INTRODUCTION

The relationship between YHWH and Israel as depicted in the Book of Judges is, to say the least, torrid – as passionate in rage as it is in love. The two parties are irrevocably, ardently enmeshed, even when one party abandons the other in favour of alternative deities, or when YHWH throws a tantrum and tells the objects of his obsession to go cry to these rival gods instead. As relationships go, it is a prime candidate for magazine 'problem pages'. This attachment, however, is routinely addressed within two main scholarly genres: commentaries (in an introductory subsection on 'theology of Judges' or permeating more pervasively, depending on the audience for whom the commentary is written) and broader 'Old Testament Theologies' where the rollercoaster relationship between deity and people is usually assessed across a range of canonical texts. But here lies a problem. These two genres remain embedded in a scholarly framework that has been irretrievably fractured by recent scholarship on the date of biblical texts, their genre and function, and the vexed question of their relation to history. Revisionist shifts have significance for how we read and interpret the YHWH–Israel relationship in texts like Judges. Put baldly, if the biblical narratives under consideration are late Persian/Hellenistic constructs where YHWH is present 'as a fictional character, much like the incompetent god who loses a bet to his Adversary in the book of Job' (Noll, 2013: 133–134), then using stories from Judges in theologies intended to enlighten readers about what God desires, or God's attributes, could be referencing a character who is a flawed and dysfunctional construct.

In this book I examine the YHWH–Israel relationship in the light of object relations theory.[1] Using psychology as an interdisciplinary

[1] 'Object relations mean interpersonal relations. The term object . . . refers simply to that which will satisfy a need. More broadly, object refers to the significant person or thing that is the object or target of another's feelings or drives' (St Clair, 1986: 1).

tool is not new, but a psychologically informed approach has not yet been applied extensively to the YHWH–Israel relationship in the Book of Judges.[2] I demonstrate how key interests of traditional theologies – the character of YHWH, his relationship with Israel, covenant, the human condition – can and should be more critically explored through the psychological concepts of repression and splitting, attachment theory, and studies of the causes and effects of masochism, without losing a firm grounding in contemporary revisionist biblical studies.

As readers may have already surmised, my approach necessitates a de-privileging of YHWH's perspective. This should not immediately alienate readers disappointed with such a stance. Yes, my suggestions inevitably conflict with the confessional standpoint implicit within many, if not most, Old Testament theologies and also with 'theologies of Judges' contained within commentaries. They also conflict with the starting point of those who use psychological theory to describe the life of faith. Miner, for instance, finds great value in attachment theory, but only when it is fully engaged within a theological framework 'which assumes the existence of, and revealed nature of, God' (2007: 112)[3]. Her work concerns the spiritual lives of believers and their attachment to a deity conceived of as an omnipotent, metaphysical reality; but this is not my starting point. Nonetheless, this does not mean that a confessional approach and the approach advocated here should view each

[2] Psychology has informed biblical studies in various ways. Brueggemann (1995) makes reference to ego-strength and the dangers of 'false self' development in his work on Psalms of lament. Joyce (1993) reads Lamentations in terms of bereavement and reactions to the experience of dying. Kamionkowski (2003) demonstrates how Ezekiel contains indicators of psychological trauma caused by the events surrounding the Babylonian exile. She uses Freud's (1963) case of Dr Schreber and the work of Anna Freud (1942) on humiliation, shame and rage in order to unpack Ezekiel's experience of emasculation and explain why he imagines himself and his community as the wife of God. Rashkow (1993) has queried what makes a reading of a text psychoanalytic and provides engaging psychologically informed readings of Genesis. More recently, Rollins and Kille (2007) document the emerging interdisciplinary field between biblical scholarship and psychological theory, and the essays within illustrate how psychological criticism has contributed to our understanding of biblical texts and their interpreters. Studies by Lasine (2001, 2002 and 2013) encourage further investigations. There is also a growing field of trauma and memory studies that explores how psychological trauma leaves its imprint on the text.

[3] In this vein, see also the work Paul (1999) who uses object relations theory to discuss Christian conversion, or Burns-Smith (1999) who applies theological categories to psychological theory in order to demonstrate how some psychological approaches within pastoral care will be a better 'fit' with the counsellor's theological allegiances.

other with animosity. There is not only room for both within biblical studies but they could effectively complement each other. For example, I have found confessional commentaries and theologies to be profoundly insightful when it comes to exploring the character of YHWH and his relationship with Israel. It is precisely because they have faithful readers in mind that writers such as Brueggemann (2008), Webb (2012), Hamlin (1990) and Martin (2008) confront, head on, the gruesome violence in Judges, the questionable morality of some of its protagonists, the cold indifference of a deity in sending tribes to their destruction, the dismemberment and rape of woman for the purpose of getting across a pedagogical message, or the (failed) genocide of indigenous peoples. These matters become theological cruxes and while YHWH is exonerated in such studies, there is a troubled consciousness that recognises how these conundrums require serious investigation. The resolutions offered have been engaging and informative. I believe my alternative approach is equally insightful, thought-provoking and challenging for those who are practical or pastoral theologians, writers of Old Testament theology, or writers of commentaries for the faithful. If Judges promulgates a view of human–divine relationship that is damaging and distorted when read from a psychological perspective, then such practitioners will need to think about its endorsement. Rather than aligning themselves with YHWH as a default position, this book challenges those engaged in faithful hermeneutics to think again about the model of divine–human relationship they are reinforcing. I want the conversation to continue, not to end.

I appreciate, however, that the conversation might be difficult to sustain. A main assumption of theology is that the deity worshipped by Christians and Jews today is revealed in biblical texts and that his character lies beyond human comprehension and scrutiny. Robert Alter complains that 'a merely psychologizing approach cannot do justice to the imaginative and spiritual seriousness' of a biblical author, not least because, while human characters act out their parts in the foreground, in the background lie 'forces that can be neither grasped nor controlled by humankind' (1992: 22). Accordingly, 'there is little to be gained . . . by conceiving of the biblical God . . . as a human character—petulant, headstrong, arbitrary, impulsive, or whatever. The repeated point of the biblical writers is that we cannot make sense of God in human terms' (1992: 22–23).[4] Alter's check on

[4] Alter's check on investigating the character of God can also be found in Sternberg's work; the latter likens the biblical narrator to the general of an army

psychological approaches can also be found in Brueggemann's work. In his discussion of how tempting it might be to think of biblical writers projecting a YHWH to suit their own ends, he resists this way of looking at things, noting that it would mean that 'the literary character of YHWH falls victim to the projections of human urgency' (2008: 136). The reason given for why the temptation must be avoided is telling; it is because such interpretation operates 'as though there were no "real" YHWH in the narrative. It does so, moreover, without reckoning with the slippery slope that our preferred YHWH may also be a projection, a point of course scored by Ludwig Feuerbach and Sigmund Freud' (2008: 136). Here, we see Brueggemann acknowledging that we do indeed create YHWH in our own image, but simultaneously distancing himself from that projection. For him, YHWH's character in biblical texts reveals something of YHWH the actual deity. His caution, if accepted, would prevent this monograph from being written.

I resist his suggestion that using psychological theories of projection puts us on a 'slippery slope'. If, brazenly, we slither down regardless, Brueggemann implies we will end up in a place of halls and mirrors where the only YHWH present is the one that we want to see, distorted by our all-too-human wishes and desires. Against this, Brueggemann's appeal to the 'real' YHWH encourages his readers to hold on to a belief that the biblical scribe is a conduit for revelation and that some biblical writers present a more authentic portrayal of this deity than others.[5] However, the elision of the

unfortunate enough to have his king enlisted in his forces. He quickly qualifies this image: the narrator's task is 'not to destroy an enemy but to redeem and establish control over his own people and . . . to manipulate them into the reverential obedience that his lord exacts as his due' (1985: 154). I concur, but I cannot follow Sternberg's approach, much as I admire his close reading of biblical texts. The problem with Sternberg's analysis is that the method that results in such excellent close readings, that analyses so well the interplay of perspectives engaged by his privileged narrator, ultimately leads to a mirroring of that narrator's agenda. I thus concur with Fuchs's assessment that Sternberg's method positions the critic 'as the obedient son to the father-text (2000: 39), but for different reasons. Fuchs criticises how his investigation of the gaps in narration has an androcentric focus, considering, for example, the gaps in David, Uriah and Joab's motivations and actions and knowledge, but without any probe of what Bathsheba may think or know. I am critical of a narrative analysis that reads so astutely but so readily with the text and in so doing privileges the perspective of YHWH.

[5] For example. Brueggemann (1988) is critical of royal, statist ideology implicit within some biblical texts, seeing it as the promotion of vested interests by self-interested groups. He offsets this with the views of other biblical writers who are deemed to have more altruistic and authentic knowledge.

character of YHWH with the God of faith has boxed commentators and theologians in; compelled to align themselves, largely uncritically, with the perspective of this character, they vindicate his behaviour and, as a result, castigate the Israel represented in Judges as wayward and disloyal. When psychological theories of object relations and attachment are employed more robustly, a different view of Israel emerges as we will see.

As noted above, I do not wish to alienate those who use biblical texts as grounding for theologies; rather, I wish to open a conversation. While I no longer own any personal allegiance to YHWH of the Bible I do not doubt that biblical texts can very eloquently and profoundly point its readers in the direction of the *mysterium*. Our difference is that I do not grant YHWH a privileged special character status that is beyond human comprehension, because I focus on the biblical scribe who scripts YHWH's part. I concede that it becomes rather tedious to tag 'which is always to say the narrator's construction' every time I refer to YHWH's view. But in order to remind readers that YHWH is a constructed character replete with the scribe's projections and externalisations, there needs to be some turn of phrase that puts us at a critical distance from the elision of literary character and divinity, so that the relationship between YHWH and Israel can be assessed without any inherent adoption of the narratorial voice.

Accordingly, in order to distance this venture from what has conventionally been known as Old Testament theology, the first step is to offer a new name for this project. The use of 'Old Testament' is now more routinely replaced with 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Hebrew Scriptures'. As for 'theology' this has been recast by Clines (1995) as the study of the ideology of implied authors. The benefit of shifting to 'ideology' lies in the critical distance it creates between scholars and the texts they interpret. For example, Clines contrasts his approach with that of scholars who investigate theologies of biblical texts in order to elaborate on them for their readers, as if 'the scholarly study of the Bible has reached its goal when it has attained an "understanding" of the texts (1995: 19). Rather, argues Clines, the biblical text needs to be evaluated critically by an external yardstick that is not caught up with the ideological commitments promulgated within a text. A faithful scholar could certainly do this work so long as they were 'wide awake' to the 'designs that texts have on them' so that they did not 'find themselves succumbing to the ideology of the texts, adopting that ideology as their own, and finding it obvious and

natural and common-sensical' (1995: 21). However, an external source of standards that throws the ideology of the text into stark relief helps to facilitate the wake-up required, providing 'a counterpoint' that is 'alien' to the given text. The counterpoint I use is psychological theory, which I believe enables readers to read the relationship dynamics of biblical texts in a very different light to the one usually employed.

Changing the terminology from Old Testament theology to 'ideologies of the Hebrew Bible' has at least two benefits. First, reference to 'Hebrew Bible' rather than 'Old Testament' indicates that this project makes no assumption that its texts are fulfilled in the New Testament. There is no Christocentric focus. While I would like Christian readers to engage with my proposals, I do not expect my findings to be assimilated easily or readily into a broader Christian framework of Biblical theology. So whereas Webb's (2012) commentary contains a section on 'Judges as Christian Scripture', it is not this project's remit. Others, however, may take what they find here and think through what it means for Christian faith and practice.

Second, and more significantly, the word 'ideologies' does not have the religious connotations of 'theology'. The findings of this study may well have a serious impact for the way in which Hebrew Bible texts are used to model divine–human relationships in contemporary confessional contexts, but it makes no assumption that the character of YHWH in Judges can be related to a transcendent deity. I understand why this view will be criticised by those who believe all human perspectives and stances should be put under the scrutinising eye of the inscrutable deity, but that is what existing Old Testament theology already offers.

Of course, if I embraced the terminology of 'ideologies' rather than 'theology' I would need to differentiate my approach from the interest in rhetoric that features in some narrative approaches. The narrative critic's focus on rhetorical interests is usually grounded in the politics and themes *of the text*. The danger here is that narrative criticism repeats back to us the rhetoric of the text in the 'understanding and explaining' way that Clines (1995) has rightly criticised, without recognising that a study of textual rhetoric is, itself, an 'interested' project.[6] Narrative criticism's inevitable close, detailed

[6] Mieke Bal (1988) has ably demonstrated how writers elevate rhetorical interests and themes that the narrator has deliberately drawn to our attention, rather than the interests that have been suppressed.

work on the text thus reflects back its politics and interests rather than evaluating whether those interests are morally dubious and what we should do about it. I am pursuing, rather, an approach that can be critical of the text, using an external discourse to highlight the text's strangeness, its questionable values and politics.

However, I am not convinced that 'ideologies of the Hebrew Bible' is a more suitable terminology. It has benefits, but the fact remains that the issues I want to address *can* be justifiably described as theological. Actually, in some ways, they are both. If we understand ideology as 'the kind of large-scale ideas that influence and determine the whole outlook of groups of people' and the 'will to power expressed in ideologies' (Clines, 1995: 11) then this project is certainly a study of ideologies, particularly in the way texts can 'give the appearance of sincerity and either moral fervour or objectivity' while actually disguising the 'issues of power, of self-identity and security, of group solidarity, of fear and desire, of need and greed' that lie beneath the surface (Clines, 1995: 24). But if we understand the close study of YHWH, his character and the way in which the scribe constructs his interaction with Israel as primary interests of theology, then this study is also theological.

An emphasis on ideologies somehow reduces the (psychological) interest I have in how biblical texts can point to the numinous as part of their engagement with profound human mysteries or experiences. Judges, no less than any other biblical text, deals with existential questions in a story world inhabited by gods, goddesses, forces and energies, often perceived as holding human inhabitants in their grip. When I refer to YHWH as the construction of the scribe I am aware that YHWH is simultaneously described by that scribe as an external force that drives events, intrudes upon human consciousness and is a stirring presence within nature, a force that works behind the scenes in a way aptly described by Alter as 'a high-voltage current' which 'can energise and transform', but also 'paralyze and destroy' (1992: 23). This *mysterium* that the narrator grapples with is an important aspect of the way he explains his experience of an uncontrollable natural world whipped about by an energy that seems to holds human destiny in its grasp. However, as I have noted, it can be too easy to then elide references to this energy with the Jewish and Christian deity and interpret the actions of the *character* YHWH as revelations of a transcendent *divinity*. As will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, the unfortunate consequence of that elision is to privilege the words and actions of YHWH and to assume that

whatever viewpoint is attributed to him is 'the' viewpoint against which all other positions must be measured. Once one takes that route, it tips the balance of the tension between human construction of a divine character and the experience of suprahuman energies far too much to one side. The speech and actions of the 'divine' character become authoritative dogma, not to be questioned, and the profundity of the text is narrowed. This results in the anxiety, ambivalence and existential discomfort of a world where supernatural energies can act unexpectedly, with capriciousness, assuaged only by making such energies part of the inscrutable ways of YHWH that mere humans cannot comprehend. But this does not maintain a balance between an ancient scribe's attempt to grapple with the *mysterium* and the way in which he constructs YHWH as a major character, replete with all the neuroses and complexes that humans project onto others, both in reality and in literary worlds. We need to use the insights of narrative critics who have provided the tools for examining characterisation, narrators and rhetoric. And we need to use the theories of psychologists, who can illustrate how notions of splitting, fragmentation, attachment and projections help us understand the dynamics of a text. But this does not mean we have to revert to a position that denudes the text entirely of its soul, reading in a solely 'academic' manner that brackets out all issues of whether or not the text has anything interesting to say about human quests for meaning, for encounters with energies that seem extrahuman. I fear that recourse only to a discussion of 'ideologies' might risk such narrowing.

Accordingly, I propose the terminology of 'God-talk' to forge a middle way that is neither caught up with Christian assumptions and allegiance to the supposed divine viewpoint within scripture, nor too rigidly bound by a non-confessional focus on ideologies that mean we focus on the text as a largely political enterprise. The phrase God-talk obviously echoes Ruether's significant book *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), which signalled a critique of theological tradition from a feminist perspective. It is in a similar spirit of standing outside the interpellation of the biblical text that I adopt the term 'God-talk'. It recognises that the subject matter of this book *is* about theological concerns, but the more informal formulation 'God-talk' points to this being 'talk', not fundamental revealed truths. The biblical text of Judges produces its conversation about YHWH and his relationship with Israel, albeit with the ideological will to power that Clines (1995) recognises, but it is a

dialogue nonetheless, a conversation that the reader hears but then responds to from their own standpoint.

My approach to the text can be likened to the position a therapist finds themselves in as they begin their work with a new client. A good therapist will listen most carefully to the presenting story, but not be sucked into alignment with it. Rather, the therapist observes the client and their own reaction to that client, alert to any feelings of countertransference. Being aware of 'how this account and this person makes me feel' grants the therapist an insight into the client's own feelings of frustration, distress, anger, happiness or whatever. Thus, if the therapist feels, say, trapped, indignant or highly constrained by the approach of the client and their storytelling, if they feel as if they are being attacked or unduly put upon, it is possible that they have an insight into the situational experiences and issues of the client. Of course, I cannot do this with the actual scribe of Judges, but my hermeneutical approach involves immersion in object relation theory alongside being aware of what this text does to me when I read it. This is a subjective move, but it is consciously so. I am fully aware that I am putting myself into an empathetic position that listens attentively to the scribe's voice, trying to be alert to the emotive content, as well as the grammar; the affect of the text as well as the rhetoric.[7] In so doing, I listen for the words that highlight possible complexes, psychodramas that lie beneath the surface account, alert to how relationships are being constructed, to the behaviours of the primary participants, to trigger events and their resolution, to the snags in the narrative, and to the key words or events that connect with the psychological literature. The relationship with the text is thus one of active listening accompanied by critical examination of the effects of the presenting story,

[7] Moore and Fine's explanation of the term 'affect' is helpful. 'Various distinctions have been drawn between feelings, emotions, and affects. Feelings refer to the central, subjectively experienced state (which may be blocked from consciousness); emotions, to the outwardly observable manifestations of feelings; and affects, to all the related phenomena, some of which are unconscious. The terms are often used interchangeably, however, to refer to a range from primitive to complex, cognitively differentiated psychic states. A relatively stable and long-lasting affective state, evoked and perpetuated by the continuing influence of unconscious fantasy, is called a mood' (1990: 9). Affects can be manifested in physical ways such as 'blushing, sweating, crying' (1990: 9) in response to experiences of shame, joy, fear, surprise etc. 'Affects have an important adaptive function in alerting and preparing the individual for appropriate response to his or her external and internal environment' and for making it visible to others (1990: 10).

without being pulled into its rhetoric. It quickly becomes clear that my approach differs most pointedly from the commentary tradition in this refusal to be sucked in to any alignment with the scribe and his presentation of 'YHWH's viewpoint'. Specifically, I do not have any investment in reinforcing his strategy or compulsion to 'keep YHWH good'. On the contrary, it is precisely the effort to keep YHWH good that becomes one of the most interesting features for consideration.

The idea that a scholar's observation of countertransference could be worthwhile is hinted at by Patrick Vandermeersch, who notes how religious texts can 'provoke particular reactions ... determined partly by the personality of the reader, but also partly by the text that addresses specific aspects of the reader's psychology ... Texts can evoke compassion, admiration or horror, but also irritation, an experience of absurdity or even the fear of becoming mad' (2001: 19). Vandermeersch is also right to remind us that that biblical scholars are not only engaged in the interpretation of texts in a very conscious way, but that we all have an active *unconscious* engaged in the process which inevitably affects out interpretation. Of course, as it is unconscious we are not aware of how we are manipulated to respond to storylines in particular ways, or how some story features may act as trigger points for our own psychic reactions. He notes, for example, how Wellhausen, looking ever like the objective textual critic, emended Gen. 24:67 so that Isaac makes love to Rebekkah in his father's tent rather than his mother's. Beneath this scholarly activity lurks the psychological motivation to change the text, since the latter prospect of a mother hearing her son making love was evidently unthinkable or intolerable.

Vandermeersch does not specifically raise the question of countertransference in this discussion, but it is mentioned by other contributors to the volume. Carlander's chapter on the Saul–David relationship draws on Melanie Klein's theories and confirms the value of looking at texts in terms of countertransference, suggesting that the genre of tragedy, in particular, evokes responses in the reader that are 'built on the countertransference reaction' (2001: 79). Raguse also draws on countertransference when noting how readers can be negatively affected by texts to a point when one simply wants to stop reading; i.e., 'when one gets the impression that the text is trying to do something "unpleasant" to the reader' or 'when the text tries to impose a certain role on the reader' (2001: 59). I cannot be aware of my own unconscious responses when reading