

MICHELLE J. LEVINE

## *Nahmanides' Literary Approach to Biblical Narrative: Varied Repetition in the Joseph Story*

A study of the Book of Genesis reveals a conspicuous dichotomy between two primary forms of biblical storytelling, the minimal strategy that produces gaps and ambiguities and the maximal strategy that reiterates character experiences and dialogue through ostensibly superfluous retellings. Both literary techniques invite the reader to play an active role in determining the meaning of the narrative. The minimal approach motivates the reader to fill in the gaps in order to restore continuity to the narrative. The maximal method urges the reader to ascertain whether and how the recapitulation illuminates important aspects of plot and character. As Meir Sternberg observes, "As the 'second' occurrence seems to add nothing to the 'first,' what is it doing in the text and why have they been collocated by way of analogy?"<sup>1</sup>

The literary analysis of the Bible's maximal mode is complicated by the presence of variations within repetitive accounts. Three primary manifestations of this literary phenomenon are apparent within the Genesis narratives.<sup>2</sup> The Bible may relate an episode through the mode of third person narration, which is later recapitulated with variations by the biblical character in his own words. In other instances, a biblical character delivers a speech to two audiences with slight modifications

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MICHELLE J. LEVINE is Assistant Professor of Bible at Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University. She received her doctorate in medieval biblical exegesis from New York University and has published articles in that field.

between the speeches. Finally, sometimes a biblical character “quotes” another character with distinct alterations. A prevalent example of this third category in Genesis is the case of unsubstantiated quotation, in which the quoting character attributes words to the original speaker that were not communicated initially.<sup>3</sup>

For each of these categories, the reader must determine the literary role of the variations within the context of the narrative scene. What is their impact on the progression of the plot and on the reader’s insight into the dynamics of the character relationships? Do the discrepancies in repeated accounts spotlight multiple perspectives on the character’s experiences? For example, do deviations between the narrated version and the character’s report signify that the character has distorted the objective account for ulterior motives? Or do these inconsistencies have no meaningful bearing on the reader’s analysis of the stories and its protagonists?

Scholars throughout the history of exegesis have grappled with the literary significance of varied repetition, swinging the pendulum from a preference for universal meaning over individual variations to a preference for the individualistic meaning of each variation.

Rabbi Mosheh ben Naḥman’s (Naḥmanides’) poetic approach to variant repetition in Genesis illustrates the influences of Rabbinic and Spanish exegesis on his literary analysis of biblical narrative. Born and bred in Christian Catalonia in the thirteenth century, Naḥmanides was exposed to more than one exegetical school of thought.<sup>4</sup> Trained by his teachers, who were students of the Tosafists, Naḥmanides was exposed to the rabbinic “omnisignificant” method,<sup>5</sup> which rejects the notions of synonymous repetition or parallelism and repudiates the idea of literary aesthetics; this approach presumes that the Bible enhances its message through embellished language. The rabbis assert that every detail within Scripture has intrinsic meaning and its inclusion within the text denotes its essential contribution to the overall message of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Naḥmanides was also schooled in the methodology of Spanish *peshat* exegesis,<sup>7</sup> which views the language and style of Scripture from the conceptual perspective of *dibberah Torah ki-leshon benei adam*—the Torah speaks in the language of humans.<sup>8</sup> Repetition and redundancy are interpreted as the idiosyncratic mode of human speech, the medium of communication adopted by the Bible to relate its stories.

Whereas the rabbinic omnisignificant position seeks to expose the intrinsic meaning of variations within repeated accounts,<sup>9</sup> the Spanish *peshat* approach generally regards these differences in repetition as the norm of biblical language. Commenting on the variations between the

servant's longwinded tale of his mission as commanded by Abraham and his encounter with Rebecca and the earlier narrated account of this scene, David Kimḥi (Radak) asserts, "And when these matters are repeated, there occurs variation in wording, but the sense is the same (*yesh bahem shinui millot, aval ha-ta'am eḥad*). For this is the norm of Scripture (*minhag ha-Katuv*) with repetition: it preserves the sense, but not the exact wording."<sup>10</sup> Comparing biblical words to the body and their meaning to the soul, Abraham Ibn Ezra declares, "The practice of learned men in all languages, therefore, is to preserve the meanings without concern for the change of words. . . . The rule is that in everything repeated, like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and many others, you will find different words but the meaning remains the same (*timza millim shonot rak ha-ta'am shaveh*)."<sup>11</sup>

Conversant in Rabbinic and Spanish exegesis, Naḥmanides feels no compelling allegiance to either exegetical trend. In his commentary on Genesis, he analyzes the broad and narrow contexts within which the deviation appears and discriminates which exegetical method zeroes in on the drama of the narrative plot and the dynamic interplay of character relationships. In some instances, he presumes that variations are meaningful, highlighting how these changes reveal significant aspects of character and character interactions and provide insight into the changing dynamics of the plot.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, Naḥmanides sometimes harmonizes divergences between the two versions and reconstructs a rendition, which is a conflation that culls from the original report and its retelling. In these examples, he merges apparently different points of view into one unified perspective on the characters' experiences. He views inconsistencies between the two accounts as manifestations of the idiosyncrasies of human dialogue or as representations of the Bible's stylistic convention (as, for example, the Bible's tendency to report concisely).<sup>13</sup>

This study highlights how cross-cultural influences shape Naḥmanides' poetic approach to varied repetition in the Joseph story, particularly the wife of Potiphar's seduction of Joseph, Pharaoh's dream accounts, and the encounters between Joseph and his brothers.<sup>14</sup> Although Naḥmanides does not delineate systematically the Bible's principles of composition and his technical poetic terminology is sparse,<sup>15</sup> his attentiveness to the Bible's method of storytelling may be gleaned through careful analysis of his interpretation of individual narrative units.

In addition, this study demonstrates how Naḥmanides' biblical commentary on the Joseph story may further literary scholarship on the art of biblical narrative. Modern biblical scholars also explore the signif-

icance of varied repetition in their analysis of the poetics of biblical narrative. In many instances, they court the omniscient approach.<sup>16</sup> For example, Robert Alter observes that many examples of variations in repeated dialogue, “. . . are cases in which moral or psychological or thematic definition of character is sharpened or somehow subtly advanced by the changes the character introduces in someone else’s words.”<sup>17</sup> These scholars caution, however, that there is no stereotypical formula to decode the significance of variation in repetition. Each modification must be examined within its distinct context in order to discern its particular literary role.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, there are times when variations are not assigned literary significance in relation to the plot and characterization of the biblical figures. For example, in the case of unsubstantiated quotations, the harmonization approach is sometimes preferred, which assumes the authenticity of the quotation even though its validity cannot be confirmed in the original dialogue report. By comparing Naḥmanides’ readings of the repeated accounts in the Joseph story with modern biblical scholarship, this study illustrates how his literary insights and concerns provide an important medieval source for advancing an understanding of the underlying poetic principles governing the artistic mode of biblical narrative.<sup>19</sup>

### The Narrated Account Versus the Character’s Spoken Report

Naḥmanides investigates the interrelationship between the voices of the narrated record of the events and the character’s own reported version in the varied accounts of the wife of Potiphar’s provocation of Joseph.

In the narrated account, the Bible reports,

And it happened, on one such day, that he [Joseph] came into the house to perform his task, and there was no man of the men of the house there in the house. And she seized him by the garment, saying, “Lie with me.” And he left his garment in her hand (*be-yadah*) and he fled and went out (39:11-13).<sup>20</sup>

Following her bungled attempt at seduction, the wife of Potiphar declares to her servants,

. . . He came to me to lie with me and I called out in a loud voice, and so, when he heard me raise my voice and call out, he left his garment *by me* (*ezli*) and fled and went out (39:14-15).

Comparing these disparate versions, Naḥmanides unequivocally accepts the narrated account as the objective, truthful rendition of the

events<sup>21</sup> and concludes that the wife of Potiphar's altered report signifies a conscious distortion of reality aimed at deception. As he explains,

"He left his garment in her hand (*be-yadah*)" (39:12): Out of respect for his mistress, he did not want to take the garment from her<sup>22</sup> hand with his strength that was greater than hers. And he removed it from himself, for it was a garment in which one wraps oneself like a robe and head-dress. And she, when she saw that he left his garment in her hand,<sup>23</sup> panicked lest he expose her to her household or to his master. She therefore preceded him to them (*hikdimato aleihem*), saying that he had removed his garment to lie with her (*hifshit bigdo lishkav immah*), and when he saw that I raised my voice, he became alarmed and fled. And this is the import of, "Now it was when she saw (*va-yehi ki-re'otah*) that he left his garment. . . . (39:13)." Therefore, she did not relate, "He left his garment in my hand (*be-yadi*)," but she only said to the people of her household and to her husband, "He left his garment by me (*ezli*)" [39:15,18].<sup>24</sup>

The failure of the wife of Potiphar to win over Joseph jeopardizes her reputation among her servants and endangers her spousal relationship. Having Joseph's garment in her possession is sure to implicate her. She therefore fabricates a contrived version of the events without delay. As Naḥmanides observes, "She preceded him to them (*hikdimato aleihem*)," taking the initiative to concoct her tale, before Joseph has the chance to defend himself and explain his state of dress in front of the astounded members of the household.<sup>25</sup> Naḥmanides supports his explanation by revealing the significance of the Bible's observation in 39:13-14: "Now it was, when she saw (*va-yehi ki-re'otah*) that he had left his garment in her hand...that she called (*va-tikra*). . . ." Linking the two events sequentially through the use of an adverbial clause, the narrated version adopts a style that conveys the wife of Potiphar's subjective point of view. When she realizes the significance of this unexpected turn of events, she reacts almost immediately to protect her honor and avert possible retaliation from Joseph.<sup>26</sup>

Naḥmanides compares the variations between the narrated report and the character's speech in order to expose how Potiphar's wife manages to walk away with her reputation intact. The narrated account relates that Joseph abandons his garment "in her hand (*be-yadah*)" (39:12,13) after Potiphar's wife grabs his robe and pleads for him to lie with her (39:12). As Naḥmanides explains, Joseph leaves his garment behind so as not to pull it forcibly from her hands, thereby extricating himself from these uncomfortable circumstances in a respectable manner.<sup>27</sup> With the incriminating evidence in her hand, she immediately

calls out to her servants. In order to deflect culpability, Potiphar's wife contorts the timing of Joseph's disrobing and its motive to her advantage. In contrast to the narrated account, she insists that Joseph disrobed voluntarily in order to sexually assault her; as she relates, "He came to me to lie with me and I called out in a loud voice (39:14)." Although Genesis 39:15 mentions his disrobing following her crying out, Nahmanides detects that the variant "*eẓli* (by me) (39:15, 18)" in her speech insinuates that Joseph had already removed his garment with the intent of raping her. When she cries out, he leaves the garment "by me (*eẓli*)" and flees! Through the brilliant manipulation of one word, the wife of Potiphar leaves the impression of her as the innocent victim and Joseph as the villain.

A study of Nahmanides' predecessors highlights the exegetical alternatives, which he takes under consideration. Radak observes, "*Va-ya'azov bigdo eẓli* [39:15]: for I grabbed him by his garment to delay him until you [the servants] would arrive and take hold of him."<sup>28</sup> Radak does not assign meaning to the wife of Potiphar's stylistic modification of *be-yadah* to *eẓli*. While he maintains that the wife of Potiphar distorts her motivations, he concludes that her pronouncement of "*va-ya'azov bigdo eẓli*" mirrors the narrated report that she snatches Joseph's garment. On the other hand, the northern French commentator, Joseph Bekhor Shor, reads significance into the linguistic variation of the wife of Potiphar's report. While he does not compare systematically the two accounts of this episode, he interprets "*va-ya'azov bigdo eẓli*" as the wife of Potiphar's accusation that Joseph removed his garment in order to rape her.<sup>29</sup>

Nahmanides perceives that the omniscient approach best exposes the wife of Potiphar at her game of deceit. By assigning meaning to her variation of *be-yadah* to *eẓli* in addition to noting her distortion of the timing of her actions, he consistently represents the wife of Potiphar as a scheming character who knows full well how to manipulate her audience's perspective to her advantage.

Modern scholars differ in their poetic analysis of this episode. M. Niehoff asserts that "in her defamation of Joseph she uses words that echo the biblical narrator's 'objective' account and her own earlier utterances to Joseph. She thus relates his flight from the house in the *same* [my emphasis] dramatic terms as had the narrator previously, her phrase *va-ya'azov bigdo eẓli va-yanas va-yeze ha-ḥuzah* (39:15) being clearly reminiscent of the authorial description: *va-ya'azov bigdo be-yadah va-yanas va-yeze ha-ḥuzah* (39:12)."<sup>30</sup> While Niehoff concludes that the wife of Potiphar contorts the chronology of events, she infers

that the wife of Potiphar is “so shocked by the implications of her own desires, that her first report reflects the reality much more authentically than she intends.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Nehama Leibowitz observes, “. . . the slightest variation in wording conceals within it great ideas. Every addition, every omission, every change in order-hidden worlds within them. . . .’ She changed ‘He left his garment *in her hand*’ to ‘*by me*,’ for without this change, the truth would have been revealed from the very beginning of her narrative.”<sup>32</sup> So, too, Robert Alter observes,

Because she uses precisely the same series of phrases in her speech (verses 14-15) that had been used twice just before by the narrator (verses 12-13) but reverses their order, so that her calling out *precedes* Joseph’s flight, the blatancy of her lie is forcefully conveyed without commentary. That blatancy is even more sharply focused through the change of a single word in one phrase she repeats from the preceding narration. . . . In the version of Potiphar’s wife, the incriminating *be-yadah*, ‘in her hand,’ of verses 12 and 13, is quietly transformed in verse 15 into *ezli*, ‘by me,’ so that Joseph will appear to have disrobed quite voluntarily as a preliminary to rape.<sup>33</sup>

Naḥmanides’ literary insights are echoed in Leibowitz and Alter’s analysis. By adopting the omniscient position, Naḥmanides exposes how the wife of Potiphar does not act out of shock or impulse, but her response is conducted with forceful and clear-headed determination to avoid any negative repercussions for her failed attempt at seduction.

Naḥmanides’ commentary on this scene illustrates his perception of the role of the exegete to be the active reader who distinguishes between the multiple points of view conveyed in biblical narrative. Because he distinguishes clearly between the voices of the narrated account and of character in the mode of dialogue, he is able to view this scene through more than one lens, demonstrating how the artistry of biblical storytelling conveys the various perspectives from which to analyze a character’s experience and behavior. This poetic sensitivity is corroborated by modern scholars who observe,

For readers to think . . . in terms of two voices [that of the narrator and character], is useful because it involves recognizing two discrete points of view which may or may not converge. . . . When . . . the perspectives of character and narrator are separated, the story gains depth and dimension because it is being seen from different angles.<sup>34</sup>

Naḥmanides demonstrates exegetical flexibility when he considers the disparate reports of Pharaoh’s dreams in Genesis 41. The modifications between the narrative version (41:1-7) and Pharaoh’s vivid reca-

pitulation (41:17-24) are variegated. There are changes in the type, number, and sequence of the adjectival descriptions of the cows and grain.<sup>35</sup> The reports diverge in their depiction of the imagery in the cow dream. Pharaoh omits the spatial location of the lean cows in relation to the fat cows (“They stood by the cows on the bank of the river” (41:3)) in his retelling. On the other hand, he supplements his version with an emotive outburst concerning the appearance of the lean cows, interjecting, “I had not seen their like in all the land of Egypt for foulness” (41:19). Pharaoh also elaborates upon Scripture’s concise description of the lean cows consuming the fat cows (41:4), observing, “And they were taken into their bellies (*va-tavonah el kirbenah*) and it was not known that they had come into their bellies (*ve-lo noda ki ba’u el kirbenah*), for their looks were as foul as before” (41:21).<sup>36</sup>

The multiple dissimilarities between these reports are not easily reconciled by the exegete since in this instance both the narrative account and Pharaoh’s recapitulation impress the reader as sincere and reliable versions of the two dreams.

The omnisignificant approach, however, makes the case that the variations are meaningful, and that they reflect the various points of view presented in this narrative scene. *Midrash Tanhuma* suggests that Pharaoh deliberately misrepresents the details of his dreams in order to test Joseph’s aptitude.

Pharaoh said, “I have dreamed a dream.” When he came to relate his dream, he sought to assess him (*bikkesh li-bedoko*) and he changed the dream for him (*ve-hayah mehappekh lo et ha-ḥalom*). Pharaoh said to him, “And behold out of the Nile were coming up seven cows [fat of flesh and fair of form—*beri’ot basar vi-yefot to’ar*]” (41:18). Joseph said to him, “This is not what you saw, but [you saw] ‘fair to look at and fat of flesh (*yefot mar’eh u-beri’ot basar*)’ (41:2).” Pharaoh said to him, “And behold seven cows wretched and exceedingly ill (*dallot ve-ra’ot*)” (41:19). Joseph said, “This is not what you saw, but [you saw] ‘ill to look at and lean of flesh (*ra’ot mar’eh ve-dakkot basar*). (41:3)”. . . Pharaoh began to wonder . . . and declared, “Since God has made known to you all this (41:39) . . . you shall be over my house (41:40).”<sup>37</sup>

Meir Sternberg also adopts an omnisignificant approach and argues that the discrepant versions imply different interpretations of the cow and grain imageries. While Pharaoh construes his two visions as one dream-plot with one meaning, the narrated version presents Pharaoh’s visions as two dream-plots with one meaning. Comparing the grammatical and adjectival asymmetry present in Pharaoh’s retelling in relation to the tight style of the narrated version, Sternberg concludes, “. . .



Pharaoh's loosening and fissuring of the meaning's analogical unity suggest that he believes in the unity of the manifest level itself; that to him the dream is also one in terms of plot coherence. There accordingly emerge not two but three different interpretations: (1) the reader's: two dreams but a single meaning; (2) the magicians': two dreams and two meanings; (3) Pharaoh's: a single dream and hence a single meaning."<sup>38</sup>

In his investigation of the variations between the dream accounts, Naḥmanides chooses to adopt a harmonization approach, which merges the disparate reports into one elaborate account. The variations in the dream reports do not signify disparate plot contents. Furthermore, the omissions and supplements within Pharaoh's account as compared to the narrative rendition do not reflect contradictory perspectives on the overall dream content. As he surmises, "And *perhaps* (*ve-ulai*) the vision (*ha-mar'eh*) and its report (*sippur*) were commensurate (*shavim*), but Scripture was not concerned (*ve-ha-Katuv lo yahush*)."<sup>39</sup> Naḥmanides attributes the inconsistencies between the accounts as the norm of Scriptural reporting. The Bible presupposes that what is not related in the narrated report will be conveyed subsequently in Pharaoh's restatement, and the insightful reader will easily reconstruct the full dream account by combining both versions. In this example as well, Naḥmanides intimates how Scripture's mode of reporting involves the reader's active participation in the reading process.

While Naḥmanides does not explain the basis for his analysis, he apparently adopts the harmonization approach because he sees no reason to question the authenticity of either description of Pharaoh's dreams. The narrated version is reliable, since it is not possible that Pharaoh was aware of aspects of his dreams concerning which this objective version was ignorant. Pharaoh's desire to understand his dreams supports the accuracy of his rendition as well. In order for Joseph to offer a faithful interpretation, Pharaoh must give a truthful and precise representation of what he has envisioned. While Naḥmanides does not elaborate, it is conceivable that the Bible's exposure of Pharaoh's agitated state (41:8, *va-tippa'em ruho*), as well as his haste to bring Joseph from prison once his minister recalls Joseph's interpretive talents (41:14), impels Naḥmanides to portray Pharaoh in a sincere light.

Naḥmanides buttresses his harmonization approach by highlighting how Joseph presents a single interpretation, which presumes a unified perspective for Pharaoh's visions. In 41:30, Joseph interprets the narrative description of the spatial proximity of the lean cows in relation to the fat cows (41:3) as an allusion to the temporal continuity between the years of

plenty and the years of famine (as he explains, “But seven years of famine will arise after them”),<sup>40</sup> although Pharaoh does not relate this detail to Joseph.<sup>41</sup> In 41:30-31, Joseph asserts, “. . . all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. And you will not be able to tell there was plenty in the land because of that famine afterward, for it will be very grave.” Joseph derives the Egyptians’ perception of their desperate plight during the famine from Pharaoh’s interjection in 41:21 that the lean cows do not change their physical appearance, despite their consumption of the healthy cows (*ve-lo noda ki ba’u el kirbenah u-mar’eihen ra ka’asher batehillah*).<sup>42</sup> According to Naḥmanides, this description intimates that while the Egyptians will avert death from hunger, their surplus from the years of plenty will not provide them with prosperity.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, since the lean cows do not die on account of their leanness, the Egyptians will survive the famine if they judiciously parcel out the reserves of food during the crisis years.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as Naḥmanides points out, Pharaoh’s elaborate observations are not reported initially in the narrated account. Notwithstanding, Joseph’s simultaneous application of both dream reports for his interpretation leads Naḥmanides to conclude that the narrated version concurs with Pharaoh’s rendition of the dreams.<sup>45</sup>

Naḥmanides’ harmonization approach finds precedent in medieval Spanish exegesis. Radak asserts, “We have already noted [on Genesis 24] that when a person repeats his words, he will add or subtract or change; he only preserves the essential content (*eino shomer ela she-yihyeh inyan ehad*). This is the case with the reporting of this dream.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Ibn Ezra remarks, “The rule is that in everything repeated, like Pharaoh’s . . . dreams and many others, you will find different words but the meaning remains the same (*timza millim shonot rak ha-ta’am shaveh*).”<sup>47</sup> So, too, Ibn Ezra observes that the adjectival variations in Pharaoh’s report concerning the descriptions of the cows are inconsequential, since their meanings are analogous.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Ezra remarks that Pharaoh’s supplemental descriptions of the appearances of the cows are insignificant, for he merely added them in order “to explain his dream,” but the meaning is the same.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, Naḥmanides does not appear to be wholly comfortable with his exegetical decision, introducing his comment with the qualifier, “perhaps (*ulai*),” as distinguished from more definitive stipulations in his commentary such as, “it is correct in my eyes (*ha-nakhon be-einai*),” “it is apparent to me/in my eyes (*ha-nir’eh be-einai; nir’eh li*),” or “it is probable (*yittakhen*).”<sup>50</sup> Conceivably, Naḥmanides is baffled by the norm of Scripture applied in this example. Why would the narrated

account omit details which are prominently interpreted by Joseph? Certainly, the Bible is not haphazard or imprecise in its method of reporting. Why is this narrative scene reported in a manner that obliges the reader to reconstruct an amalgamated dream version culled from both accounts? Throughout his commentary, Nahmanides acknowledges the laconic nature of Scriptural reporting and recognizes that sometimes gap-filling by the close reader is an important exegetical exercise.<sup>51</sup> Yet, in this case, he wonders aloud whether he has not discerned the poetic motivation behind the discrepant reports. While he does not accept the midrashic omnisignificant approach, it appears that his training in the rabbinic tradition leaves him nonetheless unsettled in his resolution that in this scenario, the variations have no meaningful consequence to the dynamics of the narrative scene.

### Variations in Dual Reporting

Nahmanides' willingness to consider different exegetical alternatives concerning the significance of varied repetition, without feeling bound to uphold either approach, is also reflected in his literary analysis of a biblical character's modified repetition of the same speech to diverse audiences. He explores the relationship between the speaker and audience as well as the impetus for each dialogue in its context in order to ascertain which exegetical position best illuminates the dynamics of the narrative scene.

Nahmanides does not adopt a consistent approach in order to resolve the stylistic diversities between the wife of Potiphar's cover-up speeches to her servants and her husband. In his consideration of the effect of each modification within the context of her addresses and its impact on her audiences, he takes into account both the omnisignificant and harmonization approaches, sometimes positing more than one resolution for the meaning of a particular variation.

Following Joseph's escape from the wife of Potiphar's seductive advances, the Egyptian mistress proclaims to her servants,

See! He has brought us a Hebrew man to play with us (*hevi lanu ish ivri le-zahek banu*)! He came to me, to lie with me, but I called out with a loud voice (39:14).

To her husband, she declares,

The Hebrew servant came to me whom you brought us to play with me (*ba elai ha-eved ha-ivri asher heveita lanu le-zahek bi*) (39:17).

Naḥmanides demonstrates his literary sensitivity to the different ways Potiphar's wife refers to the source of her troubles. In his omniscient approach, he presumes that the wife of Potiphar shrewdly customizes the style of her speeches to her different audiences. Potiphar's wife impugns her husband directly: "The Hebrew servant came to me, whom *you* brought us. . . ." (39:17). Before her servants, she refers to her husband obliquely, "*He* has brought us a Hebrew man. . . ." (39:14). This relational ambiguity signals a conscious attempt on the part of Potiphar's wife to partially couch her belittling of the master before his servants. As Naḥmanides notes briefly, "She said, *He has brought us* (39:14), concerning her husband. She did not mention him [by name] out of respect."<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, cognizant of the stylistic idiosyncrasies of human speech, Naḥmanides weighs the possibility that her indirect reference to her husband reflects a typical style of speech and does not suggest any ulterior motive on her part. He speculates that her oblique reference to her spouse is a gender typical style, "for this is the ethical way of women (*derekh musar le-nashim*)."<sup>53</sup> He also posits that the style of her speech reflects a common linguistic convention when the referent is known.<sup>54</sup>

With regard to the apparent structural diversities in her two accusatory speeches, Naḥmanides adopts a harmonization approach, paralleling the Spanish exegetical approach.<sup>55</sup> By smoothing over the stylistic differences in the arrangement of her statement, he demonstrates how the wife of Potiphar promotes a single theme in her claim of innocence to both of her audiences. Naḥmanides renders the speech to her servants: "See! He has brought us a Hebrew man, and it is *fitting for him to play* with us (*ve-ra'ui lo she-yezaḥek banu*)" (39:14). He reads her speech to Potiphar as a *mikra mesoras*, an inverted statement, coinciding with her initial outburst: "He came to *play* with me, the Hebrew servant whom you brought us" (39:17).<sup>56</sup>

By decoding how Naḥmanides analyzes the relationship between the act of bringing and the act of *to play with . . .*, one may understand why he applies the same meaning to each of her speeches, despite the variations in her addresses. Potiphar's wife claims that the cause of their predicament is the act of "bringing a Hebrew servant." This cause should be distinguished from its effect, the consequence of "*to play with . . .*" While Potiphar is accused of bringing a foreigner into their household, he is not blamed for planning intentionally to have this foreigner *play* with them. Naḥmanides apparently surmises that Potiphar's wife realizes such an accusation would not go over well with Potiphar's loyal

servants and would arouse the ire of her husband. This analysis is evident in his careful rewording of her initial speech as “it is fitting for him (*ve-ra’ui lo*) to *play* with us.” Since the acts of bringing and to *play with* . . . are not intrinsically linked, the sequence of their presentation has no direct bearing on the interpretation of her speeches.

By adopting a harmonization approach reminiscent of medieval Spanish attitudes, Nahmanides credits the wife of Potiphar with maintaining a consistent front before both master and servant, playing on their political and cultural sensitivities in order to preserve her reputation.

Nahmanides infers that Potiphar’s wife blames her husband for entrusting a foreigner with the administration of the daily activities of the Egyptian household. The act of “bringing a Hebrew servant” has as its direct object the place into which he was brought, the Egyptian home. The activity of *lezahek* is an inevitable, though not necessarily intended, repercussion of Potiphar’s actions. Apropos of the theme of Potiphar’s wife’s speech, Nahmanides renders *lezahek* in the sense of mockery or disdain, and he does not assume that it has the connotation of playfulness in a sexual manner. As he explains,

And the meaning of “See! He has brought us a Hebrew man . . . ( 39:14)”: For the Hebrews were loathed by the Egyptians. They did not eat bread with them, for this is an abomination to them (43:32). They did not purchase them as servants except as vinedressers and farmers, but they would not enter into their homes. Consequently, she said: “Behold he [the master] has wronged us by bringing a Hebrew into our homes, and appointing him overseer and ruler (*pakid ve-nagid*), and it is fitting for him to mock us (*ve-ra’ui lo she-yezahek banu*),” similar to the context (*ke-inyan*) of what is said [in Prov. 29:21], “He who pampers his servant from a child [shall have him become his master (*monon*) at last].”<sup>57</sup> And this is the meaning of “whom you brought us” (39:17), for his being brought into their house was harsh in their eyes (*ki hava’ato be-veitam hayetah kashah be-eineihem*).<sup>58</sup>

Nahmanides observes how Potiphar’s wife describes Joseph disdainfully as “the Hebrew (*ivri*),” who belongs to the class of foreigners hated by the Egyptians.<sup>59</sup> Foreigners work only in the fields and vineyards, not inside Egyptian homes. By breaking the cultural barrier and promoting Joseph to a superior position in his home, Potiphar created the opportunity for Joseph to abuse his power and see fit to *play with*, to mock and scorn the Egyptians, both lowly servants and royal mistress. Knowing full well that the Egyptians are acutely afraid of the assimilation of foreigners into their midst and their subsequent empowerment,<sup>60</sup> Poti-

phar's wife manipulates her household's point of view by playing on their fears and concerns.

It is possible that Naḥmanides' thematic analysis of her tirades also builds on his astute perception of the recurring reference to the term *bayit* (house) in this narrative sequence. The repeated reference to this term within a short narrative scope<sup>61</sup> highlights a primary theme of this story: the trust Potiphar places in the hands of Joseph to administer his household and the wife of Potiphar's attempt to exploit this power for her own designs.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to Naḥmanides' literary reading which does not assign poetic significance to the stylistic variations in the wife of Potiphar's speeches, Robert Alter adopts an omnisignificant approach, which provides a divergent perspective regarding Potiphar's wife's objectives in each of her speeches.<sup>63</sup> Alter deduces that the inversion of Potiphar's wife's words, especially the relationship of the phrase *to play with . . .* with the other clauses in her outburst, signifies that she tailors her protestations of innocence to her dissimilar audiences. Alter's reading is also based on his understanding of the verb, "*le-zaḥek*," as having the connotations of both sexual dalliance and mockery or insult. Addressing her servants, the wife of Potiphar subordinates the phrase *to play with . . . to he brought* in order to accuse Potiphar explicitly of bringing a Hebrew servant into their household to "play" with them, arousing their ire against her husband "who has introduced this dangerous alien presence in their midst."<sup>64</sup> Protesting to her husband, she positions the phrase, *to play with . . .*, ambiguously, so that the verse may be read as a scathing rebuke, "The Hebrew servant came to me—whom you brought us to *play* with me," or as a mild admonition, "The Hebrew servant came to me—the one whom you brought us—to *play* with me." With "syntactic equivocation,"<sup>65</sup> the wife of Potiphar mutes the sharpness of her reproach before her husband, while implicitly blaming him for Joseph's attempted seduction.

This reading serves as an interesting contrast to Naḥmanides' approach. Naḥmanides presumes that Potiphar's wife couches her mention of her husband to the servants, while addressing him with an explicit accusation. Furthermore, in contrast to Naḥmanides' reading, this modern approach hinges on the premise that the acts of "bringing" and "*to play with . . .*" are integrally connected. Potiphar's wife alleges that her husband "had perversely invited trouble by introducing such a sexual menace into the household,"<sup>66</sup> the alleged sexual assault proving the consequences of her husband's depraved actions. Since she accuses Potiphar of

bringing a foreign Hebrew servant for the sake of causing trouble, the sequential relationship between these two aspects of her speech is significant, and her subtle rearrangement of the relevant phrases in her speech to Potiphar is deemed meaningful.<sup>67</sup> For Naḥmanides, however, the theme of her speech revolves around Potiphar's introduction of a stranger into the household whom he raised in stature, resulting in the foreigner's own initiative to mock and scorn the Egyptians, master and servant alike. From Naḥmanides' perspective, the stylistic diversity of her speeches is inconsequential, as he maintains that the wife of Potiphar presents a unified message to both of her audiences.

Naḥmanides' perceptive insights into the vulnerability of character relationships prompt him to adopt the omniscient approach in order to reconcile the discrepancies between Joseph's speech to his brothers after revealing his identity (45:3-8) and his appeal to his father to descend to Egypt (45:9-11).

In the course of assuaging his brothers' trepidation after revealing his identity to them, Joseph pontificates about the divine providence behind his sale to Egypt and its personal ramifications for his family. "But now, do not be pained and do not be incensed with yourselves that you sold me down here, because for sustenance God has sent me before you" (45:5).<sup>68</sup> In order to underscore the profound consequence of the brothers' act, Joseph does not spare them the harsh details of their reality. "So God has sent me before you to make you a remnant on earth and to preserve life for you to be a great surviving group" (45:7). As Naḥmanides explains, had God not intervened, they would have all perished. Only Joseph's mediation on their behalf guarantees that a remnant will survive from the family.<sup>69</sup>

While Joseph's straight-talk may be well suited for his brothers, he softens his rhetoric in his entreaty to his elderly father to uproot the entire family to Egypt. Aside from the fact that Naḥmanides presumes Jacob remains unaware of the brothers' role in Joseph's sale,<sup>70</sup> he concludes that Joseph demonstrates respect for his aging father and consideration of his frail condition by sparing him the blunt details of their desperate condition. As he observes, Joseph modifies his speech to his father "by way of honor (*derekh kavod*). For to his brothers he said, 'for sustenance God has sent me before you' (45:5), 'to be a great surviving group' (45:7), but to his father, he did not want to say thus."<sup>71</sup> In order to achieve this shift in perspective, Joseph amends his oratory and declares to Jacob, as per Naḥmanides' rendering, "I will sustain you there [in the land of Goshen], for yet five years of famine remain — *lest you be reduced to poverty (tivvaresh)*, you and your household and all

that is yours” (45:11).<sup>72</sup> Tailoring his speech to Jacob’s fragile state of mind, Joseph mitigates the extreme consequences of remaining in Canaan from complete devastation to poverty. Amplifying Joseph’s brief address, Naḥmanides reveals that Joseph emphasizes to his father that his elevated position within the Egyptian government precludes him from sending sufficient food to Canaan from the royal storehouses. “They will suspect me of selling it there in order to accumulate treasures of silver and then return to my land and my birthplace.”<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, Joseph pleads with his father to leave Canaan immediately so that he may provide for his family with the permission of the Egyptian king.

Based on his close reading of the narrative context, Naḥmanides decides in favor of Rashi’s translation of the passive verb, *tivvaresh*, as a reference to poverty, in lieu of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s translation of destruction.<sup>74</sup> While Ibn Ezra does not elaborate, according to his rendition, it is apparent that Joseph delivers an identical message to his brothers and father. Naḥmanides contends, however, that Joseph does not address his aged father, who has truly believed him dead, with the same tone and content as he addresses his guilty brothers. By rendering *tivvaresh* as related to poverty and not destruction, Naḥmanides uncovers a deliberate strategy in Joseph’s variant speech to Jacob. In deference to his father, Joseph speaks a muted truth.

Naḥmanides’ literary analysis of variations in dual reporting in the Joseph story illustrates how his astute insights into character relationships preclude him from adopting a universal approach. Using the biblical context as his guide, Naḥmanides applies the exegetical school of thought which most appropriately suits the varied points of view from which the story is told.

### Character Reliability: Unsubstantiated Quotations

In his analysis of Jacob’s sons’ report to their father concerning their encounter with Joseph (known to them only as the “Egyptian lord”), Naḥmanides grapples with the literary dilemma of unsubstantiated quotations. He detects that the brothers supplement Joseph’s words with quotations that were not related in the original dialogue version. In his resolution of these literary discrepancies, he often considers two diametrically opposing alternatives for the same variant phenomenon.<sup>75</sup> His spectrum of opinions concerning these unsubstantiated quotations ranges from deliberate character strategy to strategic reporting on the part of Scripture. These examples demonstrate acutely how Naḥmanides’



versatile intellectual background comes to the fore, each exegetical attitude to which he was exposed pressing its case to be considered as a valid alternative for resolving the inconsistencies in the narrative reports.

Following their momentous encounter with Joseph, the brothers return to Canaan to convince Jacob to relinquish his beloved son, Benjamin, into their custody, in order to absolve them before Joseph and bring food from Egypt to sustain their families. According to Naḥmanides' understanding, the brothers quote the vizier as promising that if they bring Benjamin, Simeon will be returned and "you may trade throughout the land (*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*)" (42:34). Naḥmanides clarifies that the vizier ensures, "You should bring your merchandise (*sehorah*) according to your will to buy grain, and I will not take your merchandise from you, because I will make good to you as compensation for your embarrassment."<sup>76</sup> Once the brothers prove their innocence, they will be allowed to trade throughout the land and keep their profits, and they will obtain grain for free.<sup>77</sup> The recorded dialogue between Joseph and his brothers in 42:20, however, does not recount this positive outcome and even concludes rather ominously, that only compliance with the vizier's demands will save them from death.

Naḥmanides offers more than one exegetical alternative regarding the meaningfulness of the unsubstantiated quotation, "*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*." His first opinion reads this addition from an omniscient perspective and assumes a deliberate fabrication by the brothers "for the sake of peace."<sup>78</sup> In order to sway Jacob, the brothers append their conversation with the vizier, omitting the death threat and finishing on an upbeat note. Naḥmanides' near-contemporary, Ḥizkiyah bar Manoah (Ḥizkuni), whose commentary reflects an opinion of the northern French school of thought, also adopts this approach. Perhaps Naḥmanides was aware of an interpretation like that of Ḥizkuni from his northern French rabbinic teachers.<sup>79</sup>

Naḥmanides bases his analysis on the linguistic and literary features within this narrative unit. He translates *tisharu* in its secondary sense, as an expression of trade, rather than in its primary sense, as freedom to travel throughout the land (for all merchants travel in order to peddle their goods).<sup>80</sup> Had he defined *tisharu* by its core meaning, he would have concluded that the brothers merely exposed what had been implied in Joseph's words. Once the spy accusation is rescinded, it is obvious that the brothers will be able to move freely throughout the land. In fact, this is Rashi's approach. In 42:34, Rashi renders the root, *s.h.r.*, in its core sense, in contrast to his translation of *s.h.r.* as trade in Genesis 34:10, 21. As Naḥmanides perceives, Rashi's philological inconsistency testifies to

his awareness of the questionable authenticity of this unverified quotation.<sup>81</sup> By assuming that *tisharu* has the generic meaning of movement and travel, Rashi deduces that this implication is understood, even though it is not expressly stated.<sup>82</sup> Because Naḥmanides assigns a specific and limited intent to Joseph's alleged statement, he is hard pressed to deduce that Joseph actually mouthed these words when they are not recorded in the original version. He concludes that this conspicuous addition is part of the brothers' strategy of persuasion.

Naḥmanides' approach also coincides with other intentional alterations in the brothers' report to Jacob. He observes how the brothers omit their three-day incarceration (42:17) and the fact of Simeon's imprisonment (42:23), claiming in 42:33 that Joseph merely demanded that "one [of your brothers] leave with me (*ha-ehad haniḥu itti*)."<sup>83</sup> Taken together with their substitution of Joseph's ominous conclusion for a promise of compensation, Naḥmanides reveals the manifold tactics that the brothers employ in order to influence Jacob's perspective.

Conversely, Naḥmanides proposes that it is conceivable the variations between the original and quoted dialogues should not be assigned significance within the context of the brothers' address to Jacob. In this alternative, he upholds the historical veracity of Joseph's statement by attributing the discrepancies to the norm of biblical reporting. As he observes, "And it is probable (*ve-yittakhen*) that Joseph said to them, '*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*,' but Scripture did not report it (*ve-lo sippero ha-Katuv*)."<sup>84</sup>

This presumption takes its cue from Naḥmanides' insights into the vizier's earlier interactions with the brothers. Based on Joseph's declaration in 42:18 ("Do this and live, *for I fear God . . .*"), he interprets that the brothers' release after a three-day incarceration is intended to impress upon them Joseph's ethical posture. "He did so to frighten them and that they should believe in him that he fears God, and because of his fear, he releases them so that the members of their household would not die from hunger."<sup>85</sup> Amplifying the narrative, Naḥmanides deduces that Joseph provides his brothers with provisions for their trip back to Canaan (42:25) and reveals to them that this is "an act of kindness so that they should be able to bring the brother. For he said, 'It is not my intent to cause you harm if your words are proven truthful.'"<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, Naḥmanides concludes that it is plausible Joseph initiates a good will offer, allowing them to trade in the land, once he confirms that the spy accusation is unfounded.<sup>87</sup>

The qualification of the second alternative with the term, *yittakhen* (it is probable), indicates that Naḥmanides considers this alternative as

another important exegetical possibility, even though it stands in direct opposition to the first opinion. In contrast to introducing his statement with the tentative *ulai* qualifier, in this case, he prefaces his second opinion with a more definitive indicator that it is probable one should assume the original authenticity of the words attributed to Joseph.<sup>88</sup> Naḥmanides recognizes the soundness of each exegetical option because together they take into consideration two different types of realities. These realities diverge in significance, fluctuating between the assumption of a fabricated untruth and the delayed revelation of an absolute truth. To adapt modern literary terminology, Naḥmanides' first approach assumes manipulation within the characters' world of "story," and his second opinion assumes manipulation within the realm of narrated "discourse."<sup>89</sup>

The literary effect of the unsubstantiated quote, "*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*," on the reader of this narrative differs with each approach. Each opinion focuses the reader on a different point of view from which to analyze this scene. The omniscient approach highlights the address-ee's perspective by assuming that the sons of Jacob tailor this positive effect to create a specific impression on their father. The harmonization approach, which assigns authenticity to this quotation despite its deferred disclosure within Scripture, accentuates Joseph's point of view, highlighting how this unconfirmed declaration is the culmination of a number of ethical gestures that Joseph exhibits toward his brothers. Naḥmanides' willingness to consider the possibility that the brothers deliberately amend Joseph's words is especially significant in light of his observation at the end of his analysis of this speech that the Bible frequently adopts a concise mode of reporting.<sup>90</sup> His literary perception of the dynamics of this narrative context based on his understanding of the relationships between the biblical characters involved in this scene prompts him to cite the alternative that reads literary significance into the variations in their report of Joseph's words.

Modern literary scholars also grapple with the discrepancies between these two dialogue reports. In concurrence with her literary presumption that variations in repetitive accounts are thematically significant, Nehama Leibowitz prefers Naḥmanides' first opinion that the brothers fabricate the additions to their quotation of Joseph's words as part of their persuasive tactics to convince Jacob to send Benjamin to Egypt.<sup>91</sup> Robert Alter also highlights the glaring discrepancies between the two accounts, observing the brothers' consideration of their father's frame of mind. Noting their deliberate change in describing Simeon's imprisonment, Alter points out, "This apt substitution of a tactful euphemism for the

concrete image of incarceration beautifully demonstrates how the minor variations in the Bible's verbatim repetition are part of a deliberate pattern, not a matter of casual synonymity.<sup>92</sup> He observes further how the brothers omit Joseph's ominous conclusion in which he had threatened their death if they fail to bring Benjamin. Rendering "*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*" as "you will be free to move about in the land," he concludes that the brothers "make the vizier's speech end on a positive note, present only by implication in the actual words he used to them."<sup>93</sup>

Naḥmanides' presentation of two exegetical alternatives, based on his translation of *tisharu* in the sense of trade, highlights his manifold considerations in determining the thematic significance of varied repetition. Evaluating the style and content of the dialogue from the objective perspective of the Bible's mode of storytelling as well as from the subjective perspective of the biblical speakers in relation to the psychology of the addressee, Naḥmanides offers a two-tiered commentary, which allows the reader to analyze this scene from more than one angle.

Naḥmanides maintains exegetical tension between these divergent alternatives to an unconfirmed quotation in his analysis of the brothers' retelling in Genesis 43:3-7. Following the brothers' first summary report about their experiences in Egypt, Jacob staunchly refuses to send Benjamin with them (42:36). Reuben's unusual offer of his two sons as collateral for Benjamin (42:37) reinforces Jacob's determination to refuse to let Benjamin go (42:38). When the food supply runs low, Judah appeals to Jacob once again by reiterating the Egyptian vizier's demand. Jacob laments, "Why have you done me this harm, to tell the man that you had another brother" (43:6)? The brothers respond by quoting the vizier as having "asked us about ourselves and our kindred (*moladtenu*), saying: 'Is your father still alive? Do you have a brother'" (43:7)? The brothers defend their offer of this information by countering, "Could we know that he would say, 'Bring down your brother'" (43:7)?

Naḥmanides observes that Joseph's inquiry of the brothers' family is not recorded in the original dialogue report (42:9-14).<sup>94</sup> Consequently, he determines initially that the brothers fabricate this quotation to save face before their father. As he indicates, they manipulate the truth by way of "apology before their father (*hitnazzelut le-avihem*)."<sup>95</sup> This opinion coincides with his analysis of the deliberate omissions and subtle variations which the brothers insert into their first report to Jacob (42:30-34). In this manner, he achieves thematic consistency in his approach to the brothers' artful adaptation of language and content as a means of diplomacy.

Alternatively, Naḥmanides harmonizes the two reports of the brothers' dialogue with the Egyptian ruler. Joseph's unsubstantiated inquiry about their family is probably genuine, but following its conventional mode of presentation, the Bible suppresses this information initially. As Naḥmanides observes, this example is another one of "the many instances" where "[Scripture] relates an event or its recounting concisely."<sup>96</sup> From this perspective, the brothers give the impression of being faithful transmitters of Joseph's words, declaring to their father in all honesty that they were caught off-guard with the demand to bring Benjamin to Egypt.

Naḥmanides supports this alternative by highlighting that the brothers' expansive response to the vizier's reiterated spy accusation is apparently unwarranted. While they answer his charge at the outset with a general family history ("We are all the sons of one man"[42:11]), upon further accusation, they elaborate that one brother is no longer with them and the youngest has remained with his father (42:13). This information results in the vizier's demand to bring the youngest son to him (42:15). Questioning the impetus behind the brothers' detailed response, Naḥmanides concludes that it is plausible their words were a direct reply to a question that the vizier had posed.<sup>97</sup>

With regard to this modification in the brothers' speech, Naḥmanides merely differentiates between his two exegetical options with the qualifier, "or (*o*)," highlighting how he recognizes the validity of each reading. As in the previous example, each alternative focuses on a different aspect of the narrative—the psychology of the interacting characters within the world of the story and the Bible's style of presentation from the viewpoint of the writing of the story.

Naḥmanides discovers further support for the believability of this quotation in Judah's address to Joseph. As part of his plea for mercy on Benjamin's behalf, Judah reminds Joseph that their whole unfortunate circumstances began with the Egyptian ruler's inquiry into their family history. "My lord had asked his servants, saying, 'Do you have a father or brother'" (44:19)? As Naḥmanides explains, Judah said to Joseph, "We told you about this brother of ours out of compulsion (*be-ones*) because of the question of my master."<sup>98</sup> In this context, he assumes the authenticity of Joseph's query, presumably because he is reluctant to conclude that Judah would fabricate lies before the Egyptian ruler.<sup>99</sup> The same quotation whose authenticity was suspect in at least one of Naḥmanides' approaches to 43:7 has now acquired historical veracity in 44:19 and serves as the fundamental basis for his analysis of Judah's opening argument. By accepting

this unsubstantiated question as genuine, Naḥmanides reveals the accusatory undertones of Judah's speech. In essence, Judah blames the ruler for placing his family in its desperate situation.<sup>100</sup>

Naḥmanides' predecessors and contemporaries also accept this evaluation of the authenticity of Judah's comment in 44:19. Ḥizkuni considers this quote to be reliable, stating, "We do not find that he asked this, but we should say that he did ask them, for how would [Judah] have the audacity to bring forth lies about him [Joseph] in his presence? And this is what was said earlier, 'The man firmly asked us about ourselves and our kindred. . . . (43:7)'"<sup>101</sup> Radak also acknowledges the veracity of this question, stating in his commentary on 44:19, "[Judah] told him the matters as they had occurred [*ha-devarim kemo she-hayu*] in a way that would arouse his [Joseph's] mercy over the old man [Jacob] and that he would not detain the lad."<sup>102</sup>

Some modern scholars also adopt this harmonistic literary resolution. In his study on biblical quotations, George Savran observes that the quotation in 43:7 (along with 43:3, 5) "can be treated either as extensive paraphrases of the earlier material or as unverifiable quotations, which are close enough in meaning to the events of 42:9ff. to make their authenticity very likely."<sup>103</sup> He also concludes with regard to 44:19 that Judah's attribution of this question to Joseph is reliable, claiming that it is more important to focus on "Judah's assumption that it is a reasonable question for Joseph to have asked, and his correct estimation of its influence upon Joseph. By beginning his speech with the quotation, 'My lord asked his servants saying, Do you have a father or a brother?' Judah has effectively cited Joseph's interest in Benjamin as the cause of the present crisis."<sup>104</sup> So, too, with regard to 43:7, Robert Alter surmises, "The way the Bible uses verbatim repetition with additions makes it at least possible to imagine that Joseph really asked such a question but that it simply was not included in the reported dialogue, so it is not absolutely necessary to construe it as an invention of Judah's."<sup>105</sup>

Naḥmanides' insights into the dynamics of the Joseph story preclude him from adopting a uniform approach to the literary role of unconfirmed quotations. The alternatives of assigning literary significance to variations in quotations or viewing these discrepancies between the accounts as the norm of biblical reporting operate side by side as viable interpretations, often for the same variation.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

In his study of the application of omnisignificance in medieval *peshat* exegesis of the Book of Daniel, Richard Steiner concludes, “. . . it may turn out that attitude towards the omnisignificance principle is a variable which can serve to establish a new classification of medieval *pash-tanim*—a classification potentially more revealing than the current geographical one.”<sup>107</sup> Yaakov Elman observes, “One drawback to such a classification, however, is the variability of the importance of omnisignificance *within* the work of a particular exegete from issue to issue and from crux to crux.”<sup>108</sup> These scholarly conclusions must be taken into consideration when analyzing Naḥmanides’ literary attitudes toward variant repetition in the Genesis narratives.

Naḥmanides applies the omnisignificant principle discerningly. Having assimilated the rabbinic school of thought which assigns meaning to literary variations and the Spanish way of thinking which prioritizes sense over style, he does not box himself into an either/or system of poetics for this literary phenomenon. Naḥmanides demonstrates exegetical flexibility to sift through the various approaches that he imbibed as a student and to discern the most appropriate reading. He carefully scrutinizes the dynamics of each narrative scene and the position of the variant repetition in its immediate and broad contexts. He examines the interrelationship between the objective narrated account and the subjective character retelling and considers the perspectives of the biblical figures who interact through their speech within the world of these stories. Furthermore, his poetic sensitivity to the norms of biblical reporting plays an important role in ascertaining the literary meaning of variant repetition. Because of his consideration of the multiple factors at work within biblical narrative, in some cases, Naḥmanides allows for more than one possible reading, seeing the virtues of both exegetical alternatives.

Bernard Septimus observes, “. . . the selective fusing and shaping of divergent traditions is a major theme of Naḥmanides’ thought.”<sup>109</sup> This description of Naḥmanides’ literary oeuvre typifies his poetic approach to variations in repetitive accounts. In Naḥmanides’ case, however, these influences are not constraining but liberating. They presented him with multiple exegetical options so that ultimately he could let the words of the biblical text speak for themselves and he could listen with an open ear.

Naḥmanides’ appreciation for the multiple levels of reading a biblical text in the context of his literary analysis of varied repetition coincides with his overriding exegetical attitude toward biblical interpreta-

tion. As Avraham Grossman observes, “The most significant factor which guided him in his commentary is the premise that one should search within the texts of Scripture for different meanings and various layers that complement one another.”<sup>110</sup> Throughout his biblical commentary, Naḥmanides frequently presents more than one linguistic-contextual reading (*peshat*) in order to resolve ambiguities and inconsistencies within a narrative context; these multiple interpretations are often preceded by introductory qualifiers, such as *ve-yittakhen* or *nir’eh li*.<sup>111</sup> Naḥmanides’ examination of a biblical text from more than one perspective is further apparent in his consideration of the overt, *peshat* reading of a biblical text alongside the more nuanced, implicit midrashic understanding of the text. As he declares, “But there is Midrash with its *Peshat* . . . But Scripture tolerates all, and both of them are truth (*aval yisbol ha-Katuv et ha-kol ve-yihyu sheneihem emet*).”<sup>112</sup> While he generally prefers a reading based on the *peshat* of the text,<sup>113</sup> he often acknowledges the profundity of the midrashic reading.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, throughout his biblical commentary, Naḥmanides emphasizes how the overt and hidden, mystical layers of meaning co-exist within Scripture. As he observes, “. . .by way of the truth, Scripture speaks of the lower worlds, and it alludes to the higher ones (*ha-Katuv yaggid ba-taḥtonim ve-yirmoz ba-elyonim*).”<sup>115</sup> Naḥmanides’ variegated approach to variations in repetitive accounts in the Genesis narratives accordingly demonstrates how this medieval exegete maintained consistency in his exegetical program throughout his biblical commentary.

The progressive critical thinking of this medievalist’s biblical exegesis is further attested by a comparison between Naḥmanides’ literary analysis and the various literary approaches adopted by modern scholarship in its investigation of varied repetition. Naḥmanides examines *how* the Bible presents its stories in order to discover *what* the Bible intends for its readers to learn from them. His literary insights and concerns are often reflected and find parallels in modern literary biblical scholarship on the Genesis narratives. By decoding the complex thought processes which inform his poetic approach to the significance of variations in repetitive accounts, this study has illustrated how Naḥmanides’ biblical commentary serves as an important contribution to the investigation of the literary dimension of biblical narrative.



## Notes

This study is based on my dissertation, *The Poetics of Characterization in Nahmanides' Commentary on Genesis* (New York University, January 2000), which was written with the generous support of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

1. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985), 368. Sternberg, 376, notes further that while the characters that function within the world of "story" may require a complete report, the reader has already been apprised of this information. Why then does the Bible insist on communicating a second detailed account where a brief synopsis would have sufficed?
2. These categories of variant repetition are classified by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), 97, as "phrasal" repetition, to be distinguished from other forms of repetition in the Bible which involve verbal reiteration of guiding words (*Leitwort*) or recurrent type-scenes, motifs, themes, or actions. Cf. as well Sternberg, *Poetics*, 391-92, in which he delineates categories of varied repetition in biblical narrative by focusing on how the repetition physically deviates from the original communication through, for example, omission or addition. I have chosen to categorize these examples from the perspective of the "speaker" of the two accounts, be it the mode of narration or dialogue, to facilitate discussion of Nahmanides' literary insights.
3. George Savran has categorized and studied the various forms of biblical quotation in *Telling and Retelling: Quotations in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988).
4. For a discussion of Nahmanides' diverse cultural background, see Bernard Septimus, "'Open Rebuke and Concealed Love': Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, 1983), 11-13, 25-26, 30-34. As Septimus, 13, observes, "Certainly, the influence of Franco-German talmudic culture and Provençal Kabbalah set him on a cultural course unknown in Muslim Spain. But the confluence of these northern traditions with the still powerful and often divergent tradition of Andalusia contributed to the remarkable level of creative tension in Nahmanides' thought and helped to form his cultural ideal." In addition to Rashi and Ibn Ezra as well as midrashic and talmudic sources cited explicitly by Nahmanides throughout his biblical commentary, Hillel Novetsky, *The Influence of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor and Radak on Ramban's Commentary on the Torah* (MA thesis, Yeshiva University, 1992), demonstrates that Nahmanides is influenced significantly by the commentaries of David Kimḥi and Joseph Bekhor Shor. While Nahmanides rarely mentions Radak by name (one exception being his reference in Gen. 35:16 to Radak's grammatical work), Novetsky, 38-39, posits that parallels in language and content between their commentaries indicate that Nahmanides most likely had copies of Radak's *Sefer ha-Shorashim* and his commentary to Genesis. Novetsky, 65, concludes further that parallels in content but not style between the commentaries of Nahmanides and Bekhor Shor make it difficult

to ascertain whether Naḥmanides possessed a copy of Bekhor Shor's commentary; at the very least, however, he probably received oral traditions of Bekhor Shor's insights from his northern French teachers. Cf. as well M.Z. Segal, *Parshanut ha-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1943), 93-94, 98; Avraham Grossman, "Ha-kesharim Bein Yahadut Sefarad le-Yahadut Ashkenaz bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim," in *Moreshet Sefarad: Keren ha-Zikhron le-Tarbut Yehudit*, ed. Hayyim Beinart, (Jerusalem, 1992), 179-80. Compare Ephraim Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot: Toledoteihem, Hibbureihem, ve-Shitatum* (Jerusalem, 1955), 22, 396, 492, in which he discusses Naḥmanides' ties to the Tosafist method of learning.

5. The term, "omnificance" was conceived by James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven and London, 1981), 104-05, to define the rabbinic attitude toward the relationship between the sense of the text and its structure and style.
6. As Kugel, *ibid.*, 104, explains, "For the basic assumption underlying all of rabbinic exegesis is that the slightest details of the biblical text have a meaning that is both comprehensible and significant. Nothing in the Bible, in other words, ought to be explained as the product of chance, or for that matter, as an emphatic or rhetorical form, or anything similar, nor ought its reasons to be assigned to the realm of Divine unknowables. Every detail is put there to teach something new and important, and it is capable of being discovered by careful analysis." It is important to note, however, that while the omnificance approach to analysis of biblical text is a prevalent agenda throughout rabbinic literature, it was not developed systematically nor did it coalesce into an elaborate exegetical routine that was applied methodically. As Yaakov Elman observes, "Historically, omnificance reflects a rabbinic view of Scripture rather than a complete exegetical program." See Elman, "It Is No Empty Thing': Naḥmanides and the Search for Omnificance," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 4 (1993): 2.
7. For a comprehensive definition of the exegetical method of *peshat*, see Mordechai Z. Cohen, *From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimḥi* (Leiden/Boston, 2003), 3, who defines *peshat* as "an empirical, contextual reading of Scripture that adheres to the rules of language, biblical literary conventions and historical context." Compare Sarah Kamin, *Rashi: Peshuto Shel Mikra u-Midrasho Shel Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1986), 14.
8. This rabbinic dictum, which is applied infrequently within the Talmud as an exegetical solution to resolve apparent redundancies (cf. *Kiddushin* 17b; *Yevamot* 71a; *Bava Mezi'a* 31b), provided Spanish *peshat* commentators with a theoretical model for analyzing Scripture's style, structure, and mode of presentation, based on the linguistic principles and stylistic preferences of human language. For a detailed analysis of these divergent exegetical trends and their ramifications for the history of biblical exegesis, especially in the context of biblical poetry, see Mordechai Z. Cohen, "The Best of Poetry . . .': Literary Approaches to the Bible in the Spanish *Peshat* Tradition," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 6 (1995-96):15-57. Compare Elman, "It Is No Empty Thing," 1-83, who discusses Naḥmanides' omnificance agenda especially with regard to sequentiality, proportion, and resumptive repetition in the Pentateuch. See as well E. Z. Melammed, *Mefarshai ha-Mikra: Darkheiham ve-Shitoteihem* (Jerusalem, Hebrew Univ. 1975), 940-42, where he lists examples of Naḥmanides' sensitivity to repetition in the Bible. This study

- expands scholarship on Naḥmanides' biblical commentary by delineating his literary approach to variations in repetitive accounts in biblical narrative and comparing it to his exegetical predecessors and modern literary approaches.
9. Cf. Nehama Leibowitz's summary of the rabbinic approach in *Iyyunim be-Sefer Devarim* (Jerusalem, 1994), 35, 346.
  10. Radak, Gen. 24:39, in *Torat Ḥayyim*, ed. Mordecai Leib Katzenellenbogen, (Jerusalem, 1986), 1:282. Compare as well Radak on Gen. 18:13; 32:8 (*Torat Ḥayyim*, 1:213, 2:93). Cf. Frank Talmage's discussion of Radak's methodology, *David Kimḥi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge, 1975), 102-03. See also Mordechai Z. Cohen, "Hashpa'ot Midrashiyot al Parshanut ha-Peshat shel Radak," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1994), 143-46, where he discusses Radak's *peshat* interpretations, which diverge from the midrashic omnisignificant program. It is important to note, however, that Radak does not assume non-omnisignificance in all biblical contexts. Cf. Cohen, *ibid.*, 147-50, where he cites examples in which Radak deviates from Spanish *peshat* methodology and assigns significance to repetitions and redundancies in narrative contexts. In addition, Mordechai Cohen, *From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimḥi*, 272-322, astutely observes that while Radak often assigns no meaning to variations in "literal language," his *mashal* exegesis of the Bible's figurative language, particularly in his analysis of the imagery in biblical prophecy, adopts an omnisignificant stance which assumes that style and content are intricately related. Cf. as well Mordechai Cohen, "Radak mul Rabbi Ibn Ezra ve-Rambam—Gishah Ḥadashah le-'Derekh Mashal' ba-Mikra," *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1997), Division A, The Bible and Its World, Hebrew section, 36-38.
  11. Ibn Ezra, Ex. 20:1, in *Peirushei ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. Asher Weiser, (Jerusalem, 1976), 2:127. Compare Ibn Ezra's comments on Ex. 11:5 (Weiser, 2:68) and Ex. 18:21 (Weiser, 2:117). For further discussion of Ibn Ezra's non-omnisignificant approach to variations in parallel contexts, see Cohen, *From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimḥi*, 238-45, and Richard Steiner, "Meaninglessness, Meaningfulness, and Super-Meaningfulness in Scripture: An Analysis of the Controversy Surrounding Dan 2:12 in the Middle Ages," *JQR* 82 (1992): 443-445.
  12. While this study applies literary terms, such as "character," to refer to the biblical figures in Genesis, it is understood that Naḥmanides upholds the veracity of the historical events and stories related in Genesis, and he assumes the historicity of the biblical personalities.
  13. Naḥmanides does not qualify his harmonization approach for variant repetition with the methodological statements found in that of Ibn Ezra or Radak. Nevertheless, this study will highlight that Naḥmanides' awareness of Spanish *peshat* tradition informs many of his literary insights regarding the significance of variant repetition.
  14. Also noteworthy are Naḥmanides' keen insights into the literary role of non-varying verbatim repetition, especially in the Flood narrative, where the command to enter the ark is reiterated numerous times, as is the narrated report that Noah did as God commanded. Cf. Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 6:19, 22; 7:1, 9, 16. Compare the modern approach of Sternberg, *Poetics*, 387-90. This article focuses on the more striking phenomenon of variant redundancies within Genesis.

15. Compare the observations of Elman, "It Is No Empty Thing," 13, 29, and Cohen, "The Best of Poetry," 33.
16. In her study of biblical narrative, Nehama Leibowitz adopts this literary approach. See, for example, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereishit* (Jerusalem, 1969), 162-66, 265-67, 295, 323-24, 334-35, 366, 366-67, n. 7, 380-81. Compare Amos Frisch, "Perek be-Mishnat Neḥamah al 'Mivneh ha-Ḥazarah' ba-Sippur ha-Mikrai," in *Pirkei Neḥamah—Prof. Nehama Leibowitz Memorial Volume*, ed. Moshe Ahrend, et. al. (Jerusalem, 2001), 313-23. Cf. as well Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, 1989 rpt. of 1979 Hebrew edn.), 162, who observes that in most instances of variant repetition, the differences "reflect the viewpoint or intention of the speaker." So, too, Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, 1983), 73-82. Likewise, Sternberg, *Poetics*, 354-440, adopts the premise of meaningful variations in his study of the structure of repetition in biblical narrative.
17. Robert Alter, "Biblical Imperatives and Literary Play," in *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson, Jr. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991), 19. See his full discussion, *ibid.*, 19-23. Compare Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 97, where he writes, "Many of the psychological, moral, and dramatic complications of biblical narrative are produced through this technique [of phrasal variant repetition]." Alter's chapter on "The Techniques of Repetition," *ibid.*, 88-113, is noteworthy in this context.
18. See Sternberg, *Poetics*, 392-93, where he observes, "However hard one looks at the paired examples within each [category of variation], no common denominator emerges. . . . It follows that the bearing and effect of variation can be determined only in context."
19. Cf. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 11, who observes that ". . . in many cases, a literary student of the Bible has more to learn from the traditional commentaries than from modern scholarship." Compare Berlin's observations, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 19-20.
20. Unless otherwise noted, translation of biblical verses follows Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York and London, 1996).
21. While Naḥmanides does not speak of a biblical narrator per se, it will become apparent that his literary reading is predicated on his discrimination between the different "voices" within Scripture relating the sequence of events in this scene. For a modern observation in this regard, see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1993), 71, who note, "A character speaks, the narrator recounts action. When there is incongruity, we often find that the narrator's report of action is a more reliable indicator of character than the character's speech."
22. Charles B. (Ḥayyim Dov) Chavel's Hebrew edition and English translation of Naḥmanides' commentary are inconsistent regarding this term. While Chavel, *Perush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1959), 1:220, reads *mi-yado* (from his hand), his English version, *Ramban (Nachmanides). Commentary on the Torah* (New York, 1971), 1:482, renders "her hand," which is more logical in this context. Accordingly, I have quoted from Menahem Zvi Eisenstadt's edition of Naḥmanides' biblical commentary, *Perush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah* (New York, 1959-62), 313, which contains the reading from the 1489 Lisbon manuscript, of *mi-yadah*.

23. Based on context, Eisenstadt's rendition, *ibid.*, 314, *be-yadah*, is more appropriate than Chavel's version, *Perush*, 1:220, of *be-yadeha*, in her hands.
24. Naḥmanides, Gen. 39:12, in *Perush ha-Ramban al ha-Torah*, ed. Ḥayyim Chavel, 1:220. All subsequent citations from Naḥmanides' commentary will derive from Chavel's edition, cited as *Perush*, unless noted otherwise. Translation of Naḥmanides' commentary is my own.
25. Even though Joseph had apparently abandoned an outer garment which did not leave him unclothed, the wife of Potiphar was concerned that members of her household would notice that he was inappropriately dressed and begin to wonder. Knowing that Potiphar's wife had the garment, Joseph would accuse her without delay for compromising his position within the household. Compare Eisenstadt's observation, *Perush ha-Ramban*, 313, n. 41.
26. Note how Naḥmanides joins his comment of "she preceded him to them," to his observation, "And this is the import of the phrase, 'Now it was when she saw that he left his garment in her hand. . . .' (39:13)." Sternberg, *Poetics*, 424, parallels Naḥmanides' reading, observing, "'When she saw . . . she called': losing no time, she raises the alarm to give color to her story." However, Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109, explains the narrator's repetition of her seeing Joseph's garment in her hand as a technique to draw attention to the "critical evidential fact of the robe in her hand, which is *followed* (verse 14) by her 'calling out'; and it provides a fine moment of suspended narrative progress, while we wait to hear what move she can possibly devise to get out of this compromising situation."
27. Naḥmanides, 39:12, classifies this motive as a means of expressing "honor for his mistress." This is one of many examples in which Naḥmanides deciphers the motives of biblical characters, revealing the underlying psychological facets of their persona.
28. Radak, Gen. 39:15 (*Torat Ḥayyim*, 2:171).
29. Bekhor Shor, Gen. 39:15, in *Peirushei Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor al ha-Torah*, ed. Yehoshafat Nevo (Jerusalem, 1994), 72. For a similar analysis of the significance of *ezli*, compare *Peirushei ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Ḥizkiyyah ben Rabbi Manoah (Ḥizkuni)*, ed. Ḥayyim Chavel (Jerusalem, 1981), 148, on Gen. 39:12. Naḥmanides, however, probably did not possess the commentary of this northern French scholar as they were close contemporaries. Cf. on this, Novetsky, *The Influence of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor and Radak on Ramban's Commentary*, 8-9. On the other hand, parallels between Ḥizkuni and Naḥmanides' commentary lead one to believe that Naḥmanides had access to additional northern French biblical interpretations presumably through his Ashkenazic teachers. Compare the later commentary of Shmuel David Luzzatto, *Perush Shadal al Ḥamishah Ḥumeshei Torah*, ed. Phil Schlesinger (Tel Aviv, 1965), 161, who also notes how *ezli* intimates that Joseph had already removed his garment to lie with her.
30. M. Niehoff, "Do Biblical Characters Talk to Themselves? Narrative Modes of Representing Inner Speech in Early Biblical Fiction," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111, 4 (1992):590. Cf. Donald Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)* (Leiden, 1970), 77-78, who regards the technique of repetition in this context as being applied in a "shoddy fashion," and critiques, ". . . must the author be so unimaginatively repetitive?"
31. Niehoff, *ibid.*, 591.
32. Leibowitz, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereshit*, 295 (my translation).

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33. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109-110. For a similar analysis, cf. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 424-25.
34. Fewell and Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 71-72. Compare Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 82, “. . . biblical narrative makes use of multiple points of view. . . . The reader of such narrative is not a passive recipient of a story, but an active participant in trying to understand it. Because he is given different points of view, sees things from different perspectives, he must struggle to establish his own.”
35. For example, the narrated version depicts the lean cows as “foul to look at and meager in flesh (*ra’ot mar’eh ve-dakkot basar*)” (41:3), while Pharaoh portrays them as “gaunt, very foul-featured, and meager in flesh [*dallot ve-ra’ot to’ar me’od ve-rakkot basar*]” (41:19).
36. Cf. Leibowitz’s chart listing the differences between the two accounts, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereshit*, 323-24.
37. *Midrash Tanḥuma* (rpt. Jerusalem, 1971-72), Vol. I, *Mikkez*, ch. 3.
38. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 400, and see his discussion, 399-400.
39. Naḥmanides, 41:3 (*Perush*, 1:226).
40. Naḥmanides, 41:3 (*Perush*, 1:226) notes that the position of the lean cows was “by their side [of the fat cows] and close to them, and this is a sign (*siman*) that there will be no interruption between the years of plenty and the years of famine.” Compare his analysis of the parallel meaning of the rising of seven scorched sheaves “after” the appearance of the seven healthy sheaves as an allusion to the successive continuity between the years of plenty and of famine. Cf. Naḥmanides, 41:6 (*Perush*, 1:226), in which he notes, “for a sign of continuity (*siman tekhifah*) he saw in all of them [the dreams].” In this analysis, he applies the term *siman* to indicate that there is a direct correlation between the concrete dream imagery and its figurative interpretation. In an interesting parallel application, Naḥmanides applies *siman* to characterize his typological approach to the Genesis narratives, which views the concrete actions and personal biographies of the forefathers as symbolic harbingers of the future destinies of their progeny; compare Naḥmanides, Gen. 12:6 (*Perush*, 1:77-78).
41. Cf. Naḥmanides, 41:3 (*Perush*, 1:226). Naḥmanides probably bases this figurative analysis on Radak’s vague comment, 41:3 (*Torat Ḥayyim*, 2:181), “And they stood—it did not say ‘they grazed’ but they stood next to the first ones and all this is explained in the interpretation.” Note that Naḥmanides analyzes the positioning of the lean cows near the healthy cows from a temporal, not spatial, perspective. In his view, the description of the healthy cows grazing steadily in the reed-grass by the river, reported in both dream accounts (41:2, 18), highlights the spatial implication that there will be seven years of abundance and stability exclusively in the land of Egypt, enabling Egypt to gather surplus grains, while all the countries will suffer widespread famine. As Naḥmanides, 41:2 (*Perush*, 1:225), explains, “And maybe this was hinted in the dream (*ve-ulai ba-ḥalom ramaz ba-zeh*) in that it mentions, ‘And they grazed in the reed grass,’ because there [in Egypt] was their pasture and their position (*mireihen u-ma’amadan*).” Naḥmanides emphasizes how Joseph singles out the land of Egypt as the location for the abundance (41:29, 30), while the years of famine are described by him without any territorial referent (41:30, 31), as an allusion to this spatial differentiation between Egypt and her neighbors.

42. See Naḥmanides, 41:4 (*Perush*, 1:226).
43. Naḥmanides, 41:4.
44. Naḥmanides, 41:4. Compare his comment to 41:36 (*Perush*, 1:228). In this context, Naḥmanides, 41:4, is also disagreeing with Rashi's understanding of the ramifications of the lean cows "eating" the fat cows. Rashi, 41:4, in *Rashi al ha-Torah*, ed. Abraham Berliner (Frankfurt, 1905; rpt. Jerusalem, 1970), 81, translates "*va-tokhhalnah*" as an act of destruction and elimination (compare Num. 13:32). Correlating the "eating" of the lean cows to the "swallowing" of the blighted ears of grain, Rashi interprets this imagery as an allusion to the obliteration of the fond memories of the plentiful years during the years of famine; this corresponds to Joseph's symbolic interpretation in 41:30. Rashi surmises (Berliner, 82), that Joseph interprets Pharaoh's interjection in 41:21 to refer to the Egyptians' perception that "the abundance will not be known in the land because of the famine afterward," as explained in 41:31. Naḥmanides, influenced by Radak, 41:4 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:181), renders "*va-tokhhalnah*" as consumption, indicative of Joseph's solution that the Egyptians eat of the grain of the years of plenty during the seven years of famine. Naḥmanides, 41:4, relates Joseph's interpretation of the forgotten state of prosperity which had once ensued, described similarly in 41:30 and 41:31, as a decoding of the meaning of Pharaoh's exclamation in 41:21, concerning the unchanged appearance of the lean cows after eating the fat cows. Cf. Radak, 41:21 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:186). For a discussion of the differences between these various approaches, compare Leibowitz, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereshit*, 314-15.
45. As Naḥmanides, 41:3 (*Perush*, 1:226), emphasizes, "And perhaps the vision [the narrative version] and its report [Pharaoh's version] were commensurate . . . just as he added in the report, 'And you could not tell that they had come into their bellies' (41:21)."
46. Radak, Gen. 41:17 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:185).
47. Ibn Ezra, Ex. 20:1 (Weiser, 2:127).
48. As Ibn Ezra, Gen. 41:19 (Weiser, 1:115), observes, "for this is similar to this (*ki zeh karov mi-zeh*)."
49. Cf. Ibn Ezra, 41:21 (Weiser, 1:115). Compare the explanatory notes of Yehudah Krinski, *Be'ur Meḥokekei Yehudah* (New York, 1975), 1:444-45, on Ibn Ezra's commentary. Compare the observations of Isaac Abarbanel, *Peirush ha-Torah* (Warsaw, 1862; rpt. Jerusalem, n.d.), *Mikkez*, 20b, "Pharaoh told his dream to Joseph and altered a few things . . . for the sense is similar and the text has said less in one place and more in another as it saw fit (*kefi zorekh ha-inyan*)." The northern French commentator, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam), on Gen. 41:21, in *Perush ha-Rashbam ha-Shalem al ha-Torah*, ed. David Rosin (Breslau, 1882), 58, has a unique approach to the relative significance of these variations, which takes into consideration the editorial arrangement of biblical text. While there is only one version of the dreams, Pharaoh's subjective reaction to the image of the lean cows was only worthy of mention by Pharaoh himself; in the narrated version, "what Pharaoh thought to himself concerning his astonishment about the bad appearances of the cows as before (41:21) would not have been fitting to report (*lo hayah ra'ui likhtov*)." This is an interesting middle of the ground position, assigning significance to the variations from the perspective of editing, but not from the point of view of meaning or content. (It

should be noted that it is not known for certain whether Naḥmanides had access to a copy of Rashbam's commentary; on this, see Novetsky, *The Influence of Bekhor Shor and Radak on Ramban's Commentary*, 8-9.) Cf. Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1978), 76, who also credits additions to Pharaoh's version as reflective of his subjective account in comparison to the narrator's objective telling. Compare Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 80, who analyzes Pharaoh's recapitulation of the first dream as an example of "elegant variation . . . fully explicable on psychological grounds: Pharaoh, like most people recalling a dream, waxes hyperbolic at the memory of the fantastic images."

50. A survey of Naḥmanides' usage of the qualifier, *ulai*, reveals that he reserves this term for introducing explanations with which he associates a measure of uncertainty. Naḥmanides attaches *ulai* to his speculative rationale for a predecessor's interpretation (cf. Naḥmanides, Gen. 1:11; 11:32; 12:11; 13:7; 37:2; Ex. 6:3; 14:15; 19:13). *Ulai* qualifies an explanation that relies on gap-filling, which does not have textual corroboration (cf. Naḥmanides on Gen. 14:1, 7; 22:2; 35:22; 37:18). *Ulai* further classifies Naḥmanides' attempt to explain the purpose for a gap within a biblical context (cf. Naḥmanides on Ex. 32:35; Lev. 4:2). Naḥmanides also applies this qualifier when disclosing motivations behind character actions, which are not explicated in the text (cf. Naḥmanides on Gen. 18:15; 20:12; 30:1; 31:35; 48:17; Num. 14:17). Throughout his biblical commentary, however, *ulai* does not preface an interpretation that is expressly classified as *peshat*, disclosing the apparent meaning that emerges from the biblical language and context. On the other hand, other qualifying terms, such as *ha-nakhon be-einai* (*ha-nakhon*), *hanir'eh be-einai* (*nir'eh li*), and *yittakhen*, do preface an interpretation classified explicitly by Naḥmanides as *peshat*. See, for example, in Naḥmanides' commentary on Gen. 22:2; Ex. 3:12; Lev. 18:7, 23:43; Num. 35:2; Deut. 10:1, for the idiom, *ha-nakhon (be-einai) al derekh ha-peshat*; Gen. 13:17, 25:22, 38:24, 42:6, for the introductory idiom, *al derekh ha-peshat yittakhen*; and Gen. 8:4; Ex. 20:21; Lev. 18:21; Num. 13:22, 35:14; Deut. 21:14, for the juxtaposition of *nir'eh* with a *peshat* interpretation. Accordingly, Naḥmanides' application of the qualifier, *ulai*, to his harmonizing resolution of the inconsistencies between Pharaoh's dream reports signifies a degree of tentativeness, which he assigns to the import and consequence of his interpretation. Naḥmanides' usage of the classifying terms, *ulai*, *nir'eh*, and *yittakhen* throughout his exegesis will be discussed in a future paper, based on my presentation, "Organization and Classification within Naḥmanides' Biblical Commentary: The Role of Introductory Qualifiers," The Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, Dec. 2003.
51. Compare Naḥmanides' comment, Gen. 42:21 (*Perush*, 1:234), in which he notes the Scriptural norm (*mi-derekh ha-Ketuvim*) to speak briefly of a matter in one section and elaborate upon it in another location. Cf. as well Naḥmanides, Gen. 31:7 and Lev. 1:10 (*Perush*, 1:173; 2: 14, respectively). Additionally, Naḥmanides presumes the phenomenon of unreported dialogue conversations which he fills in as a way of smoothing out the reading of the narrative scene. See, for example, Naḥmanides, Gen. 16:11 (*Perush*, 1:98), where he inserts an intermediate conversation that transpires between Abram and Hagar, and concludes with regard to its omission in the biblical text that "Scripture did not need to deal at length in this matter." Cf. as well



- his comments on Gen. 12:18 (*Perush*, 1:81). Nahmanides also demonstrates his awareness of the laconic nature of biblical dialogue, often fleshing out the recorded conversations; see, for example, his analyses of Gen. 42:11; 42:25, 34; 44:1; 45:11.
52. Nahmanides, 39:14 (*Perush*, 1:220). Interestingly, Alter, *Genesis*, 226, notes to 39:14, regards her omission of Potiphar's name as meaningful, but concludes that she does so out of contempt, not respect.
  53. Nahmanides, 39:14.
  54. Nahmanides, 39:14. He compares this stylistic instance to the omission of direct reference to God in various places in Job (compare 7:12-19; 23:3-15), "for it is known by them [the speakers] that about Him they speak," and to the oblique reference to Ish-boshet in 2 Sam. 3:7. Rashi, 39:14 (Berliner, 79), also does not assign significance to this variation, noting that the omission of Potiphar's name is an example of the succinct nature of direct speech (*zeh lashon kezarah*).
  55. Compare Radak, 39:17 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:181), who suggests that the *kaf* of "*ka-devarim ha-eleh*" signifies that the variations in her two reports are insignificant for "the content is the same (*ha-inyan ehad*)." Radak, however, does not elaborate on the ramifications of this harmonization approach.
  56. See Nahmanides, 39:14, in conjunction with his commentary to Gen.15:13 (*Perush*, 1:92), where he comments on 39:17 in his discussion of various biblical examples of *mikra mesoras*. See also Nahmanides, 39:19 (*Perush*, 1:221), where, in one alternative, he interprets the *kaf* in *ka-devarim ha-eleh asah li avdekha* (39:19) as a comparative *kaf*, rendering: "When his master heard the words of his wife who said, 'Your servant did to me *like* these things that I immediately told to the members of your household,' he was angered." This reading implies a conflation of the variants in her reports to the servants and her husband. Rashi, 39:17 (Berliner, 79), also regards this verse as an inverted statement, but he does not analyze its ramifications. Compare Rashi on *Sotah* 38a, s. v. *mesoras hu*, where he defines a *mikra mesoras* in relation to the Talmud's discussion of Ex. 20:21 as a statement that is *mehuppakh*, stylistically reversed.
  57. For this translation of Prov. 29:21, especially of the rare term, *monon*, compare the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra as well as Gersonides, on this verse. Contrast Rashi's rendition of *le-zahek* in this context as a reference to sexual promiscuity; see Rashi's comment on 39:17 in his analysis of Gen. 21:9 (Berliner, 41). Cf. Rashbam, Gen. 26:8 (Rosin, 29), commenting on 39:14, 17, as well as Seforno, 39:14 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:171), who translate *le-zahek* as sexual sporting. Nahmanides deviates from the translation of *le-zahek* as sexual dalliance in other contexts as well. While Rashi interprets *mezahekin* Gen. 21:9 (Berliner, 41) as a reference to Ishmael's transgression of the three cardinal sins, including sexual promiscuity, Nahmanides, 21:9 (*Perush*, 1:122-23), explains that Ishmael was "mocking (*mal'ig*) Isaac or the great feast." In addition, Nahmanides, Exod. 32:6 (*Perush*, 1:508-09), does not necessarily attribute sexual connotations to the Israelite actions of *le-zahek* around the Golden Calf, as does Rashi, Ex. 32:6 (Berliner, 196), who maintains that they transgressed the three cardinal sins. For a similar approach to Nahmanides, compare Luzzatto, Gen. 39:14,17 (Schlesinger, 161), who especially notes that *le-zahek be-* (as opposed to *le-zahek el*) indicates a language of mockery and abuse (*leshon zilzul*) and highlights her

- emphasis on Joseph's foreign status as a Hebrew.
58. Nahmanides, 39:14.
  59. While this epithet is not attached to Joseph previously in this narrative unit, see Nahmanides, 40:14 (*Perush*, 1:224), where he applies Joseph's declaration, "I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews," retrospectively to his analysis of 39:14, and claims that "Joseph told them he was a Hebrew because he did not want them to consider him a Canaanite." Cf. Leibowitz, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereshit*, 295-96; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109-10; and Sternberg, *Poetics*, 425, on the switch from the plural *banu* to the singular *bi* and from *ish ivri* to *eved ivri* when speaking to her husband, in contrast to her address to her servants. Nahmanides does not comment on these variations.
  60. Compare Ex. 1:10, concerning Pharaoh's fears of the Israelites' proliferation in his kingdom. Cf. Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York, 1986), 15-17, on the devastating effect that the Hyksos occupation had on the Egyptian psyche, leaving an indelible impression on them concerning the effects of foreign infiltration. See Luzzatto, 39:14 (Schlesinger, 161), where he notes that the Egyptians were living at that time under the domination of the shepherd-kings (Hyksos), which inevitably resulted in Joseph's scorn and belittling of the native Egyptians when he was raised to a position of power. Abar-banel, *Mikkez*, 17b, adopts Nahmanides' approach as well.
  61. Compare Gen. 39:2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 16. This interpretation was suggested to me by Alter's literary analysis of Gen. 39; see, in particular, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109.
  62. Alter, *ibid.*, 109, also observes how reiteration of the epithets describing Potiphar as "his (=Joseph's) master" and his wife as "Potiphar's wife" reinforces this theme.
  63. For this analysis, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 109-11.
  64. *Ibid.*, 109.
  65. *Ibid.*, 110.
  66. *Ibid.*, 110.
  67. Compare as well Alter's analysis in *Genesis*, 226-27, notes to 39:14, 17. For a similar approach highlighting the syntactic equivocation in her speech to her husband and how it differs from the speech to the servants, see Sternberg, *Poetics*, 425-27. Sternberg, however, claims that her speech to the servants focuses on the nuance of "play" in the sense of "abuse," thereby enlisting her servants' anger at "misrule of his trusty," the "sexual assault on herself [adduced] as an illustrative consequence of importing a Hebrew 'to play games with us' (425)." On the other hand, her speech to her husband intimates the meaning of "play" as sexual menace, bringing about the effect of a "provocative variation" (426).
  68. Compare Nahmanides, 48:9 (*Perush*, 1:262), where he observes that Joseph reiterates to Jacob the miracle of marrying and having two sons while in Egypt in order to emphasize the divine providence that protected and guided him in this foreign country. Cf. Edward L. Greenstein, "An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, eds. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis and James Ackerman (Nashville, 1982), Vol. II, 123, in which he demonstrates how the story's ambiguity concerning the events leading up to Joseph's arrival in Egypt and the way in which the sale transpired highlight the true "cause" of Joseph's fate, the divine

- hand working behind the scenes. Compare Donald A. Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry in the Joseph Narrative," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, Vol. 1, 71-72, who highlights the paradox of the narrative from the human's point of view because of his ignorance of God's ways.
69. See Nahmanides' analysis of this declaration in his commentary to 45:11 (*Perush*, 1:242). Compare Nahmanides, 45:6 (*Perush*, 1:242), where he observes how Joseph delineates the dire state of the Egyptian economy in order to accentuate the great significance of his sale to Egypt.
  70. As Nahmanides, 45:27 (*Perush*, 1:244), concludes, "It appears to me (*yir'eh li*) by way of the *peshat* that Jacob was not told all of his days that his brothers sold Joseph; but he thought that Joseph had strayed in the field and those who found him took him and sold him to Egypt." This comment appears in the context of Scripture's report that the brothers told Jacob "all" (45:27) that Joseph had said to them. Nahmanides concludes that the term "all" is an exaggeration, for there is no evidence that Jacob was ever made aware of Joseph's sale. Cf. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 72, who indicates that "there is no suggestion that Jacob ever learned of the fabrication of the earlier evidence" of the bloody striped tunic. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 379, concurs on Jacob's ignorance of Joseph's sale. Contrast Rashi, 49:9 (Berliner, 95), based on *Genesis Rabbah* 97:9 (See *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary*, eds. Ch. Albeck and J. Theodor, 2nd edition [Jerusalem, 1996], 1218), which assumes that Jacob was probably informed of Joseph's sale.
  71. Nahmanides, 45:11.
  72. *Ibid.*
  73. *Ibid.* This example illustrates Nahmanides' literary sensitivity to Scripture's penchant for reporting dialogue exchanges in a compact manner. Adopting the role of narrator, Nahmanides presents the expanded version of the dialogue scene in the voice of the speaking character and often clarifies the motives and initiatives of the biblical protagonists.
  74. Compare Rashi, 45:11 (Berliner, 88), who claims the root of *tivvaresh* is *y-r-sh*, a variation on *r-v-sh*, which connotes to be reduced to poverty. Rashi cites 1 Sam. 2:7, which applies the causative form of the verb, *morish*. He, however, does not analyze the literary ramifications of Joseph's dialogue. Ibn Ezra, 45:11 (Weiser, 1:120) arrives at his rendering of this verb by applying its transitive form in Deut. 4:38, *le-horish goyim*, which he renders "to destroy." Rashbam, 45:11 (Rosin, 63) contends that the root of *tivvaresh* is *y.r.sh.*, referring to being driven out from one's land, in this case because of famine; he cites the parallel of Deut. 9:3 (*ve-horashtam ve-ha'avadtam maher*). Radak and Bekhor Shor do not comment on this context. Among the modern scholars, Seybold, "Paradox and Symmetry in the Joseph Narrative," 72, translates *tivvaresh* as "come to poverty," though without explanation. On the other hand, Alter, *Genesis*, 268, notes to 45:11, infers that this verb derives from the literal meaning, "'to be inherited,' that is to lose all of one's possessions, either through bankruptcy or by being conquered by an enemy." He further asserts that "to become poor" misconstrues the Hebrew verb. See also Everett Fox, *In the Beginning: A New English Rendition of the Book of Genesis. Translated with Commentary and Notes* (New York, 1983), 187, who translates *tivvaresh* as to become disinherited; in n. 11, however, he also considers the translation, "reduced-to-poverty." Cf.

- as well *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: New York, 1999), 90, which translates *pen tivvaresh* as “may not suffer from want.”
75. In the following examples, Radak and Ibn Ezra do not comment with regard to the literary significance of the unsubstantiated quotations in their context.
  76. Naḥmanides, 42:34 (*Perush*, 1:235). Presuming that this conversation is reported in a condensed form, Naḥmanides amplifies on this dialogue version and reveals that Joseph also specifies his motivation behind this magnanimous gesture.
  77. This translation follows Chavel’s rendition, *Perush*, 1:235, which reads “*ve-lo ekaḥ mikkem seḥoratkhem*.” Compare Chavel, *Ramban—Commentary on the Torah* (English edn.), 1:518, n. 160. Eisenstadt, *Perush ha-Ramban*, 339, reads, “*ve-lo ekaḥ mikkem mekhes bi-seḥoratkhem*,” assuming that the issue refers to the taking of customs taxes on the merchandise brought by the brothers. It appears that Eisenstadt’s edition, based on the 1489 Lisbon manuscript, contains a scribal rewriting of the word, *mikkem* with a *mem*, to *mekhes* with a *samekh*, and the doubling of this word was therefore inserted.
  78. As Naḥmanides, 42:34, concludes, “They changed the matter for him for the sake of peace (*shinnu lo ba-davar mippenei ha-shalom*).”
  79. Ḥizkuni, 42:34 (Chavel, 156).
  80. Compare Rashi, 42:34 (Berliner, 84-85), who writes, “Every *lashon* of *soḥarim* and *seḥorah* refers to travel and movement.” In its core meaning (*lashon*), the root *s.ḥ.r.* denotes movement and travel. However, its secondary applications connote trade and peddling. See also Alter, *Genesis*, 249, notes to 42:34, on the different meanings of *s.ḥ.r.*
  - 81 See Naḥmanides’ analysis of Rashi at the conclusion of his commentary to 42:34 (*Perush*, 1:235). Cf. Rashi, 42:34 (Berliner, 84-85); compare Rashi, 34:21, (Berliner, 70), in which he apparently renders *s.ḥ.r.* as trade. As Naḥmanides observes, “It appears that the Rabbi wanted to guard against this (*nir’eh she-razah ha-Rav le-hizzaher mi-zeh*) [that is, from adopting a translation which would presume Joseph said words which were not recorded in his original speech], for they said only that they would be permitted to circulate throughout the land and to always buy grain at their will.”
  82. Compare Eliyahu Mizraḥi’s supercommentary and that of *Siftei Ḥakhamim* to Rashi, 42:34, in *Ozar Mefarshei ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1976; reprint of Warsaw, 1862).
  83. This rendition stands in stark contrast to Joseph’s actual command in 42:19 that “one of your brothers be detained (*ye’aser*) in this very guardhouse.” See Naḥmanides’ analysis, 42:34. Cf. Abarbanel, *Mikkez*, 23a, where he concurs with Naḥmanides’ reading.
  84. Naḥmanides, 42:34.
  85. Naḥmanides, 42:17 (*Perush*, 1:234). As Eisenstadt, *Perush ha-Ramban*, 338, n. 46, observes, “Consequently, they will rely on his guarantee not to harm them anymore, and they will bring Benjamin.”
  86. Naḥmanides, 42:25 (*Perush*, 1:234). This example illustrates another instance in which he fills in the gaps of the narrative by expanding on the condensed dialogue version represented in the biblical text.
  87. According to Naḥmanides, Joseph continues to demonstrate his moral character to his brothers when he places money in their sacks prior to their second return to Canaan (44:1). Elaborating on Joseph’s abridged command,

Naḥmanides, 44:1 (*Perush*, 1:237), presumes that Joseph tells his servant to inform the brothers, “My master knows he has done wrong (*ḥamas*) to you and [now] he wishes to make amends to you (*vi-yevakkesh le-hetiv lakhem*).” Based on this approach, Naḥmanides clarifies that Judah seeks the release of Benjamin by appealing to the vizier’s moral sense, of which he has been made aware through multiple encounters. As Naḥmanides, 44:19 (*Perush*, 1:239), explains, “And that which appears to me, by way of the *peshat*, is that [Judah’s] words are only supplications to arouse his [Joseph’s] compassion. For Judah thought that he [Joseph] was a man who fears God, as he had told him (42:18), and as he had acted mercifully toward them as one who fears sin, *by consoling them for the suffering he had caused them*.” (Chavel, *Perush*, 1:239, n. 5, confines Joseph’s consolation to his words in Gen. 43:23. My analysis demonstrates that Naḥmanides is also referring to the various indications of Joseph’s intent of kindness and desire to make amends, as revealed through Naḥmanides’ expansion on these compact dialogue scenes.)

88. Naḥmanides applies the qualifier, *yittakhen*, to introduce a plausible explanation, which juxtaposes one of his own interpretations or that of his predecessors. The term, *yittakhen*, derives from the root which denotes measurement and regulation. By prefacing an opinion with this qualifier, Naḥmanides indicates that he intends to measure and examine the biblical text from various angles, exposing how the Bible’s elastic language conveys multiple shades of meaning or how ambiguities in the Bible allow for more than one exegetical approach. Therefore, the *yittakhen* approach overall does not intend to disqualify earlier explanations but reads the biblical text from an additional, distinct perspective. On the usage of *yittakhen* in this manner in Naḥmanides’ commentary, cf., for example, Naḥmanides, Gen. 18:17, 24:7; Ex. 6:12, 15:20, 23:23. Naḥmanides also assigns the *yittakhen* qualifier to a remark which aims to finesse his primary opinion or that of his predecessors. On this usage of *yittakhen*, see, for example, Naḥmanides, Gen. 24:62, 38:18; Ex. 19:2; Lev. 19:18; Num. 14:9. Cf. my discussion in “Organization and Classification within Naḥmanides’ Biblical Commentary: The Role of Introductory Qualifiers,” AJS Conference, 2003.
89. For the distinction between the worlds of “story,” the realm wherein the characters interact with no awareness of their position in the overall narrative, and “discourse,” the domain of narration which communicates the story through the narrator’s mediation and point of view, see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London, 1978), 15–42. Compare Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca, 1977), 26, who adopts the Russian formalist distinction between “*fable* (the story), that is, the series of events represented as they would have occurred in life” and “*subject* (the plot), the special arrangement given to these events by the author.”
90. See Naḥmanides, 42:34, where he notes that there are “many places” where Scripture “is concise [in relating] an event or its report (*yekazzer be-ma’aseh o be-sippur*).” Cf. his comments to Gen. 24:22, 31:7 (*Perush*, 1:138, 173, respectively).
91. Leibowitz, *Iyyunim be-Sefer Bereshit*, 335. See her detailed chart, 334–35, highlighting the differences between the two dialogue reports. Cf. Ruth ben-Meir’s analysis of Leibowitz’s consideration of Naḥmanides’ literary insights in “*Le-Darkei Parshanuto shel Ramban*,” *Pirkei Neḥamah: Neḥamah Leibowitz*

- Memorial Volume*, 130, as well as Frisch, “*Perek be-Mishnat Neḥamah*,” 318.
92. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 169. For a similar observation, see Sternberg, *Poetics*, 297, and Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 43.
  93. Alter, *ibid.* In his later work, *Genesis*, 249, he prefers the translation, “you can trade in the land,” based on the “situation of going back and forth to Egypt to buy grain.” In that context, however, Alter does not discuss the significance of this variation in light of the brothers’ dialogue with Jacob. Cf. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 81-82, who also translates “*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*” as “you shall have free access to the country,” and indicates that “the threat that they might be put to death is replaced by a promise that all will be well if they exonerate themselves;” the variation is “accounted for wholly on psychological grounds: the brothers are motivated by the desire to confide in their father, but are anxious not to upset him.” While these approaches render the phrase, “*ve-et ha-arez tisharu*,” parallel to Rashi’s understanding, Rashi, as interpreted by Naḥmanides, does not view this addition as a deliberate variation *per se* because its intent may be inferred from Joseph’s original words. Although Alter indicates that this addition is present by implication, he apparently places greater emphasis on the understanding that the brothers’ addition is a deliberate amendment to Joseph’s words.
  94. See Naḥmanides’ analysis of 43:7, in his commentary to 42:34 (*Perush*, 1:235).
  95. Naḥmanides, 42:34, on 43:7. Chavel, *Ramban: Commentary on the Torah*, English edition, 1:518, translates *hitnazzelut* as “motivating plea.” Cf. Abarbanel, *Mikkez*, 23a, where he concurs with Naḥmanides’ approach. See as well Luzzatto, 43:7, 44:19 (Schlesinger, 176, 181), who follows Abarbanel’s analysis.
  96. Naḥmanides, *ibid.*
  97. Naḥmanides, *ibid.* Cf. Rashbam’s comments, 42:12 (Rosin, 61), which appear to be prompted as well by his contention that this question is authentic. See Martin I. Lockshin, *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir’s Commentary on Genesis: An Annotation and Translation* (Lewiston, NY, 1989), 301, n. 1-2, for this insight.
  98. Naḥmanides, 44:19 (*Perush*, 1:239).
  99. Naḥmanides notes the believability of this quotation in 44:19 as part of his analysis of 43:7; cf. his commentary to 42:34. See also his summary description of Judah’s speech in his commentary to 44:19. In addition, cf. Naḥmanides, 44:21 (*Perush*, 1:240), where he assumes the believability of the unverified quotation in 44:21, in which Judah was commanded to bring Benjamin “that I may set eyes upon him.” As he notes, “. . . [Scripture] is concise there [in the original dialogue account] about *all* of these matters which Judah related in his [Joseph’s] presence.” Based on this presupposition, Naḥmanides apparently accepts the authenticity of the unconfirmed quotations in 44:22, which cites the brothers’ initial refusal to send for Benjamin (“The lad cannot leave his father. Should he leave his father, he would die”), and in 44:27-29, which quotes Jacob’s declaration of his attachment to Benjamin and his anxiety about losing him (“You know that two did my wife bear me. . . . And should you take this one, too, from my presence and harm befalls him, you should bring down my gray head in evil to Sheol”).

100. Compare Naḥmanides, 44:19, 21 (*Perush*, 1:240), in which he concurs with the midrashic approach (cf. *Gen. Rabbah* 93:6 [Theodor-Albeck, 1155], which highlights Judah's implied accusation of Joseph's mishandling of the whole matter.) See Nehama Leibowitz's analysis of Naḥmanides' commentary in this regard, *Limmud Parshanei ha-Torah u-Derakhim le-Hora'atam: Sefer Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 1975), 196-97. Nevertheless, Naḥmanides, 44:21, acknowledges that Judah purposely avoids any mention of the spy accusation and Simeon's incarceration, even though these incidents contribute to his argument that they brought Benjamin out of compulsion. Naḥmanides rationalizes that Judah is guided by his ethical morality or because of his fear of Joseph's royal position (*derekh musar o eimat malkhut*).
101. Hizkuni, 44:19 (Chavel, 159).
102. Radak, 44:19 (*Torat Hayyim*, 2:217); cf. Rashi, 44:19 (Berliner, 88). On the other hand, Luzzatto, 43:7, 44:19 (Schlesinger, 176, 181) is consistent in his claim that the vizier's question was fabricated by the brothers. In 44:19, however, he acknowledges that there is an opinion which presumes that the original report was compact.
103. Savran, *Telling and Retelling*, 128, n. 16. Compare *ibid.*, 141, n. 66, where he cites 43: 3-5, 7, as examples of "unverifiable quotations rendered believable by their contexts."
104. Savran, *ibid.*, 60-61, and see as well 128, n. 16.
105. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 171. Cf. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, 85, who notes with regard to 43:7, "It is indeed likely that Joseph did ask these questions, which must have been very important to him."
106. Naḥmanides' evaluation of the significance of unsubstantiated quotations in the Joseph story is also evident in two further examples. In his commentary to 37:22, on the quotation in 42:22 (*Perush*, 1:209), he accepts the veracity of Reuben's self-quotation, observing that this statement fills in the gaps between his arguments to save Joseph in 37:21 and 37:22. He attributes the variant discrepancy to the Bible's deliberate decision to omit initially intermediate conversations in which Reuben did not sway his brothers to listen to him, reporting only the final outcome of their exchanges. On the other hand, in his commentary to 45:27, on the quotation of 50:16-17 (*Perush*, 1:244), Naḥmanides questions the authenticity of the brothers' quotation of their father's deathbed request for their clemency, noting especially that from a *peshat* perspective Jacob was never informed of the circumstances of Joseph's sale. He concludes that the brothers fabricate the request for fear of Joseph's revenge against them now that Jacob was gone. These examples illustrate further that Naḥmanides does not adopt a one-sided approach, but he determines the significance of each unsubstantiated quotation based on the immediate and broad contexts.
107. Steiner, "Meaninglessness, Meaningfulness, and Super-Meaningfulness in Scripture," 446.
108. Elman, "It Is No Empty Thing," 62, n. 14.
109. Septimus, "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love," 34.
110. Avraham Grossman, "*Parshanut ha-Mikra bi-Sefarad, ha-Me'ot ha-13-ha-15*," in Beinart, *Moreshet Sefarad*, 111. See as well Jacob Licht, "*le-Darko shel ha-Ramban*," in *Teudah 3: Mehkarim be-Sifrut ha-Talmud bi-Leshon Hazal u-ve-Parshanut ha-Mikra*, ed. M. Friedman, A. Tal, and G. Brin (Tel Aviv, 1983), 229, and Yaakov Elman, "Moses ben Naḥman/Naḥmanides (Ramban),"

- in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebø (Gottingen, 2000), I, 2, 432.
111. Among the many examples of this multi-tiered interpretation in Naḥmanides' biblical commentary, cf. his analysis of Gen. 2:3, 24:4; 29:27; 38:24. In relation to this aspect of his exegetical approach, Naḥmanides often highlights the comments of his predecessors (particularly that of Rashi) alongside his own exegetical insights. In these cases, he does not completely nullify his predecessors' readings, but demonstrates a preference for his own; cf. for example, Naḥmanides' commentary to Gen. 4:8; 19:12; 31:43, 39:9.
  112. Cf. *Sefer ha-Mizvot le-ha-Rambam Im Hassagot ha-Ramban*, ed. Ḥayyim Dov Chavel (Jerusalem, 1981), 45.
  113. Cf. Naḥmanides, Gen. 8:4 (*Perush*, 1:57), in which he cites the precedent of Rashi for investigating *pešatei ha-mikra*, even though midrashic analysis had predominated biblical exegesis until his time. He notes further the rabbinic dictum, "There are seventy faces to the Torah" (*Otiyyot de-Rabbi Akiva*) to justify his pursuit of a different avenue of exegesis than that of the Midrash.
  114. To cite one telling example from among many throughout his exegesis, see Naḥmanides, Ex. 1:1 (*Perush*, 1:280). In that context, he acknowledges the midrashic approach for the purpose of the repetition of the names at the beginning of the Book of Exodus, stating that "words of the Aggada are words of truth concerning the subject of the love of God [for Israel] and that he repeats their names always." He emphasizes, however, that his reading is closer to the grammar and style of the text and provides an important contextual flow between the narratives in Genesis and Exodus, which mention the names of Jacob and his family who descended to Egypt.
  115. Naḥmanides, Gen. 1:2 (*Perush*, 1:15). Compare his comment to Gen. 3:22 (*Perush*, 1:42), "But all of these matters [concerning the episode of the Garden of Eden] are twofold (*kefulim*), the revealed and the concealed in them are truth." Cf. Elliot Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Naḥmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 14 (1989): 112, who proposes that Naḥmanides' principle may be extended to all of Scripture, "... as the notion of two layers of meaning reflecting two levels of reality is operative in other contexts in Naḥmanides' commentary as well." Cf. Wolfson's complete discussion, *ibid.*, 103-17, in which he analyzes the interrelationship between Naḥmanides' kabbalistic interpretations (*sod*) and his other exegetical approaches which apply *pešat* and midrashic readings.