THE SAMSON CYCLE:

A FORM STUDY IN THE BIBLICAL EPIC

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We proceed from the insight that the Bible stems from living recitation and is intended for living recitation, that speech is its true existence, that writing ("Scripture") is only its form of preservation.

--Martin Buber[1]
(1926)

Scholars over the past century have postulated structural principles governing the creation of oral literature. The folklorists Axel Olrik[2] and Vladimir Propp[3] presented independent schemes to explain formalistic patterns in narrative folk prose. Their approach was expanded in the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss[4] and his school. The first major study on oral epic verse was done by Alfred Lord based on Serbo-Croatian heroic songs.[5] Lord's findings on the "formula" as the basis of epic style was applied to biblical poetry in two recent studies by William Whallon.[6]

The major thrust of this scholarship has been to prove the degree of stylistic and structural patterning in an art form heretofore considered "primitive" and haphazard. Whether the epic narrative is indeed governed by superorganic laws which actively control individual narrators as Olrik presented it, or whether the sequence of "functions" in the folktale is universally identical, as Propp argued, the indisputable fact remains that new criteria must be established for an understanding of oral literature as opposed to its written counterpart.

It is the purpose of this paper to apply the theories of oral composition to the biblical prose narrative, using the Samson cycle as a classic example, to determine whether or not the Hebrew Bible can be included within the category of oral literature. We use the translation of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, on which our basic assumptions are grounded, as

our point of departure for all that follows.

The significant innovation of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation[7] was to treat the text as an oral rather than as a written document. A major manifestation of this principle was the dividing of the text into "meaning-lines" each of which represented a rhythmic unity. They recognized a "colometric style" at work in the text. "It is not a question...of 'blank verse'," wrote Buber, "but rather of meaning-lines, cola, and therefore also not...of very dissimilar metres, but rather of none at all."[8] Their system advantageously eliminated the artificial distinction between biblical prose and poetry.

Using their scheme, one notices a striking resemblance to the "adding style" of epic verse. In the Serbo-Croatian epic, according to Lord, each line is a sentence unit unto itself. In each line the singer utilizes conventional embroideries and various formulas which Lord defines as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."[9] Since the singer must construct line after line in rapid succession, he therefore builds patterns of sequences which we know of as the "parallellisms" of oral style.

Whallon recognized that biblical parallelism of two or more hemstichs (conventionally referred to as "poetry") is oral-formulaic in line with Lord's thesis. Unfortunately, Whallon refused to extend the formula into the realm of prose.[10] We shall attempt, below, to identify the biblical "formula"

at work work in the Samson cycle specifically and in the biblical prose narrative in general.

Buber and Rosenzweig opposed the atomistic approach to the biblical text. They understood the Bible as "a true organic unity," a unity achieved by means of repetitions, leading words and assonances.[11]

All scholars agree that repetition is a basic characteristic of oral art. Olrik differentiated between "intensifying repetition" and "simple repetition" while he stressed that "without repetition, the sage cannot attain its fullest form."[12] For Lévi-Strauss, "repetition has as its function to make the structure of the myth apparent."[13] There is widespread agreement that tripling is the basic form of repetition at least in the Judeo-Christian cultural sphere.[14] Every aspect of the narrative can be tripled, even the attributes of a character ("The princess was beautiful, gentle and wise...").[15] The combination of three plus one, with the last being the climactic event, is also a common device.

Patterning and stylization are the sine qua non of oral literature. "This rigid stylizing of life has its own particular aesthetic value. Everything superfluous is suppressed and only the essential stands out salient and striking."[16] Using conventional themes and recognized stylistic devices, the story-teller displays his own talent in two ways: by unifying all the elements into a coherent, dramatic whole and in his manner of presentation.[17] While the written text of the

story still preserves the formalistic qualities, the second quality, that of performance, is entirely lost. Therefore, in reconstructing the original oral presentation of the tale, one must pay special attention to the oral quality of the words. It is precisely this oral quality that Buber and Rosenzweig attempted to recreate in their translation, not only in the form in which it was printed but also in their insistence that the translation (as the Hebrew text itself) was to be read aloud.

The two major unifying themes of the Samson cycle appear in the initial siuation described in Judges 13:2-3. Firstly, each episode centers around a woman. In chapter 13 the woman is Manoah's wife who finds herself in a common biblical predicament--that of the barren woman. Episode two concerns Samson's first wife (chapters 14-15), episode three deals with the Gaza whore (16:1-3), and the final episode centers on Delilah. Secondly, each of these episodes treats the theme of deception, of uncovering secrets. The dramatic tension of chapter 13 revolves around discovering the true identity of the mysterious visitor. The second episode describes Samson's famous riddle. The third, "comic relief" episode shows Samson deceiving the Philistines at Gaza, and the final one depicts Delilah's repeated attempts at discovering Samson's secret despite his repeated deceptions.

This second theme of deception is denoted throughout the

text by the leading word higgīḏ. Buber defined the Leitwort as "a word or word-stem which is ingeniously repeated within a text, a series of texts, a group of related texts..."[18] The root of higgīḏ is ngd which (in the present context) does not mean to speak but rather to reveal a truth, to recount something heretofore unknown.[19] After the angels's first appearance, Manoah's wife reports back to her husband: "I did not ask where he was from/his name he did not tell me" (wᵉ-ʾeṯ šᵉmō lōʾ higgīḏ lī). When Samson violates the first Nazirite law by killing a lion and eating the honey from its carcass, the text repeats the phrase wᵉ-lōʾ higgīḏ lᵉ-ʾaḇiḇ ū-lᵉ-ʾimmō ʾēṯ ʾašer ʿāśāh with slight variation (14:6,9). The verb is used eight times in the riddle sequence, usually in a formulaic context (vs.12-17). The most striking use of the verb, particularly in contrast to ʾāmar (to say) can be found in the dialogue between Samson and Delilah (16:8-18).

Parallel to the leading word, yāḏaʿ and lōʾ yāḏaʿ are used to emphasize the secrets that are hidden from the protagonists. Thus, at the angel's second appearance, Manoah offers him food which the latters graciously declines, and the story-teller adds: kī lōʾ yāḏaʿ Mānōaḥ kī malʾaḵ ʾAḏōnāy hūʾ (13:16). When the angel's identity is finally established, the story-teller says: ʾĀz yāḏaʿ Mānōaḥ kī malʾaḵ ʾAḏōnāy hūʾ (vs. 21). The verb reappears at two crucial points in the narrative when the hand of God is once more secretly at work, unknown to the protagonists who suffer for this lack of knowledge (14:4 and

16:20). While higgīd refers to the external secrets of the story, yādaʿ highlights the "theological" secrets that motivate the plot.

EPISODE ONE

The first time the angel appears before Manoah's wife (who clearly plays a more active role in this chapter than does her husband), he tells her that she will give birth to a son. The formulation is identical to that in Genesis 16:11 where the angel of the Lord tells Hagar that she will conceive a son. The angel's prophecy outlining the laws of the Nāzīr is repeated three times, twice by the angel himself and once by the wife. Samson"s three duties as a Nāzīr are identical to those explicated in Numbers 6:1-8: abstinence from wine, unclean food and shaving. Samson will violate each one of them, saving the vow against shaving for the end.[20]

On his first visit, the angel also informs Manoah's wife that her son "will begin to deliver Yisrael from the hand of the Philistines." This is the only mention of Samson's hidden destiny. It is concealed from him until the end of his life. The word "deliverance", however, does appear once again, in 15:18, when Samson realizes for the first time that God and God alone is the source of his strength. By repeating "deliverance" in this context, the story-teller reminds his listener that Samson's private acts of vengeance are merely the preliminaries to his ultimate act of deliverance.

In the first episode, the theme of recognition concerns

the identity of the mysterious visitor. At several points in the narrative Manoah and his wife are on the verge of discovery. They refer to him as a "man of God," "the sight of him like the sight of a meesenger of God," all of which builds up the suspense. A similar effect is achieved in Judges 6 when Gideon is visited by the angel of the Lord. When the guest reappears, Manoah asks his name, to which the angel replies: "Why now do you ask after my name/it is wondrous." The Hebrew word is pelî'. "Manoah took the goat's-kid and the leading-gift/ and offered it up (way-ya'al)on the rock-slope to HIM[21]/ He did wondrously (ū-mafli la-'aśot)/ Manoah and his wife saw it/ It came about/ when the flame went upward from the slaughter-site up to heaven/ HIS messenger went up (way-ya'al) in the flame of the slaughter-site/ Manoah and his wife saw it." The language itself reveals the angel's identity, for both the words pelî' and way-ya'al are used first in a natural context and are repeated immediately ~~thereafter with a supernatural~~ connotation.

The recognition scene is nicely dramatized by the refrain "Manoah and his wife saw it," allowing the hearer to guess for a moment what the two of them must be thinking (the verb "to see"--rā'oh--occurs in various forms some nine times in this chapter). Suddenly, Manoah understands that his guest was none other than an angel of God (vs. 21). He is struck with fear, to which his wife responds:

Lū ḥāp̄eṣ ʾAḏōnāy leʰamiṯēnū

Lō ʾ lāqaḥ miy-yāḏēnū ʿōlāh ū-minḥāh

Wᵉ-lō ʾ herʾānū ʾeṯ kol ʾēlleh

Wᵉ-ḵā-ʿēṯ lō ʾ hišmīʿānū ka-zōṯ

Her speech not only rhymes--hamiṯēnū with miy-yāḏēnū and herʾānū with hišmīʿānū--but it is also symmetrically composed with a lū-lō ʾ-wᵉ-lō ʾ-lō ʾ construction. The elements of action, sight and sound are arranged in a conscious progression.

The chapter concludes with Samson's birth: HE blessed him/ The rush-of-his-spirit began to impel him[22]/ in the camp of Dan/ between Tzora and Eshtaol." This is the first mention of the spirit of the Lord as Samson's life-giving force. It reappears as a connective device in the phrase wat-tiṣlaḥ ʿālāw rūaḥ ʾAḏōnāy at three crucial points in the narrative: when Samson is attacked by the lion (14:6), when he carries out his first act of vengeance (14:19), and before his spectacular jawbone massacre (15:14). As for the verb "to begin" (yāḥel), it occurs in only [redacted] other passages: first when Samson's mission is spelled out (13:5), [redacted] then when he regains his lost strength before the climax (16:22). Other connective devices that tie this chapter to the others are the motifs of fire and the goat's-kid. Fire reappears in 14:15, 15:5-6,14, and 16:9, and the kid in 14:6 and 15:1.

The introductory chapter contains several formulaic passages. Unlike the formula defined by Lord, the biblical one is not metrical. Nevertheless, four distinct types of formulas

can be identified: 1. a rhythmic formula, 2. a rhyming formula, 3. a grammatical formula achieved by duplication of the root, and 4. any combination of the above. Formulaic passages appear primarily in reported speeches. The rhythmic pattern of a line only becomes apparent using the Buber-Rosenzweig system of "meaning-lines."[23] The predominant use of the waw both as a conjunctive and as a verbal unit (the waw consecutive) facilitates the line division. Thus, the angel's speech to Manoah in vs. 3-4 follows a three-beat line and Manoah's prayer to God in vs. 8 contains a four-beat line.

The second type of formula, that of rhyme, has already been noted in the speech of Manoah's wife to her husband. We find the third type in Manoah's fearful cry: Mōṯ nāmūṯ kî ʾElōhîm rāʾînū (We shall die/die/for we have seen Godhead). Buber noted that "even in Hebrew itself after the biblical era--when it became a literary language--the peculiar deepening and strengthening of a verb through the juxtaposed infinitive of the same verb...has died away to limited traces."[24]

The case for rhythmic formulas in the Hebrew Bible is admittedly problematic, since we have only the Masoretic stress marks (from the 8th century C.E.) to work from. While strict rhythmic patterning, like metre, is foreign to biblical Hebrew, there can be little doubt as to the significant presence of the rhythmical form in general. Buber wrote:

> ...historical wonder can be grasped by no other form of speech save that which is rhythmically articulated, of course in

> oral expression (a basic concept which is closely associated with the old-time relation between rhythm and magic). This is sustained by the wish to retain unchanged for all time the memory of the awe-inspiring things that had come about; to which end a transmission in rhythmical form is the most favorable condition.[25]

Leaving aside the relation between rhythm and magic, we find rhythmical patterning at work in the Creation story underlining the very ordering of the universe being described (e.g. Genesis 2:1-3). Even the genealogies are rhythmically formulaic. This is a subject that demands far more study than it has received up to now. In the Samson cycle, rhythmic patterns of two, three and four-beat lines appear and reappear in the reported speeches of the narrative. The rhythmic, rhyming and grammatical formulas together with the various forms of structural parallelism are the mainstay of the biblical oral art.

EPISODE TWO --Chapter 14

Samson's first actions as an adult are highly untypical of the Nāzīr he is supposed to be. Samson announces his intention of marrying a Philistine woman. The dialogue with his parents is nicely constructed:

Samson: ʾIššāh rāʾîtî bᵉ-Timnāṯāh mib-bᵉnōṯ Pᵉlištîm/ Wᵉ-ʿattāh qᵉhū ʾōtāh lî lᵉ-ʾiššāh

Parents: Ha-ʾēn bi-bᵉnōṯ ʾaḥeḵā ū-bᵉ-ḵol ʿammî ʾiššāh...

Samson: ʾōtāh qaḥ lî kî hîʾ yāšᵉrāh bᵉ-ʿênāy

The refrain-like repetition of the formulas way-yēred Šimšōn Timnāṯāh, way-yarʾ ʾiššāh bᵉ-Timnāṯāh, ʾiššāh rāʾîtî

bᵉ-Timnāṯāh is highly effective, giving the narrative the quality of a ballad. The phrase Samson uses in reply to his parents is the leitmotif of the entire book of Judges: "She is right in my eyes." Everywhere else the phrase is used about the People of Israel who do what is right in their own eyes and what is evil in the eyes of the Lord.[26] Here Samson is doing what is proper in his own eyes by marrying a gentile woman, precisely the taboo that the Israelites were constantly transgressing. At this point the story-teller interjects: "Now his father and his mother did not know that it was from HIM/ that he was seeking an opportunity from the Philistines." The irony of the situation is that Samson himself is unaware of God's plan. He is simply acting out of compulsion. Again, as with the angel, only the hearer is let into the secret. The hero must reveal his hidden destiny the hard way, through constant trial and tribulation.

On his way down to Timnah, Samson is attacked by a lion which leads to his first deception and his first violation. He eats the honey from the carcass, a food forbidden to the Nāzīr, and does not tell (higgīḏ) his parents. Their ignorance serves to heighten the drama of his transgression. In Timnah, Samson participates in a "drinking-meal" and thereby violates the prohibition against wine-drinking.

The riddle sequence is formulaic in its entirety. ʾAhūdāhn-nāʾ lāḵem hīḏāh (Now let me riddle you a riddle) begins Samson in a line that not only rhymes but also contains a duplication

of the root. What follows is a fairly regular sequence of four-beat lines (vs. 12). Then the Philistines reply: Hūḏāh ḥīḏāṯᵉḵā wᵉ-nišmāʿennāh (Riddle your riddle and we will hear it). The riddle itself follows in the same three-beat pattern: Mē-hā-ʾōḵēl yāṣā maʾaḵāl/ ū-mē-ʿaz yāṣā māṯōq (Out of he who feeds came food/ out of the wild one that which is sweet). Scholarly explanations of this passage are as varied as they are ingenious. Tur-Sinai would have us believe that the riddle alludes to God's Torah in accordance with the imagery in Psalm 19:2-8.[27]

Regardless of where the riddle actually originated, the biblical story-teller successfully integrated it into the plot. The hearer knows that the lion incident inspired Samson's riddle. Now it is up to the Philistines to come up with the answer. On the fourth day of the feast[28] they threaten Samson's bride with burning (the fire motif) unless she succeeds in finding the solution. She cries before Samson and taunts him in a rhyming formula: Raq sᵉnēʾtanī wᵉ-lōʾ ʾahaḇtānī/ ha-ḥīḏāh ḥaḏtāh li-ḇᵉnē ʿammī/ wᵉ-lī lōʾ higgaḏtāh (You only hate me/ you do not love me/ you have riddled the riddle to the sons of my people/ and have not told it to me). She continues to torment him for the duration of the seven-day feast until Samson finally gives in, on the last day. The Philistines enhance their victory by waiting for the last possible moment, "on the seventh day before the sun had come in," to answer his riddle with one of their own: Mahm-māṯōq mid-dᵉḇaš/ ū-meh ʿaz mē-ʾarī

(What is sweeter than honey/ What wilder than the lion). The infuriated Samson retorts with a rhyming three-beat formula: Lūlē' ḥarašṯem bᵉ-ʿeglāṯī/ lō' mᵉsāṯem ḥīdāṯī (If you had not ploughed with my heifer/ you would not have gotten my riddle). The lūlē'-lō' creates a parallel structure. Samson hurries down to Ashkelon, kills thirty Philistines and returns with their linen garments, the wager involved in guessing the answer. After this first act of vengeance, Samson returns home to his father, bringing the chapter full circle.

Chapter 15 opens with Samson's visit to his wife's home. It takes place in the month of May, during the wheat harvest, the same harvest that he destroys as his second act of vengeance. Samson arrives with the gift of a kid (a unifying motif) but her father turns him away with the following formulaic speech:

'Āmōr 'āmartī
Kī śānō' sᵉnē'ṯāh———————————
Wā-'ettᵉnennāh lᵉ-mērē'ekā
Ha-lō' 'aḥōṯāh haq-qᵉtannāh ṭōvāh mimmennāh
Tᵉhī nā' lᵉkā taḥtehāh (15:2)

In the Hebrew, a rhyming effect is achieved with the -tah, -nah suffix, besides the fact that we have here a grammatical formula.

Samson carries out three acts of vengeance to retaliate against specific acts on the part of the Philistines. There is

a numerical progression from thirty killed to three hundred killed to an undetermined number killed in response to the murder of his wife. Three thousand Judahites come to arrest him in the cleft of the rock of Etam. Samson gives himself up to the Philistines and kills them to a man--one thousand persons. This follows the pattern of 3+1 with the last being the culminating event.

The episode of Samson in hiding is dramatized by the interplay of the verbs "to go up" and "to go down." In addition, the repeated use of ʿāsāh (he did) emphasizes the character of brute retaliation in the Samson-Philistine conflict. "The Philistines went up and encamped is Yehuda." The Judahites: "Why have you come up upon us?" The Philistines: "We have come up to bind Shimshon/ to do to him as he has done to us." The Judahites: "Go down" three thousand strong to arrest Samson. They ask: "What have you done to us?" to which he replies by reversing the Philistine threat: "As they have done to me/ so have I done to them." The Judahites: "We have come down to bind you..." Samson asks them to swear that they will give him up alive. They reply in a formula containing two sets of duplicated verb-roots: "No/ we want to bind you/ bind you/ but we do not want to put you to death/ put you to death." Samson, bound in two new ropes, meets the Philistines in Lehi, breaks the bonds which drop from his hands "like threads of flax which one ignites with fire" (the fire motif). He finds the fresh jawbone of an ass and kills them all.

Having carried out this murderous feat, Samson proclaims his famous song of victory, a masterful formula based on the double meaning of the word hamor:

Bi-l^{e}hī ha-hamōr

Hamōr hamōrāṯāyīm

Bi-l^{e}hī ha-hamōr

Hikkēṯī ʾelef ʾīš

(With the jawbone of an ass/ mass upon mass/ with the jawbone of an ass/ I have struck a thousand men). The effect is achieved through a short, two-beat line, assonance and the repetition of a homonym.[29]

The episode closes with the miracle at Ramat-Lehi. Samson finds himself dying of thirst and implores God's help in a formulaic prayer (15:18): "You yourself have given into your servant's hand/ this great deliverance/ and now shall I dying of thirst/ fall into the hands of the Foreskinned Ones?" In the Hebrew, each line contains three accents. The last phrase recalls, the beginning of the marriage episode, when his parents pleaded: "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your brothers and among all my people/ that you must go and take a wife/ from the Philistines/ the Foreskinned Ones?" (14:3). As we have seen, God's spirit envigorates Samson at moments of crisis. Here unlike other times, Samson turns directly to God for help and is saved by an external miracle. The water, in turn, enables his own "spirit" to revive. This episode anticipates the only other time that Samson turns to God

directly, in the moment of his climactic death.

EPISODE THREE

Chapter 16 opens with the incident at Gaza, the lightest episode in the cycle, the only one in which nobody is killed. Though the incident is not connected with the central events of Samson's life, it does serve as a subtle preamble to the last chapter. The opening line Way-yēred Šimšōn ʿAzāṯāh immediately recalls the formulaic refrain of chapter 14 way-yēred Šimšōn Timnāṯāh. Gaza is the very place he will be enslaved after his capture. While Samson is lying with the prostitute, the Philistines are waiting in ambush, just as they wait during Delilah's tests of strength. Finally, Samson's tremendous feat of unhinging the city gate from both sides and carrying it off to Hebron some forty miles away foreshadows his last feat of strength, when he grasps the two central pillars and pulls down the temple.

EPISODE FOUR

"It came about after this/ he fell in love with a woman in the valley of the Brook of Sorek/ her name was Delila." The entire narrative that follows is constructed of a sequence of repeated formulas, an example of what Olrik termed "intensifying repetition." The Philistines approach Delilah immediately after her marriage:

Patti ʾōtō ū-reʾī

Bam-meh kōḥō gāḏōl

Ū-Bam-meh nūḵal lō

Wa-ʾasarnūhū 1e-ʿannōtō (16:5)

The verb pattî (dupe) recalls 14:15 where the Philistines used the identical tactic to foil Samson. The three-beat line is sustained in the next verse where Delilah repeats the formula, varying the grammatical structure. At this point the semantic tension between ʾāmar (he said) and the leading word higgîd (told) comes into play:

Wat-tōmer Dᵉlîlāh ʾel Šimšōn
Haggîḏāhn-nāʾ lî
Bam-meh kōḥaḵā gāḏōl
Ū-ḇam-meh tēʾāsēr lᵉʿannōṯeḵā (vs. 6)

Eventually the Philistines succeed in binding and humbling him, but not until Samson undergoes three tests of strength and a fourth (3+1) that finally marks his undoing. In each case Samson replies to her request in a rhyming formula: "If one binds me with seven/ damp gut-strings/ undried/--wᵉ-hālîṯî/ wᵉ-hāyîṯî/ kᵉ-ʾaḥaḏ ha-ʾādām--I become weak/ I become like/ one of humankind." Delilah tries him out. Then the ominous refrain: "Now the ambush was sitting for her in the chamber" (vs. 9). She calls out: "Philistines upon you Shimshon" and he promptly breaks the bonds "as hempen cord bursts when it smells fire (the fire motif)/ and his strength was not made known." Delilah repeats her request in an expanded three-beat formula:

Hinnēh hēṯaltā bî
Wat-tᵉḏabbēr ʾēlay kᵉzāḇîm
ʿAttāh haggîḏāhn-nāʾ lî
Ḇam-meh tēʾāsēr (vs. 10)

This is the third version of the formula. The first dealt with Samson's powers in three lines, the second reduced it to two lines, while the third compressed it further into one line Bam-meh tē)āsēr. The third version expands the formula, however, by adding the theme of Samson's deception and by introducing rhyme. Version four (vs. 13) repeats the third with slight variation.

For a third test, Samson instructs her to weave the seven locks of his hair with a web. The number seven is repeated from the first test, but more important, the present test anticipates his final capitulation which will involve not the weaving, but the cutting of his hair. She calls out: "Philistines upon you Shimshon," he awakens from his sleep and walks off, pin, web, loom and all.

Now Delilah reverts to the same tactic used by her predecessor. The rhyme introduced in version three and repeated in four is expanded in version five. The deception theme is embellished by recalling the taunting formula of 14:16:

)Ēk tō)mar)ahabtīk
We-libbekā)ēn)ittī
Zeh šālōš pe(āmīm hētaltā bī
We-lō) higgadtāl-lī
Bam-meh kōḥakā gādōl (vs. 15)

The re-echoing of his first wife's taunt is of utmost significance to highlight the dramatic progression of the plot. While his first wife cried before him several days, of Delilah

it is said: "It came about/ when she had pressed him hard with her speeches every day/ and had tormented him/ so that his soul was cramped to death/ he told her all his heart." To the first wife he had revealed his riddle; to Delilah he reveals the riddle of his life, the source of his God-given strength.[30] The expression "cramped to death" not only foreshadows his actual demise but is also realized in a victorious manner at the very climax of the story (with the fourfold repetition of the root mwt in 16:30).

Just as Delilah's taunt is an expansion of the initial formula, so too does Samson devulge his secret by using the rhyme scheme of his refrain in expanded form:

Mōrāh lō' ʿālāh ʿal rōšī
Kī n^{e}zīr ʾElōhīm ʾanī
Mib-beṭen ʾimmī
ʾIm gullaḥtī
W^{e}-sār mimmennī kōḥī
W^{e}-hālīṯī
W^{e}-hāyīṯī
Ke-kol hā-ʾādām

Whereas the two previous versions of the formula concluded with k^{e}-ʾaḥaḏ hā-ʾādām (like one of humankind), the final version concludes with k^{e}-kol hā-ʾādām (like all of humankind). It is the kol that gives him away, so to speak. Delilah picks it up immediately: Wat-tēreʾ Dᵉlīlāh/ Kī higgīḏ lāh ʾeṯ kol libbō (Delilah saw/ that he had told her all his heart). This

phrase brackets Samson's admission and is repeated a third time for the necessary tripling effect. The leading word higgîd, embodying the external secrets of the story, no longer reappears, those secrets now having been revealed. The internal, "theological" secret, however, denoted by the phrase lō' yāda', still awaits its resolution.

Samson's seven locks of hair are cut off as he lies sleeping on Delilah's lap. Once again she calls out: "Philistines upon you Shimshon." He awakens from his sleep (just as in vs. 15) saying to himself: "I will get away as time and time again." W^e-hū' lō' yāda' kî 'Adōnāy sār mē-'ēlāw (He did not know that HE had left him).

Samson's punishment is what Mircea Eliade calls "initiation," that is, "the passing, by way of a symbolic death and resurrection from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of an adult."[31] Indeed, we are told in the very next verse: "His hair began to grow again/ as soon as it had been shaven off." The verb yāḥel is used for "begin" to recall 13:25: Wat-tāḥel rūaḥ 'Adōnāy l^epa'amō. By inference, God's rūaḥ will return to him once more. The hero will pick himself up after the fall and display his last act of courage, the only fully self-conscious action of his life. Olrik called this climactic scene a tableau scene which conveys "not a sense of the ephemeral but rather a certain quality of persistence through time."[32] The action etches itself in our memory long after the details of the story have been forgotten.

The Philistine aristocrats assemble in their temple to revel before Dagon in honor of their victory. They proclaim their thanks in a triple rhyming song (vs. 23). The populace, acting as a chorus, repeat the song in expanded form:

Nātan ʾelōhēnū
Bᵉ-yādenū
ʾEt ʾōyᵉvēnū
Wᵉ-ʾet mahariw ʾarṣēnū
Wa-ʾašer hirbāh ʾet halālēnū (vs. 24)[33]

Samson is brought in and placed between the pillars. The house is full and there are three thousand people on the roof (recall the numerical progression). Samson cries out to God in an outstandingly powerful prayer. The double equivocation of God's name, the staccato-like rhythm and the use of the supplicatory na create the desired effect:

ʾAdōnāy ʾElōhīm
Zokᵉrēnī nāʾ
Wᵉ-hazzᵉqēnī nāʾ
ʾAk hap-paʿam haz-zeh
Hā-ʾElōhīm
Wᵉ-innāqᵉmāh
Nᵉqam ʾaḥat mi-štē ʿênay
Mip-pᵉlištīm (vs. 28)

Samson grasps the two pillars, one in his right hand and one in his left--details that add to the vividness of his action as well as to the suspense. Finally, just before the final

act, he exclaims: Tāmōṯ napšī ʿim pᵉlištīm (Let my soul die/ with the Philistines). Yet no folktale can end here. There must be a dénoument, a "terminal calm" as Olrik put it. Significantly, the summary statement picks up on the word "death" in repetitive manner:

Way-yihyū ham-mēṯīm ʾašer hēmīṯ bᵉ-mōṯō

Rabbīm mē-ʾašer hēmīṯ bᵉ-hayyāw

Samson justifies his existence to himself, to his people, to God, with this act alone. At the moment he is led into Dagon's temple to testify to the Philistine victory, his destiny is unequivocally clear. He is a meesenger of God and it is to God alone that he must dedicate his last act. Taken in isolation, even this feat can be seen as a personal vendetta against the Philistines for the loss of his eyes. But the story-teller has added a new dimension to the climactic act by fusing Samson's personal vengeance, the motivating factor of his life, with his ultimate vengeance against the Philistines. The hero who was ruled by his passion dies tragically of his own free will. The vindication from all his failures comes only in death, but it is a death of epic stature, of a hero fulfilling his secret mission.

Scholars have shown that the Samson cycle is a collection of independent stories about a popular folk hero who belonged to the fund of folklore common to the sea peoples.[34] His relationship to the Greek hero Herakles has been analyzed in great depth.[35] The biblical story-teller, receiving an oral

tradition, shaped the various tales into an epic saga. This unity was achieved by the use of re-echoing rhythmic, rhyming and grammatical formulas, the tripling device, leading words and repeated tale motifs, all of which are conscious literary devices common to the oral literature of the world. The biblical text that has come down to us is certainly a compressed and carefully edited version of what must once have been a far more expansive oral style. The essentials of that style, however, are preserved in our text. It is a matter of attuning one's ear to the sounds and rhythms that make up the biblical narrative.

NOTES

1. Martin Buber, "Eine Uebersetzung der Bibel," [1926]. Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung (Berlin, 1936), p. 307. Translated by Everett Fox (as are all subsequently quoted passages from this work).
2. Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," [1928]. The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), pp. 131-141.
3. Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale [1928], trans. Laurence Scott. International Journal of American Linguistics, vol. XXIV no. 4 (1958).
4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," Myth: A Symposium, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Indiana Univ., 1965), pp. 81-106.
5. Alfred Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).
6. William Whallon, "Formulaic Poetry in the Old Testament," Comparative Literature, vol. XV no. 1 (1963), pp. 1-14; "Old Testament Poetry and Homeric Epic," Comp. Lit., vol. XVIII (1966), pp. 113-131.
7. Appeared in German as Die Schrift. The latest edition is in four volumes: Die Fuenf Buecher der Weisung, Buecher der Geschichte, Buecher der Kuendung and Die Schriftwerke. (Cologne, 1954, 1955, 1958, 1962). The translation was begun in 1925. By the time of Rosenzweig's death (Dec. 1929), the work had progressed through chapter 53 of Isaiah. The

volumes appeared year by year as they were completed. In 1930 a revised edition of the Pentateuch was published. Buber completed the entire work in Jerusalem in 1961.

8. Martin Buber, op. cit., pp. 307-308.
9. Lord, op. cit., p. 4.
10. Whallon, "Old Testament Poetry and Homeric Epic," p. 128: "Old Testament prose, too, may have derived, ultimately, from an oral tradition, but we have no reason, from either its style or the occasion of its use, to think so."
11. Buber, "Eine Hinweis fuer Bibelkurse" [1936]. Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung, p. 315.
12. Olrik, op. cit., p. 133. cf. Buber's statement: "Repetition is a deep need of human nature." "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," op. cit., p. 283.
13. Lévi-Strauss, op. cit., sec. 8.1.1.
14. Olrik called this the "Law of Three." Propp refers to tripling.

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15. Dov Noy, Mavoʾ leᵉ-siḏrūṯ ha-ʾaggadāh, ed. M. Ganan (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 14. Cf. M.W. Roth, "The Numerical Sequence X/X+1 in the Old Testament," Vetus Testamentum, vol. XII no. 3, pp. 300-311.
16. Olrik, op. cit., p. 138.
17. Propp delineates four areas in which the story-teller is free to create, op. cit., p. 102:
    1. In the choice of those functions which he omits or conversely, which he uses;
    2. In the choice of the manner in which a function is realized;

3. Absolute freedom in nomenclature and attributes of characters;

4. In the choice of linguistic means.

Cf. Lord's list of six changes that occur regularly in the art of the oral poet, op. cit., p. 123.

18. Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzaehlung des Pentateuchs," [1927]. Op. cit., p. 211.

19. Dov Noy, op. cit., p. 4.

20. J. Blenkinsopp, "Structure and Style in Judges 13-16," Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 82 (1963), pp. 65-75. Blenkinsopp argues that the breaking of the vows is the central theme of the Samson cycle.

21. On the Buber-Rosenzweig rendering of the name YHVH, see the Translator's Introduction.

22. Buber and Rosenzweig translated rūaḥ as Braus, which conveys a physical sense. Feeling that "spirit" is too abstract a notion, Mr. Fox has chosen "the rush-of-his-spirit" instead.

23. Mr. Fox's translation has modified the original divisions used by Buber and Rosenzweig; see the Translator's Introduction.

24. Buber, "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," op. cit., pp. 283-4.

25. Martin Buber, Moses (N.Y., 1958), p. 14.

26. Cf. for example Judges 17:6, 21:25; 2:11, 3:7,12.

27. N. H. Tur-Sinai, "Samson and His Riddle," (Hebrew) ʿIyyūnīm bᵉ-Sēp̄er Šōfᵉṭīm (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 378-402.

28. Buber and Rosenzweig emended the text (a practice which

they usually avoided) to read r^{e}vī'ī instead of š^{e}vī'ī. This is in accordance with the Septuagint reading.

29. Cf. Lemek's victory song for a similar structural and rhythmic pattern. In addition, the Lemek formula contains a triple rhyme.

30. Zvi Adar, The Biblical Narrative, trans. Misha Louvish (Jerusalem, 1959), p. 73.

31. Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (N.Y., 1963), p. 201.

32. Olrik, op. cit., p. 138.

33. Cf. the rhyme scheme in Gideon's speech to God, Ju. 6:13.

34. E. Margaliyot, "The Parallel Between the Samson Story and the Stories of the Sea Peoples" (Hebrew), Gēt Mikrā', vol. 27 (1966), pp. 122-130.

35. G. Roskoff, Die Simsonsage nach ihrer Entstehung, Form und Bedeutung und der Heraclesmythus (Leipzig, 1860). A. H. Krappe, "Samson," Revue Archéologique (May-June 1933), pp. 195-211. Cyrus Gordon, "Homer and the Bible," H.U.C.A. (1955), pp. 43-184. For an overview of the solar-myth theory as applied to Samson, see Theodor H. Gaster's Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament (New York, 1969), p. 434 and the accompanying notes.

36. For instance, note the oral quality of Exodus 23:9:

> Do not oppress the sojourner
> you yourselves know well the soul of the sojourner
> for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt

or, most emphatically, Exodus 22:21-23:

A widow or an orphan you shall in no wise afflict
Woe if you afflict
afflict them
They will cry out
cry out to me
I will hear
hear their cry
my anger will flame up
and I will slay you with the sword
your wives will become widows
and your children orphans

37. For a more detailed exegetical treatment of Exodus 3:14, cf. Buber's Moses, pp. 48-55.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The following translation of the Samson saga is to be viewed as the textual counterpart to Mr. Roskies' exposition. Based as it is on the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, it seeks to lead the reader back to the rhythm and rhetoric of the Hebrew original--and hence back to its spokenness.

We maintain, along with Buber and Rosenzweig, that the approach set forth in this paper is applicable not only to one set of stories but to virtually all the great biblical narratives. This view applies with particular force to the Pentateuch. Its oral character points to a tradition of living instruction (the literal meaning of the term Torah) rather than one of ossified stories and laws. The text contains its own mechanism for revitalization; and therefore the attentive reader who trains himself to be a hearer can discover for himself (by means of leading words, formulas, and the like) what Rosenzweig called the "form-secret" of the Hebrew Bible. Thus he can learn to listen for the"instruction" which is meant for him--in narratives, in poems, and even in legal sections.[36]

It is hoped that this translation will demonstrate these principles and even serve as a pedagogical tool--in a way which has been impossible with previous English versions. Preparations are under way for continued work along these lines; at the present time an English draft of the Book of Genesis has been completed.