, a shift that entailed his making the unconscious conscious. The third time, his expression was self-expression, not an intersubjective story: it was still too exclusively indexical and hence too strongly *bound* (sic) to himself as a unique subject. The rebirth in Delilah's lap is not only a return to the mother's womb. It is a return that cuts off wrong choices and enables him to begin anew. *Reculer pour mieux sauter*. However, it still is a return, a regression. The paradox, or the third riddle of this text, is the result of this move. Samson's rebirth leads to imprisonment and powerlessness, shortsightedness, symbolized in his blinding, and womanlessness. What goal has he then reached?

A return to Samson's sexual problems is required. His sexual power was in its secret; knowledge destroyed it. The revelation makes him impotent, powerless, *banal*. The banal is unacceptable for this proud man. He is like some men who try to compensate their violent envy of childbirth by social and sexual boasting. But if the common is unacceptable, social life is impossible. Intersubjectivity is only possible thanks to *shared* knowledge. A solution to this seemingly impossible dilemma could be the absolute possession of the social order. As long as woman is excluded from the common, it is not common.

This explains the *double standard*. The relativity of man's sexual performance is to be kept a secret. Monogamy for women is the only way to reach this. The same holds for social life. Man's performances in public life may be common, as long as his wife overestimates

them. The more she is confined to the house, the greater the chance of success.

One performance is inaccessible to man: childbirth. *The fantasma*, the ideal hidden behind so much ambition is that man gives birth to a child. This is possible, however, on a symbolic level. For a man like Samson, who constantly has to balance his relationships with women against his pact with himself-God, rebirth is not satisfying enough. What he seeks is to coincide, while giving birth himself, with the child being born: *autogenesis*. What he would perform then would be the impossible but highly desirable ideal of making a harmonious whole of the conflicts of life. To stay in himself *and* go out; to bring the symbolic order into the imaginary order; to make a symbiosis out of separation. Clearly, the rebirth on Delilah's lap is not a fulfillment of this ideal. It is only a phase in it.

Turning, confined, blinded, Samson also seems deprived of women. His features are now, however, not so much those of a newborn baby as those of a not yet born foetus. The woman is not excluded but including, be it symbolically.

The last scene, Samson's death, provides a solution for the remaining problems. His hair has grown again. No Philistine has thought to keeping him bald. In this interpretation it is not necessary to explain this omission by the sledgehammer argument of Philistine stupidity, as Naastepad does. They simply cannot reach him, since he is not yet born. And they do not find it necessary, since Samson's hair is no longer related to heterosexuality. Meanwhile, his strength comes back, but it is a different strength. The strength he is now saving up, will not be used with woman ("out of the eater came forth meat") but against her.

Samson's last, third, real and symbolically ideal birth is his death. For note: He is standing between two pillars. From the perspective of a newborn child, the motherly thighs, several times larger than the baby's head, must be enormous. During birth, the opening between the thigh is small, too small, oppressively tight. Samson corrects the female birthgiving: he enforces a larger gap. In the process, the pillar-thighs break. This, as the text explicitly states, is Samson's greatest *tour de force*. He has found a better solution to the birth-trauma than anybody else. He takes revenge, breaking the thighs and killing the impure Philistines with it. He outdoes woman, making the gap acceptably large. Not only does he kill the woman and with her, her people; he also makes her superfluous. Naastepad too establishes a link between the temple and the woman. Determined as he is to idealize Samson, he interprets the final scene as union with the beloved woman (72). He fails to explain, however, how this interpretation can be accommodated to his previous interpretations which contradict it. Nor does he explain where the woman is.

Samson has outdone and undone woman. No wonder he dies

satisfied. No wonder that, after his long travels to alien women, he is now fetched back by his male blood relatives. "Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down and took him." Now he is allowed into the country of the circumcised, the pure, the lust-free. Now the pact with God, the male principle, has finally been realized.

5. Who is Samson?

Samson is insecure in his sexuality.

- he is conceived without sex;
- he moves into the house of a woman as often as three times;
- he keeps his masculine sexuality a secret;
- his sexual power is in his hair, a symbol of female appeal;
- he has a special pact with the male God, actualized in a vow of purity;
- he has no children;
- his love is defined according to the feminine principle of surrender;
- his end is without woman.

One possible interpretation of this portrait could be that Samson takes an extremely long time to fight the struggle that any man has to fight between the two sides of the bisexual personality. His final choice for an exclusive relation to men attains its climax at the very moment of the womanless birth, therefore it is attained in relation to the feminine. His choice is a negative one: he chooses for the masculine *against* women.

Fear and desire of return to the mother's womb leads to a strong death-drive. Death is, in this view, an ultimate and definitive return to the mother (earth). This desire-fear complex is crossed by a struggle between active and passive impulses. For this struggle too, Samson's death offers an appropriate solution. He dies actively by letting himself be captured passively. His passive tendency, symbolized by the full surrender he allows others to demand of him, is not resisted; he opposes it by first living it out completely. It is only after having been completely reduced to passivity, that he is able to be really socially active. The text insists that his death is his greatest performance. It realizes his ideal of unity by combining birth and death, destruction and social benefit, in a creative regression. He not only combines contradictory impulses; he also combines the individual and the social, the public welfare. If Samson is a hero, he is so because he manages thus to overcome the initial impossibility of reconciling these opposite interests that were, for him, contradictions.

The actantial analysis referred at first sight to a struggle between two male forces, both *destinateurs*. At the beginning of the Delilah-episode, the Philistines were the incentive; at the end, Samson was the *arbiter*. The double *destinateur* weakens the position of the

subject, Samson himself, who pursues his own repressed object. That object is, then, to achieve a clear insight into his own sexuality. Delilah is now no more a subject of her own but a *destinateur*. Together with her Philistine blood relations, the uncircumcized, she represents the impure, feminine side, the side of lust. She represents the drive that put Samson on a trail that fills him with fear.

The Philistines now acquire a clear meaning. They represent the feminine. At the other side, and at the end of the episode, it is the masculine side that occupies the *arbiter*-position. That side is represented by God, in the pact with the male God. This struggle between the Philistines and God excludes Delilah as a decisive power, making her innocent by the same token. The unconscious struggle in Samson himself limits the number of actantially functional actors even more. God may be interpreted as an aspect of Samson's personality. This way, Samson's circle continually narrows. Indeed, he ends up in total solitude, confronted with himself alone: turning around in prison. It is only after he has been locked up long enough for his hair to grow back that he is "purified" enough to lend his Naziritehood a personal content. In the pact with God, in his choice for the exclusively masculine, he finds the strength to enforce autogenesis.

The other narratological problems now receive explanation. Samson's view is not given, focalization is denied to him. Firstly, this is because he has no view, at least none that is clear to himself. His unconscious view is expressed by Delilah, who loses her second-subjective power since she is not an independent focalizer. She only helps him to focalize. So the "real" view is after all Samson's. Delilah holds a mirror up to him, the mirror that, according to Lacan, allows the subject to discover and thus to constitute himself.

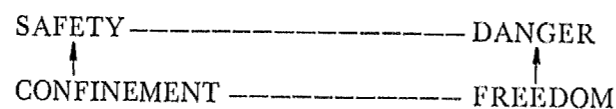
There was also a question on the textual level. Why does Samson not speak? Why is he only reacting, not taking the initiative of speech? It is again, the psychoanalytical framework that allows us to find an answer to that problem. The discursive situation is comparable to the analytical situation. In psychoanalysis there is a constant struggle between the narrative and the dramatic mode. Self-analysis is impossible because the monologue is not dramatic, since it does not enforce a partition of roles that is needed for transference. Delilah's role could ultimately be compared with the analyst's. It is only when she reproaches Samson for not feeling real love in the sense of surrender, that he realizes that surrender is what he seeks, hence what the real nature of his love is, and the anxiety that that knowledge evokes in him.

6. Samson, Subjectivity and Reality

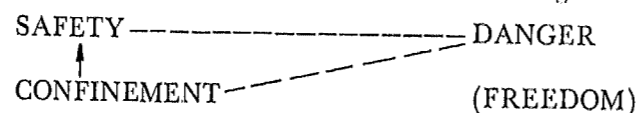
It is impossible to distinguish between truth and emotionally-charged fiction. Freud

What is now the meaning of this myth about the strongest man on earth? The recipients all insist on love as the first meaning. Naastepad does his best to see a fine, commendable love in Samson's behavior, and he skilfully circumvenes contradiction by insisting on his desire rather than his performance. Identifying Delilah and Samson, he seems sensitive to the homosexual tendencies without, of course, ever naming them. That love is the main theme is obvious. The fact that it is problematized is, however, repressed, and only apparent at the painful moments where the recipients contradict their own interpretations, deviate from the initial stand in order to save Samson's heroism.

The myth is concerned with the *problems* of love in the first place. It is the myth of anxiety. Fear of the female, the feminine attraction and impurity, fear of initiation, of the first time. Fear of the *vagina dentata*. Fear of emotional surrender, of too strong an attachment. Fear of old age and of the return to the womb, of the powerlessness of the child. Above all, fear caused by the irresistible attraction of all these things. "Redeem us from love" is the theme of this myth, a theme that we find in many texts, from feminist novels to poems written by Napoleon. These fears lead to the problematic but familiar inhibitions that make life so difficult for many of us. The emotional inhibitions are expressions of a personal, often unconscious meaning-complex that can be visualized in an incomplete semiotic square:



This diagram shows a rather frequent masculine view of woman. It is incomplete, because the diagonal disjunctions are impossible to establish. The desired freedom entails confinement, and confinement is dangerous. So a vicious triangle arises, shortcircuiting freedom:



This shortcircuit is the space where the regressive person turns around.

In the Bible traces of repressed matriarchy can be noticed (Trible 1978, Daly 1973, Ruether 1975, Bianchi and Ruether 1976, Stone 1976). In the view of the Bible, this repression is part of a progress. Samson's case is an instance of that view. His subjectivity

is problematic. At first sight, he is denied narrative positions that are involved in the transference of meaning from the text to the naturalizing reader. The weakness of the subjectivity of his antagonist, the woman, a weakness that is inherent to its derived, secondary nature, creates the margins that allow readers to fill in problematic gaps (Iser 1974), and naturalize selectively in the sense of the overall repression. The preceding interpretation may have shown that this pseudo-progress is rather a paralysing regression.

The painstaking efforts to repress the feminine is better evidence of the still surviving matriarchy than the rare positive indications. In this sense, the Samson-story is a *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach 1977, Bal 1978), an iconic sign of the tensions in the whole Bible. The creation by God the father, that drastic attempt to get rid of the creating mother, provides the repression with its justification in the mythical reality: *it has always been like that, from the beginning of time*. The invention of origins makes naturalization possible, and makes fiction real (true?).

Naturalizing the Samson tale within the reassuring isotopy of morality indeed allows one to preserve the hero's heroism. This heroism is psychologically helpful and socially necessary to deal with problems otherwise too hard to bear. The margins of the text, however, problematize, by a return of the repressed, the efficiency of the procedure. Confrontation of the narrative subjects with the myth indicates the location of semantic gaps. There is, contrary to mythical thinking, a difference between reality and fiction, and that difference is signified in fiction itself. In a rational world, man tries to accommodate to reality. In a mythical world, man simply transforms the world. If the power of woman over birth is unbearable, man creates his own symbolically possible childbirth: autogenesis, modelled on God the father, who in his creation created himself too.

Reading fiction is the attribution of an interpretant to a mimetic sign. Representation, for the reader, demands simplification and particularization, both based on recognition of the *same* and the *different*. Then, and only then, successful katharsis is possible. The kathartic process includes the establishing, by the reading subject, of a new, consistent model of the represented subject. This process develops in two phases. In a first phase, the reading subject identifies (*same*) with the represented subject₄ (siège. . .), through interpretation of the subject₂ (topic) of the text, as it is unfolded by the narrative subjects₁ (dependent on system) from the starting point (subject₃) to the end of the tale. This solidarity, in the second phase, must be replaced by an ultimately purifying desolidarization. The *genitivus objectivus* (purification of passions = to purify the passions) passes into a *genitivus separativus* (purification of passions = to be rid of passions).

The tale of Samson represents a subject₄ (support of action and

influence) that is highly unstable, dependent and de-centered. As a subject of narrative action, it is surrounded by other, mightier subjects. As a subject₂ (topic), Samson's apparent subject (love) is overruled by his unconscious one (fear of love) that leaves him powerless. As a subject₂ of the narrative process, he is a passive speaker, a failing focalizer, and thus a de-centered narrative subject₃ (starting point). This instability of the subject seems to be threatening for men, and probably, though perhaps to a less extent, for women too. It makes the recipients feel uncomfortable. Kathartic reception, then, requires a painstaking effort to integrate the elements of the dissolved subject. The readers do not manage to reach what Samson himself successfully fulfills, thanks to Delilah's therapeutic activity.

Samson's passions, the fear of *and* attraction to women, are "purified" in a first phase, when he finally reaches partial maturity with Delilah. This purification, however, concerns but one of his two passions, as it leads to an apparent acceptance of (surrender to) woman. It is replaced by the second stage at the moment of his final and only action: he gets rid of fear *and* attraction, by getting rid of woman altogether. For the reader this solution is, however, too drastic. The recipients cannot attain this katharsis, because they refuse even to get involved in the process at all, filled with fear as they prove to be at the first signs of instability. They too readily create a reassuringly consistent, unified heroic subject, at the cost of distortions (different) of the text. Sticking to a preliminary solidarity, they cannot but deny themselves the possibility of purification. Theirs is a failed katharsis: instead of getting rid of the conflicting and therefore disturbing passions, they only get rid of woman, retaining the passions.

This explains why they are attracted by a moral-religious interpretation. Under the unifying heading of *God's plan*, contradictions can be blurred and gaps filled in. But what they impose on themselves unconsciously is, then, the de-centering of their own subjectivity, in endorsing a dependency to the authority of morality. They submit to ideology. Among the four aspects of the subject, which are thus increasingly unbalanced, they stress subject₁: dependency of law.

The structure of reality in fiction has no fixed form. It takes shape, at every reading, in the margins of subjectivity. Where the responsibilities of the different subjects are problematic, meanings are unsteady. The rhetoric of subjectivity is then not oriented toward a stable and repeated naturalization, but to a seemingly self-evident though actually fully wild one, for which every reader has responsibility of his own. Text and myth do not coincide, but the text does provoke, by its very inconsistency, this *mythification*.

And repression is another word for mythification.

*Appendix: The Misunderstanding or: What Samson and Delilah Really Think**

Roles: Delilah 1: What she says (to Samson)
 Delilah 2: What she thinks (straightforward; standing behind Delilah 1)
 Samson 1: What he says (to Delilah)
 Samson 2: What he thinks (straightforward; standing behind Samson 1)

Delilah 1: Explain to me in what your great force resides, and with what you might be tied in order that one could tease you a little.

Delilah 2: Samson, what are you thinking? You are so attractive. I am desperately in love with you, but that also makes me insecure. Show me your feelings. What is going on inside you when you are so quiet? Say something.

Samson 1: If they tied me with seven fresh bowstrings which have not yet dried out, then I would grow weak like anyone else.

Samson 2: I cannot betray my secret. But it has to do with the new and the virginal. Only unique love, never experienced before, will bind me.

Delilah 1: See, you are putting me on. Tell me what would tie you.

Delilah 2: See, you are not taking me seriously. What is the use of such vague answers. You will not tell me who you really are, you are afraid of giving yourself. You prefer to play tough, to intimidate me, in order not to have to enter into a real relationship. If you can only be tied by a new love, then there must be a misunderstanding. About whom are you talking? Neither of us was a virgin when we started seeing each other. And what is the difference, *for God's sake*. Do you want to live with me, or do you only want to have a fling?

Samson 1: If they tied me with new ropes which had not been used before, then I would grow weak like others.

Samson 2: "For God's sake" . . . Girl, if you knew how sensitive a spot you just hit. I myself do not know what I want. I love you, I should like to merge into you completely, I want to experience with you something I have never felt before. The bond between us is stronger, more complex than just sexual. But how could I tell you? A man cannot say these things, can he? Women are unreliable. Once you take up with one, you will never get rid of them. If I keep disguising myself in vague allusions; I will at least keep something special for you. My secret is not particularly impressive. "For God's sake" stop. Let me fool myself by fooling you.

Delilah 1: So far you have mocked me and lied to me. Tell me, what would tie you.

* The appendix has been translated from the Dutch by Christine van Boheemen.

Delilah 2: Oh Samson, I understand. You are just afraid. That is why you don't take me seriously. You are afraid to tie your self down. On the other hand you do wish me to attach myself to you. Suppose I had an affair. That would dent your male chauvinism a bit. But do you understand what you are denying yourself this way? It is impossible to truly enjoy a relationship which is so unequal. That newness, that uniqueness which you demand from me, which would tie you, you say, cannot come from secrecy and deceit. We are already so close. That fear, that double standard does not make you happy.

Samson 1: If you weave my hair to the warp of a loom. . .

Samson 2: Jesus, what am I doing? If I finish my sentence she will know. Delilah, darling, if you bind me, if you become indispensable to me . . . no, let me stop. If I say it, if I think it, then it suddenly becomes true. Then it is suddenly certain. Why do I encourage you to make yourself indispensable? I won't be able to turn back. I don't want to, I won't, I want to remain free, oh, if only I was still a boy. I am yearning for the boy's club I belonged to when I was ten years old. The excitement, the sure sense of understanding one another without claims, without constricting ties, but excitement, innocent adventure. Women are so scary.

Delilah 1: Oh, Samson, how can you say you love me while you keep your heart in hiding? Three times already you have not taken me seriously, and refused to tell me what makes you so strong. Tell me, Samson, if you love me, tell me.

Delilah 2: Dear Samson, can't you do it? Can't you give yourself? Are you so terribly afraid? Look at me. Am I afraid of you? I understand you, but that is not enough. I understand your fear, fear of a tie, fear of a commitment, fear of sex, fear of women. But the only way to get over that is to talk. Declare yourself. I will not let you go. I cannot be satisfied with a relationship without commitment. You must choose, Samson, you must choose yourself. You are no longer a little boy who can pretend, among his friends, that women do not exist, who can imagine that all those scary witches can be made to disappear. Even if all men would get together and lock the door, even then women would still be there. Samson, what do you choose? Me or your friend, that God? Homosexuality is not a disgrace man. But I cannot help you as long as you put your head in the sand.

Samson 1: Your sadness makes me sad. I will tell you. My hair has never been cut because I have been a Nazarite dedicated to God from the moment that I came from my mother's belly. If my hair would be cut, I would lose my power. Then I would become weak like everyone else.

Samson 2: God, God help me. Help. I cannot stand this. Delilah, your sadness because of me is insupportable, because it makes the ties between us the closer. And it is especially this relationship which

scares me. Your sadness pierces me. I do not wish this fusion. Your sadness is working against you, against me. Why can't we stay together and still exist independently? (Silence) No, I see, you are right. I do not exist independently. I am part, of you or of him. I must choose. Help me. God, Delilah, help me. If you help me things will be just like before. Then I shall be child again. Then you will take all decisions for me. Because I myself cannot do so. Do you see now, do you understand what my secret was? My secret is a lack. I have never learned to be independent. That is why I am so afraid of that commitment. I must begin again. Back to where things went wrong. Oh God, let me be born again. Alone, without women, without mother. Alone.

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THE EPINICIAN SPEAKER IN PINDAR'S FIRST OLYMPIAN Toward a Model for Analyzing Character in Ancient Choral Lyric¹

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How does Pindar, fifth century B.C. composer of encomia for victors (epinicia), depict the actions of the figure of the poet in his odes? How do the depictions of this figure correspond to the actual activities of Pindar in the real world? What poetic argument is Pindar making by depicting the figure of the poet as he does?

These are some of the issues which I address in a longer treatment of the roles played and the rhetorical and linguistic devices used by what I call the Epinician (E-) speaker — the poet figure in the text, or poet-persona in the familiar phrase. In that work I distinguish social or external roles of the real poet, "Pindar," from those inscribed in the text for the E-speaker; and I analyze the language used, the enunciation, of that speaker (Rubin: in progress).

This paper lays the groundwork for a portion of my study of the E-speaker in which I develop a model for describing the actions he performs, including his speech acts. In Part One I present my method for delineating the many roles that this figure assumes. Then, in Part Two, I apply this typology of roles to both the E-speaker and

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The text I have used and to which the line numbers refer is by C. M. Bowra, ed. *Pindari Carmina* (Oxford 1947, 2nd ed.).