When Interpretation Traditions Speak too Loud for Ethical Dilemmas to be Heard: On the Untimely Death of Haran (Genesis 11:28)

C. WYNAND RETIEF (UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH)

ABSTRACT

The author argues that the majority of modern day translations of Genesis 11:28a, reading "Haran died in the lifetime of Terah, his father" (or wording to that effect) missed the intention of the narrator's actual words "Haran died in the face of (in confrontation with) Terah, his father." His working hypothesis, concluding the exegesis of the text, is that the narrator faced the ethical dilemma of having the task to tell a positive story about the origins of Israel while knowing the dark side which he, as an honest witness, could not negate, and consequently alluded to. This "small voice" of the author/narrator can easily be silenced and is consequently not picked up by strong translation traditions, as indeed happened in this case.

A INTRODUCTION

According to the Masoretic text of Genesis 11:28a Haran died עַל־פְּנֵי his father Terah. It should strike those of us who are used to translations telling us that Haran died *while his father Terah was still alive*[1] as odd. In the Hebrew text it seems obvious that Haran died "facing" his father – a reading provoking questions. What really happened? Why did Haran die prematurely and without warning? What role did Terah play in Haran's death? Does the text want to communicate something more that is not revealed in its narrative context? This text should raise our curiosity: is there something that was missed or ignored by the majority of translations? What happened in the history of the translation of this text?

B THREE INTERPRETATION TRADITIONS OF GENESIS 11:28

Genesis 11:28a reads וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֶּרַח אָבִיו. The term עַל־פְּנֵי is classified as a compound preposition, with פְּנֵי as the construct form of the noun פָּנִים (=face). עַל in combination with פְּנֵי- "has different meanings according to the different senses of the noun and the preposition."[2] The LXX translated it as ἐνωπιον. In

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1 Cf. AFR (1933) 1954, AFR NV 1983, NIV 1984.

2 *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic, based on the lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Ed-*

all other cases in Genesis where the LXX uses this word (16:13, 14; 24:51; 30:33, 38; 31:35) it is to be understood as "before; in the presence of,"[3] never in a temporal mode as is the possibility with עַל-פְּנֵי,[4] but always in terms of locality or spatial reference – of course translated from different Hebrew words. The New Testament occurrence of ἐνωπιον confirms its spatial orientation as well as the semantic domain within which it also occurs in the LXX.[5] It is obvious that the LXX understood verse 28a at least to mean that Haran died in the presence of his father Terah.

The Vulgate betrays a shift or widening of perspective, when translating עַל-פְּנֵי as "ante", with the denotations "before, in regard to position, order, or time…".[6] Therefore, apart from a spatial reference the possibility of a temporal interpretation was introduced by the Vulgate. This means that the words "Haran died before Terah, his father" could now be understood in terms of time, most popularly translated as "Haran died while Terah, his father, was still alive" or words to that effect.[7]

It seems that three different translation traditions can be identified, which we can label A, B and C. A is the oldest, originating in the LXX, understanding the relation between Haran and his father Terah exclusively as a spatial one at the moment of Haran's death, with the possible meaning of a confrontation between Haran and Terah that caused the death of the former.[8] The

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ward Robinson (eds. Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, Oxford University Press, 1972 [1907]), 181.

3 John Lust, Erik Eynikel and Katrin Hauspie, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Part I* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellshaft, 1992), 156.

4 Raija Sollamo, "Some 'improper' Prepositions such as ένωπιον, έναντιον, έναντι, etc., in the Septuagint and Early Koine Greek," *VT* 25 (1975): 779. According to Sollamo's research on ενώπιον, he once "find that a translator has confused the meanings and rendered the temporal עַל-פְּנֵי mechanically with ενώπιον" with reference to 1Kings 15:3 (page 779). The inference is that עַל-פְּנֵי in Genesis 11:28 was correctly translated in the LXX with a spatial meaning.

5 *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, *1* (Eds. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A Nida. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 717 F(83.33). See also Raija Sollamo, "Some 'improper' Prepositions", 773-782.

6 *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (ed. Noah Porter, 1913), n.p. [cited 11 June 2010]. Online: http://babylon.com/free-dictionaries/reference/dictionaries-thesauri/Websters-Revised-Unabridged-Dictionary-(1913)/62062.html.

7 For example AFR (1933) 1954, NBG 1951, AFRNV 1983, NIV 1984, REV 1989, TEV 1994, NLT 1996, GN 1997, CEV 2000, NBV 2004, JSB 2004.

8 This tradition is also attested in the Jewish exegetical history. Genesis Rabbah 38:13 refers to Rabbi Chiyya who understood עַל-פְּנֵי to simply mean "in the presence of." Nearly the same narrative explanation is given in Targum Yerushalmi (Pseudo-

second tradition (B) opened up by the Vulgate, is a temporal understanding, where the text simply says that father Terah was still alive when his youngest son died. Then there are translations that leave the interpretation of "before" or equivalents over to the reader to decide,[9] which can be called the C-tradition, somewhat undecidedly between A and B.

The temporal tradition (B) seems to have won the day in terms of numbers of translations, especially in the recent fifty years. The reason is obvious: the United Bible Society guides translators along this road by means of their Translator's Handbook. On Genesis 11:28 it translates and comments: "*Haran died before his father: before* translates a Hebrew idiom 'before the face of,' which means 'while his father was still living'."[10] This interpretation is attested in Brown-Driver-Briggs[11] (going back to Gesenius) who seems to have made an exception of this one text (and erroneously bringing in Num 3:4b) by interpreting עַל־פְּנֵי temporally. The motivation for this rather awkward exception is manifested in the Targum Onqelos and Neofiti, explaining עַל־פְּנֵי as "in the life(time) of."[12] This of course has a direct bearing on this subject: What motivated the scholars of these Targums to explain the text in this way, apparently

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Jonathan) for "Haran died in the presence of his father, Terah." Genesis Rabbah also refers to Rabbis who translated it as "because of [the idolatory of] Terah". This has rather a legendary than linguistic basis. See "Genesis Rabbah," n.p., The Soncino Midrash Rabbah on CD-ROM. Version 2.0. 1991-2008.

9 For example KJV/NKJV 1982, RSV 1952, LUT 1984, NRSV 1989.

10 William D. Reyburn and Euan M. Fry, eds., *A Handbook on Genesis. UBS Handbooks. Helps for Translators* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 267. An example of the influence of the United Bible Society translations is to be found in the new Chichewa translation (*Buku Loyera*, 1998) which closely followed the Handbook, in direct contrast to the traditional and still much read Chichewa translation (*Buku Lopatulika,* 1922 revised 1936 and 1966) with its unambiguous spatial translation.

11 *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (eds. Francis Brown, SR Driver and CA Briggs, Oxford University Press, 1972), 818. It is remarkable that under עַל־פְּנֵי within category (a) = *in front of, in the sight of,* the last inscription reads "to die *in the presence of* any one (=in his lifetime)," with reference only to Genesis 11:28 and Numbers 3:4 (which actually read that Eleazar and Ithamar served as a priest in the presence/sight of Aaron – with no mention of death in this part of verse 4). Numbers 3:4 therefore does not apply, and the only text deviating from the normal spatial denotation of עַל־פְּנֵי remains Genesis 11:28. All other categories under עַל־פְּנֵי is spatial, not temporal.

12 Targum Onqelos explains וּמִית הָרָן עַל אַפֵּי בחיי״ תַּרַח אֲבוּהִי Targum Neofiti simply paraphrases Genesis 11:28 as ומית הרן בחיוי דתרח אבוהי – see "Aramaic Targum Search. Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project of the Hebrew Union College," n.p. [cited 11 August 2010]. Online: http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/searching/ targumsearch.html.

deviating from the normal understanding of עַל־פְּנֵי while there was another Jewish tradition in line with the Septuagint?[13]

It seems that in both Jewish and Christian circles two opposing views existed from at least the fourth century, with the temporal interpretation more prominently propagated since the Middle Ages in the public arena of (common) Jewish readers, and for Christian readers in more recent centuries and decades. In the former case the Targums paved the way, in the latter case especially the newer UBS translations since the middle of the 20th century, apparently in the footsteps of Gesenius. In this regard it is noteworthy how older translations that followed tradition A, in recent years added footnotes that supports tradition B (therefore confliction their own translation). The Dutch Staten Bijbel is an example,[14] strengthening tradition B at the cost of A.

The net effect of tradition B's translation is that no further enquiry into the text is made, since it is plain and simple that there is nothing more to Haran's death than its occurrence in Terah's lifetime.

C THE TERM עַל־פְּנֵי IN GENESIS

The linguistic difference between traditions A and B primarily lies in the function of עַל־פְּנֵי – spatial or temporal. A brief research of this term in the book of Genesis should indicate the level of interpretational correctness on linguistic grounds.

In Genesis 1-11 the term occurs four times in the so-called Priestly account of the creation story (1:2 [twice], 20, 29) and five times in the flood narrative and its introduction (in 6:1, 7; 7:3, 18, 8:9), as well as three times in the Tower of Babel narrative (11:4, 8, 9) where עַל־פְּנֵי is normally translated as "on the

[13] Genesis Rabbah 38:13 refers to the tradition represented by Rabbi Hiyya who understood עַל־פְּנֵי to simply mean "in the presence of." Nearly the same narrative explanation is given in Targum Yerushalmi (Pseudo-Jonathan) for "Haran died in the presence of Terah, his father." Rabbis who translated the phrase as "because of [the idolatory of] Terah" base it on legends, rather than linguistics. See "Genesis Rabbah," n.p.

[14] In 1657 this well known national translation read, and is still reading: "En Haran stierf voor het aangezicht zijns vaders Terah...", but a footnote in the 1997 edition reads "D.i. in het leven en de tegenwoordigheid van zijn vader" (i.e. in the life and presence of his father). De Naardense Bijbel (2004) reiterates the traditional Dutch translation with "Haran sterft voor het aanschijn van zijn vader Terach".

(sur)face of" or "above" (LXX ἐπάνω, Vulgate: super[15]). In all instances עַל־פְּנֵי has a spatial reference.

In Genesis 12-50 this term occurs in Genesis 16:12 in the angel's description to Hagar of the character of her son to be born: Ishmael will be a stubborn militant, living על־פני כל־אחיו – "in the face of all his brothers". Translators choose two options: spatial separation or confrontational relationship. The genealogy of Ishmael (in a sense the summation of his life) is recorded in Genesis 25, where verse 18 picks up the same expression of enmity between the Ishmaelites and their (Egyptian) brothers.[16]

In Genesis 17:17 עַל־פְּנֵי is clearly spatial in its function. Genesis 18:16 describes how Abraham's divine guests rose to leave, looking עַל־פְּנֵי Sodom, one of the cities which they now approached, and would turn out to be Yahweh's enemy. After the destruction of Sodom (and Gomorrah), the same expression is repeated in 19:28: Abraham looked על־פני Sodom and Gomorrah and על־כל־פני ארץ. Within this narrative the expression under discussion clearly indicates a relationship of spatial separation as well as grave opposition.

Genesis 23:19 and 25:9 respectively report the burial of Sarah and Abraham, according to both texts in the cave of Machpelah located עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא. It is clearly a spatial, geographical description, already indicated by לִפְנֵי מַמְרֵא in verse 23:17. Genesis 32:22 tells about the gifts that Jacob sent to his brother Esau which went "ahead of him" (NIV) (עַל־פָּנָיו) while he was staying over for the night. A spatial reference cannot be denied, but a temporal one could also be possible. The setting is that of a deep and long time confrontation between the two brothers, which Jacob now tries to avert.

Genesis 50:1 describes how Joseph, at his father Jacob's death bed, at the moment that his father dies, fell "upon the face (of)" (עַל־פָּנָיו) his father, wept over him (עָלָיו) and kissed him". The double occurrence of עַל is quite graphic: the father lying on his death bed, already deceased, while his bereaved son literally falls upon him, and weeps in that position on top of him. This last use of עַל־פְּנֵי is reminiscent of the father-son relationship at the beginning of the Abraham narrative. There the roles were reversed: Haran died עַל־פְּנֵי his father Terah. No tears or feelings are recorded. The circumstances could be quite different, may be confrontational. If this would be the case, the closing of the narrative which started with Terah and his sons comes to a peaceful closure with Jacob and his sons, especially his second last, but nearest son to his heart.

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[15] Both LXX and Vg prefer to change the עַל־פְּנֵי in verse 20 to "underneath" (κατα, sub), as it did not make sense to the translators that the birds would fly above the firmament, as the MT has it.

[16] A structural analysis of the verse indicates that עַל־פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם and עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו are parallelisms.

To summarise: it is only in Genesis 32:22 that עַל־פְּנֵי could possibly have a temporal meaning apart from a spatial. All indications are that עַל־פְּנֵי in Genesis 11:28, which seems to be a pivotal text, has a spatial function with a possible confrontational connotation, going hand in hand with separation. Therefore: Haran dying in confrontation with his father. The question raised by this, however, is: why did Haran die such a death? What was the actual scenario?

D GENESIS [6-]9 (NOAH AND SONS) PREPARING THE WAY FOR GENESIS 11:26-32 (TERAH AND SONS)

The striking parallels between the Noah and Terah narratives, with regard to genealogical data, narrative structure and intentionality[17] help to put the puzzle together.

At the end of the genealogies in Genesis 5 (verse 32) and 11:10ff (verse 26) we find the same peculiar recording of the patriarch having three sons when reaching a certain age: "And Noah was 500 years old when he became the father of Shem, and Ham and Japhet" (5:32), is followed in 11:26 by "And Terah was 70 years old when he became the father of Abram, and Nahor and Haran."[18] Furthermore, both preceding genealogies have the same basic form: *When (a) had lived x years, he became the father of (b). And after he became the father of (b), (a) lived y years and had other sons and daughters.* In Genesis 5 there is an additional *altogether (a) lived z(=x+y) years, and then he died.* On a structural level these passages are nearly identical.

In the cases of both Noah and Terah the repetitive statement of sons at one certain age, mentions a grandson as well. Genesis 9:18-19a brings the grandson in as a kind of parenthesis within the genealogical line of Noah-and-sons. This information seems to serve as a preparatory introduction to Canaan, but definitely emphasizes by means of the pronoun הוּא the fact that Ham *himself* was the father of Canaan[19] – information which actually stands at the centre of the inclusio, and which is repeated in verse 22 (*Ham, the father of Canaan*), and should therefore be taken seriously:

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[17] Note the conclusion of John S. Bergsma and Scott W. Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)," *JBL* 124/1 (2005): 27 "There is increasing recognition that the pentateuchal narrative is seldom careless or arbitrary, and intertextual echoes ... are seldom coincidental."

[18] In both instances in the MT after the setumah closing the genealogy, indicating that this is an "addition".

[19] John S. Bergsma and Scott W. Hahn, making a case for maternal incest as interpretative background of this narrative, remark that "Ham is repeatedly, and apparently superfluously, identified as 'the father of Canaan' (v. 18 and 20 –sic!) because the narrator wishes to signal the reader that this narrative explains *how Ham became* 'the father of Canaan'." See Bergsma and, "Noah's Nakedness," 35.

And the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japhet,
*[and Ham – **he** was the father of Canaan]*
these three were the sons of Noah.

In Genesis 11:27ff nearly the same narrative pattern as in 9:18ff can be traced: the grandson (Lot) is added to the sons – information that prepares the reader for what would follow (11:31, 12:4 etc). In this case the fact that Lot's father is Haran of all people, is emphasized by means of the unusual syntax in the Hebrew of the subject (Haran) preceding the verb (he fathered). The same word order is already used in the preceding line: "Terah fathered…" Just as plain as it is who the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran is, so clear should it be who fathered Lot. When the narrative (in 11:28) reaches the point of deadly confrontation and separation between these two fathers, the genealogical line of Father Terah and Father Haran gets a new perspective in retrospect: The Terah and Haran lineages is therefore not merely a chronological record of one family, but they are indeed two opposing houses, a family divided in itself, and that on the same Babylonian soil (Genesis 11:28b, 30c). In essence it is the same story as that of Noah and his sons, with remarkable similarities to the conclusion of the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1-9.

In 9:18 the addition of Canaan within the brief genealogy prepares the way for the story (in verses 20-27) of Noah's curse on Ham that will actually impact on Canaan. This same intention is seemingly at work in the Terah narrative[20] that can be formalised as: the curse of father on son impacting on son's son:

Noah>[Ham]Canaan → Terah>[Haran]Lot.

The curse narrative of Genesis 9 seems to be a simple story of Noah lying in his tent naked after having he himself uncovered in his drunken stupor; Ham discovered him like that and then told the story to his brothers Shem and Japhet, who then covered his nakedness while their faces were turned away from their father's nakedness. After Noah sobered up and discovered the truth, he cursed Ham's son (and not Ham, the obvious "culprit").

There is, however, more to this simple narrative than the eye meets. The age old critical questions are: is what happened really curse worthy? And: why

[20] Generally known as the Abraham narrative, with its introduction in Gen 11:27-32. Formally this narrative cycle ends before the next תלדות formula in Gen 25:12 (therefore 11:27 – 25:11). For discussions of the narrative structure of this cycle, see Byron Wheaton, "Focus and Structure in the Abraham narratives," *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006), 143-162 and Rachel Yudkowsky, "Chaos or Chiasm? The structure of Abraham's life," *Jewish Bible Quartely* 35/2 (2007), 109-114.

cursing the son of the culprit?[21] Textually these problems are connected to the expression "Ham, *the father of Canaan*" (verse 22a)[22] and two issues in verse 24.[23] The various explanations offered are either unconvincing[24] or unsatisfactory[25]. Speiser's verdict: "the problem remains unsolved."[26]

What we have here, as in Genesis 11:28 and other examples, is a narrative text that is provoking questions, in my opinion a spring board towards the discovery of a counter narrative beneath the surface narrative.[27] It appears that the Rabbis took the promising road by drawing the line to the perverse sexual practices of the Canaanites (and Egyptians) in Leviticus 18(v. 3), and the subsequent sexual laws (18:6-29), complemented by those in Leviticus 20, and Deuteronomy 23:1; 27:20. According to Leviticus 20, to see or uncover the na-

[21] John L Harris, "An Exposition of Genesis 2:4 – 11:32," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 44/1 (Fall 2001), 52 briefly mentions the different Rabbinic arguments why Ham was not cursed. Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17,* New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 324 also mentions the force of the word "cursed" (ארור) as one of the interpretative problems: is it a wish from Noah or a divine declaration?

[22] In 10:6 Canaan is the fourth son of Ham, after Cush, Mizraim and Put. Why only him in 9:23?

[23] (1) "his youngest son" – if it refers to Ham, it contradicts the genealogy in Genesis 5:32, 10:1-32. (2) Noah saw "what "his youngest" *did* to him" [אשׁר עשׂה לו] – after the report of Ham *seeing* his father's nakedness. Gerhard von Rad comments: "Possibly the narrator suppressed something even more repulsive than mere looking" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972], 24).

[24] The LXX translated הַקָּטָן with the comparative "his younger son"; Rashi translated "the contemptible". John Skinner, *Genesis*. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 183-184 is of the opinion that these translations are wrong.

[25] The theory of two different genealogical traditions ("global" = Shem, Ham, Japhet; "local"= Shem, Japhet, Canaan) overlayed by one another, resulting in "the father of" as a posed insertion (Ibn Ezra, Wellhausen, Budde, Gunkel, von Rad, L Rost etc.), may explain the history behind the text, but according to Westermann it does not solve the problem. He concludes: "We must leave the contradiction as it is." See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11, A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 484;

[26] Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 62.

[27] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Publishers, 1987), 199-200 rejects the notion "that there must be something more to Ham's offence than appears on the surface" as stemming from "Westeners who are strangers to a world where discretion and filial loyalty are supreme virtues." (page 200) – with reference to the importance of the fifth commandment (page 199). Wenham unfortunately downplays the controversy that this passage provoked in Rabbinic circles.

kedness of somebody, indicates sexual intercourse with that person.[28] A midrash explains the cursed act as castration.[29] However, "the nakedness of your father," according to Leviticus 18:8, is nothing but "the nakedness of the wife of your father." A son, having sexual relations with his father's wife, uncovers (or: sees) his father's nakedness, and both sexual partners should be executed according to Lev 20:11.[30] The allusion in this narrative is specifically that of (maternal) incest in the first degree,[31] leading to the end result of a

[28] O. Palmer Robertson, "Current critical questions concerning the 'curse of Ham' (Gen 9:20-27)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41/2 (1998), 179 mentions that the phrase "looking on a person's nakedness" refers to grave sexual sin. In Leviticus 20:17 both terms "see" and "uncover" are used to denote the same action of sexual intercourse of a man with his sister. In Deuteronomy כָּנָף is used in a sexual context (cf. Ezekiel 16:8), which is obviously clothing, with the possible connotation of a royal garment, symbolic of power and authority (that of Yahweh – Ruth 2:12, Psalm 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 61:5, 63:8, 91:4, Yahweh's royal "vehicle," the "wings of the wind" // Cherub – 2 Samuel 22:11=Psalm 18:11; Psalm 104:3; the wings of the cherubim in the Solomonic temple, representing Yahweh's kingship – 1 Kings 6:27, 8:6,7 // 1 Chr 3:11,12,13, 5:7,8; that of Ruth's גאל– Ruth 3:9; that of Samuel, symbolising Saul's kingship – 1 Samuel 15:27; Saul's כָּנָף of his robe (which David cut off) – 1 Samuel 24:5, 6, 12; the power of the King of Assyria – Isaiah 8:8, and his boasting that no nation showed any power against him (using the imagery of young birds in a nest) – Isaiah 10:14; Cush, "the land of whirring wings," i.e. power [in action?] – Isaiah 18:1; the parable of the cedar tree, and the two eagles, representing Zedekiah, and the kings of Babel and Egypt respectively, concerning Zedekiah's unsuccessful rebellion against the authority of Babel = Ezekiel 17; the protective power of a Jewish man – Zechariah 8:23; the power (wings) of the "Son of Righteousness" – Malachi 3:20.

[29] To avoid the implication that this could allude to Ham having homosexual intercourse with his father, and in an effort to explain why Canaan is cursed for Ham's sin, the midrash poses the explanation that Ham castrated Noah to prevent him from having a fourth son; so his own fourth son, Canaan, be cursed; it is also alluded that Canaan was present, and did the castration. See "Genesis Rabbah" 36.7; B. Sanhedrin 70a. Also see Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis,"in: *The Jewish Study Bible, Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation* (eds. Adéle Berlin and Marc Z Brettler, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26.

[30] For Ancient Near Eastern parallel laws in the Hammurabi Code, Middle Assyrian and Hittite Laws, see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd Edition with Supplement*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 157, 158, 181, 189; Athalya Brenner, "On incest" in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*. (Ed. Athalya Brenner, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 137.

[31] See Bergsma and Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness", 25-40 for an overview of the three main theories, namely castration, paternal incest (homosexuality), and maternal incest – the viewpoint preferred and well defended by these authors, in the footsteps of Frederick W. Bassett, "Noah's nakedness and the curse of Canaan – a case of incest?," *VT* 21 (1971), 232-237. Although Kenneth A Mathews is of the opinion that "(t)here

cursed Canaan. "Ham is repeatedly, and apparently superfluously, identified as 'the father of Canaan' (verses 18 and 20) because the narrator wishes to give a signal to the reader that this narrative explains *how Ham became* 'the father of Canaan.'"[32] In a subtle – or rather not so subtle – way the narrator indicts Canaan as the baby born from the (maternal) incestuous relationship between Ham and his mother.[33] Therefore the actual curse falls on Canaan, the product and symbol of that which is too ghastly to contemplate or mention by name. And exactly because the act is not named and Ham (according to the surface narrative) never caught in the act, he is not proclaimed guilty. In the surface narrative he is the innocent witness, testifying to his brothers what he saw in his father's tent: a drunk old father, unaware of his own nakedness. But in the background this is most probably a story of power struggles, of sons trying to usurp their father's authority and power.[34]

The close parallels between the Noah and Terah narratives regarding genealogical data and related rhetorical and narrative structure, give ample reason to suspect that they share the same intentionality.[35] In other words: Genesis

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is no reason to assume that homosexuality or for that matter, heterosexual misconduct would be described euphemistically by the author" he recognises in a footnote that this expression is an "(e)uphemism for sexual relations, often incestuous". See Kenneth A Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26.* The New American Commentary 1A (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 419 (footnote 162).

[32] Bergsma and Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness," 35.

[33] According to the flood narrative(s) Noah had only one wife (Genesis 6:18, 7:7, 8:18), who had to be Ham's mother. Tractate Sanhedrin 108b mentions that Ham was cursed because of sexual relations he had while he was in the ark, in a time that abstinence should be practiced. See David H Aaron, "Early Rabbinic Exegesis on Noah's son Ham and the so-called 'Hamitic Myth'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63/4 (1995), 739-740.

[34] The motive of usurpation of the father's power and authority by means of having sexual intercourse with the wife/wives (including concubines) of the father, is well attested in the Old Testament. Notable examples of a son attempting to unseat his father through relations with the paternal consort(s) are Absalom's infamous public intercourse with his father's concubines (2 Samuel 15:20-23), Reuben's relations with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4), David's acquisition of Saul's concubines (2 Samuel 12:8), and Adonijah's attempt to acquire David's wife Abishag (2 Kings 2:13-25). Ezekiel rebukes his contemporaries for committing this sin (Ezekiel 22:10). This same motive is also found in the ANE and Greek mythology. See Bergsman and Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness," 27-38, with references to Basset, "Noah's nakedness," 236.

[35] Bergsma and Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness," 35-26, note inter-textual relationships elsewhere in Genesis: "Once Ham's offense is understood as heterosexual and procreative (of Canaan), the links that paternal-incest theorists recognize between Genesis 9:20-27 and Genesis 6:1-4; 19:30-38; Leviticus 18 and 20; Deuteronomy 23:1; and

11:26-28 is on the surface an innocent account of a son born to Terah's third son Haran (apart from the possibility that Milcah is his other child – verse 29), followed by the announcement of Haran's death – but that there are much more to it. The first signal of an undercurrent is the mentioning of Lot's name within the second line of the Terah genealogy. If this signal could be missed, the report of the father-son (or rather: father-father) confrontation surrounding Haran's death should be a wake-up call, summoning the reader to make the connections between fatherhood and deathly confrontation between fathers who seemingly have become antagonists. Indeed, if it is true that עַל־פְּנֵי has a connotation of confrontation (and relational separation), Haran's death is not only untimely, but also violent, the symptom and end result of interpersonal relations torn apart.

To guide the reader, the narrator had actual already told the same story in another setting, the characters being Noah and sons, climaxing in the curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:25, 26b, 27b) – and indeed, on the other hand, the blessing of "Yahweh, the God of Shem" (9:26a). In the Terah-narrative this aspect of blessing is explicitly in the foreground with Yahweh Himself as the initiator (Genesis 12:1-3. What is not well realised is that the blessing in the surface narrative can only be rightly evaluated in terms of the curse that is very much hidden in this part of the narrative.

E COULD LOT AND ABRAM (ABRAHAM) BE BLOOD BROTHERS?

Could it then be that Haran was facing his father as his adversary, perhaps as his executioner? Answers to these tough questions are not readily available. The reader is taken along a rather mysterious path, where connections have to be made, as in Genesis 9. The text is more covert than overt. Here are things that may not be mentioned by name: relationships insinuated as confrontational, ending in the death of a son; a son without father that survived, but whose own life went down the cursed road through Sodom, ending as an escapee in an unnamed cave, where his own daughters birthed children from the incestuous relationship with him, their drunk old father; a narrative ending in incest-cum-drunkenness – a vivid reminder of the Noah in Genesis 9.

Once more this begs a question: do we not have the same story behind the story in Genesis 11:26 and further? Was Lot born from an incestuous relationship like his progeny? Was his mother and the wife of Terah not perhaps the same person? Is this not the reason why he is mentioned in the same row with Abram, Nahor, Haran? Is the genealogy not actually a record of four

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27:20 are clarified and strengthened. All these other passages concern heterosexual intercourse." Genesis 11:26-32, however, was outside the focus of their research.

brothers on mother's side? And as if we need more confirmation: remember the link with Canaan the son of Ham! – genealogically the fourth one (Genesis 10:6).

In the ongoing narrative, with all kinds of confrontations, tensions and strife building up, the relationship term between Abram and Lot is indeed "brother" and "brothers". In the confrontation between Lot's and Abram's herdsmen, the appeal of Abram is: כִּי־אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנָחְנוּ – "Indeed, us men – *brothers* are we" – and therefore we should live in harmony (13:8). Later when Lot, residing in Sodom, was taken war captive, the narrator tells that Abram heard this news about "his brother" (14:14), acted against the captivators and brought back "his brother Lot" and his belongings (14:16).

The obvious reaction – mainly motivated by the fact that Lot was introduced as Abram's deceased brother's son (11:27, 31) and once (in 12:5) explicitly mentioned as "the son of his brother" – is either to insert "the son of" before brother (as Targum Onqelos and Neofiti do[36]), or to explain "brother" as "kinsman". This interpretation is obvious, and in line with other occurrences of "brother/s" as kinsmen later in the same narrative, and in later parts of Genesis.[37] But it does not take away the probability that the narrator is finally unveiling Lot[38] before the latter leaves the scene in Genesis 19. And the narrator does this for the sake of the reader who, like the characters in the narratives in Genesis 4-50, is struggling to see the faces of blood brothers.[39]

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[36] See "Aramaic Targum Search," n.p.

[37] Note the set expression איש לאחיו meaning "one another" in 26:31, also איש אחיו in 9:5, as well as איש מעל אחיו "one from the other" in 13:11. אחים is apparently kinsman/ neighbour in 13:8, 16:12//25:18 – Ishmael will live against all his brothers (=kinsmen); 19:7 – Lot pleads with the Sodomites ("my brothers") not to harm his visitors; 24:27 – Abraham's slave witnesses that God led him to "the brothers of my lord"; 27:29 – Jacob is blessed by Isaac הוה גביר לאחיך וישתחוו לך בני אמך if this phrase happen to be a parallelism, it probably means physical brothers, but see 27:37 where it probably means more than Esau (other brothers as well?). In Genesis 29-31 (Jacob and Laban cycle) "brother/s" occurs 13 times in total, 8 times as kinsmen or in-laws (29:4, 15, 23, 25, 32, 37, 31:46, 54), the rest (5 times) as blood brothers; in Genesis 32-36 (Jacob-Esau cycle) all 12 times as blood brothers; in Genesis 37 (Jacob and Joseph) it occurs all 21 times as blood brothers; in Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar) all 8 times as blood brothers and in Genesis 39-50 (Jacob and Joseph) all 71 times as blood brothers. Therefore in Genesis 37-50 all 100 occurrences are referring to blood brothers.

[38] The only passage in which לוט does not appear as a personal name is in Isaiah 25:7, meaning "veil", which could be the actual meaning of Lot's name.

[39] The theme through Genesis 3-50 of brothers [and fathers, with their wives in the background] struggling to see one another's faces because of mutual power struggles and attempts at usurpation of power/authority – linked up with sexual overtures – seems to be a strong binding one. The theological centre may well be found in Jacob's

Indeed, if Abram and Lot are blood brothers on the side a mother absent in the narrative, with Lot as the child born from incest in the first degree, the intention of the narrator in Genesis 11:28 finally comes to the light: Haran, with his father's wife, was caught red handed in this unmentionable perverse sexual relationship, already implied in the twin story of Genesis 9: Haran, attempting to displace his father, as symbolised by this act. With only one punishment by law: מות־יומתו – "they will surely die," echoing the warnings of Leviticus 20:11.

F CONCLUSIONS

The questions raised by the close (and) inter-textual reading of Genesis 11:28 led to the discovery of a complimentary, even contra narrative behind (or beneath) the surface narrative. In my opinion we should seriously ask: what were the motivation, intentions and mechanisms that the narrator used to take the reader-disciple, willing to follow his clues, along with him?

With this said, my conviction is that what is perceived in literary theory as layered text or new meaning or double entendre in the text[40] was motivated by the writer or narrator of that text. My theory is that a possible motivational factor could be an ethical dilemma facing the narrator: an episode or story endangering the good name of God's people, which the narrator has to tell but cannot do openly without tainting the nobility of the characters, in this specific text that of Abram (Abraham), his family, and by implication his motives in the ongoing story. Therefore the only ethical way out, is to tell the "bad" story as a hidden parallel narrative[41] by means of allusions, inter-textual references and parallels, ordering of information, etcetera. This "story behind the story" is not readily detectable on the surface, where the "good" story plays itself out. Therefore only those "with ears to hear and eyes to see" will be able to become initiated witnesses of this counter narrative, and therefore the ethical dilemma.

The narrator's main technique to draw the reader's attention to the hidden narrative, so it seems, is to phrase particular parts of the narrative in a way that should raise questions in the mind of the observant reader. In the case of the report of Haran's death in Genesis 11:28, the reader should immediately

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encounter "face to face" eventually with God. See: Mark D. Wessner, "Toward a literary understanding of 'face to face' (פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים) in Genesis 32:23-32," *Restoration Quarterly* 42/3 (2000), 169-177.

[40] See for example, see Menakhem Perry, "Literary Dynamics – How the order of a text creates its meanings," *Poetics Today* 1-2 (1979), 35-64, 311-361.

[41] Menakhem Perry calls this "a latent story 'lurking in the depths,' to be revealed in a 'second' reading." See Menakhem Perry, "Counter-Stories in the Bible - Rebekah and her bridegroom, Abraham's servant," *Prooftexts 27* (2007), 279.

ask: What happened here? There must be something behind these words![42] Sometimes these questions surface as interpretational problems (e.g. the curse on Canaan instead of on Ham, Genesis 9:20-27), but many times they may simply be overlooked.

Bible translations may or may not help to pick up the clues to the story behind the story. Once a translation is followed by others, it becomes a translation tradition with a growing status of truthfulness. Popularity of a tradition is equated with its correctness, so that traditions with more publications are deemed more persuasive. The effect of this on the reading of texts of this nature is that popular reading (or translation) traditions that do not help readers to become witnesses and participants of this "double layer" in the text, are voices becoming louder as they grow in popularity, therefore increasingly suppressing the possibility of discovering the hidden narratives, and the posed ethical dilemmas motivating them.

In the case of Genesis 11:28 the popular tradition unfortunately won the day at a high cost: bluntness to the hesitancy of a narrator whose truths are nearly unspeakable, but should be heard. On the other hand: if the Targumic explainers of the Neofiti and Onqelos texts had known the bad genes in Abraham's makeup, they indeed succeeded in avoiding its unveiling - with the assistance of their Christian disciples.

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[42] Examples of thought provokers can be multiplied. For example, Menakhem Perry discovers a hidden parallel narrative in Genesis 24 of the "switching of bridegrooms" by observing that two terms in specific areas of the narrative are used for Abraham's servant: "servant" and "man". The observant reader (taking the feminine story into consideration), asks questions, and discovers the hidden story. See Menakhem Perry, "Counter-Stories in the Bible", 275-323.

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Dr. Wynand Retief, Research Fellow at the Department of Old and New Testament, University of Stellenbosch. Justo Mwale Theological University College, P. O. Box 310199, LUSAKA, 15301. ZAMBIA. *E-mail*: cwretief@gmail.com.