THE PHILISTINES AS SCAPEGOATS: NARRATIVES AND MYTHS IN THE INVENTION OF ANCIENT ISRAEL AND IN MODERN CRITICAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The Philistines have, for centuries, suffered under the weight of their relent-lessly negative portrayal in the books of the Old Testament. From Goliath to Delilah, they have personified the intrinsically evil other in the burgeoning narrative myth of the nation of Israel. By applying the theories of contem-porary literary deconstruction, particularly in the work of Derrida and Freud, the Philistines can be seen as literary constructions as much as historical figures, destined to play out the role of narrative scapegoats in the inexorable biblical drive for the sustenance of the myth of the existence of the Israelite nation.

Introduction

In February 2004, at the St. Mary's ground of the Southampton Football Club in England, two irate home supporters unfurled a banner to protest at the mooted return of ex-football manger Glenn Hoddle, a man who had abandoned the south-coast club in April 2001 for a more prestigious appoint-ment at the fashionable London-based Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. The banner featured Hoddle's name, with the subtitle 'Alias … Judas'!

Brendan Kennelly, the distinguished Irish poet who concerns himself with the voicing of the Other, had written of a previous unwarranted use of Judas' name by an aggrieved sportswriter:

> Judas was in no position to write a protesting letter to that newspaper. How must men and women who cannot write back, who must absorb the full thump of accusation without reply, who have no voices because they are 'beyond hope', feel in their cold, condemned silence? (Kennelly 1991: 10).

Kennelly attempted just such a response with his brilliant *The Book of Judas* in which he voices Judas Iscariot, and allows him to respond to centuries of censure where his name has been a byword for a particularly hurtful and underhand form of betrayal.

The Philistines: Old and New Myths

While Judas has found a source of potential redemption in the work of Kennelly, no such luxury has been afforded to the Philistines, a cultured, sea-fearing race who settled in Canaan during the 13th and 12th centuries BC. Their name has also entered the lexicon of mute shame, ranking alongside the Barbarians as the personification of the Outsider, epitomising an ignorance of clearly delineated and deliberately exclusive cultural signifiers.

The Philistines entered this pantheon of the Other as a direct result of the challenge they posed to the burgeoning collective Hebrew identity— within the parameters established by the biblical narrative—and it is entirely consistent that their name has been used from biblical times to the present day to distinguish between those who have set the social, cultural and political agendas, and those who have stood irredeemably outside the ideologies which were fabricated to facilitate the rationalisation of the 'nation's' space. In the Bible the Philistines are the seminal and archetypal Other, the model Outsiders whose sole function in the text is to plot the destruction of civilisation, and whose activities provide crucial nodes of justification for the creation and expansion of the Israelites. The demonic Philistines, then, fulfil a role that was later to be played by, amongst others, Africans, Indians, Aboriginals and Irish in the construction of the great colonial edifice of Otherness, a role ironically played out to tragic effect by the Jews themselves over centuries of ethnic persecution and alienation. It was Matthew Arnold who set the tone in the modern period.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, a seminal treatise on the state of England published in 1868, Arnold coined what became the popular usage of the term 'Philistine', namely what Chris Baldrick defines as 'a person devoted narrow-mindedly to material prosperity at the expense of intellectual and artistic awareness; or (as an adjective) ignorantly uninterested in culture and ideas' (Baldrick 1990: 167). While acknowledging that 'this attempt at a scientific nomenclature falls very far short in precision of what might be required from a writer equipped with a complete and coherent philosophy' (Arnold 1971: 105), Arnold proceeds to divide English society of his day into three somewhat overlapping groupings, Barbarians (the aristocratic class), the Philistines (the middle-classes) and the Populace (the working class).

Arnold labelled the Liberal English bourgeoisie as 'Philistine', suggesting 'the notion of something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in the

resistance to light' (Arnold 1971: 101)—note that the motif of light and the Philistines' fear of its illuminative qualities runs throughout the work. The Philistine constantly retreats from the *light* of a restorative culture, secure in the darkness of a rigid and utilitarian worldview which is resistant to both internal unease and external enlightenment. Arnold's subjective, unreferenced and somewhat sarcastic use of the term 'Philistine' cannot belie the fact that, largely as a result of his endeavours, the term has entered the lexicon of cultural essentialisation, denoting a people whose travails and genocidal experiences at the hands of the Israelites are reduced to what Arnold refers to as self-affirming reflections on 'the things of itself and not its real self' (Arnold 1971: 105). Arnold's use of the term Philistine—as indeed also the term Barbarian—highlights the complexities involved in attempting to define the Other, namely that the definition of one inevitably involves a definition of the other.

Built into the concept of the Other is a veiled acknowledgement of the presence of the Other in the Self. Apparently these polarised opposites physically co-exist at the extremities, and indeed play their part in defining each other. This is also the case within the intellectual parameters of colonial discourse, albeit parameters delineated by the dominant partner. Thus, in the biblical narrative, the Israelites could not define themselves without the Philistines. For that reason, the very people portrayed in the narrative as epitomising the potential nemesis of the people of Israel are themselves. In virtue of their very existence they construct their adversaries.

The Bible, therefore, fulfils the classical criteria of colonialist literature by allowing the Israelites to denigrate Philistinic culture at every turn, engaging in what Adbul JanMohamed refers to as 'an obsessive, fetishistic representation of the native's moral inferiority' (JanMohammed 1995: 25) which, by contrast, increases 'the store of his own moral superiority…'. JanMohamed argues that this self-perpetuating cycle of cultural and moral denigration allows the dominant power to accrue 'surplus morality', which is then fed directly back into the negative portrayal of the Other. Consequently, the behaviour of the Philistines has to be portrayed in the Bible on a continual downward moral spiral of betrayal, slaughter and inherent untrustworthiness, a pattern of behaviour that concurrently establishes the moral authority of the Israelites. This essentialisation of the Philistines results in their inability to end this self-sustaining cycle and, given the fact that the original narrative drive emanates from the Israelite perspective, their double-bind appears inextricably constructed.

Critical Theory and the Liberation of the Philistines

The contemporary and somewhat belated 'liberation' of the Philistines from this relentless textual negativity can be found in what might appear to

be an unlikely source. The focusing of contemporary critical theory, from deconstruction to psychoanalysis, on issues relating to the literary subject offers a fresh perspective on the unrelenting biblical narrative drive against the Philistines. With the gradual rise to prominence of literary theory in the 1970s and 1980s, texts such as the Bible were increasingly scrutinised in the same manner as, for example, seminal novels of the nineteenth century. Questions of personal identity, social identification and the nature of the complex relationship between Self and Other began to pose some serious questions about the very function of literature itself.

The concept of an essential personal or tribal identity came under serious assault, from Foucault, Derrida and Freud, amongst others, with a variety of socio-cultural, socio-linguistic and psycho-cultural factors being increasingly regarded as the constituent elements in the self-perception of an individual or a society. This gradual decentring of the subject into a fractured, composite and largely created entity serves to relieve the Philistines of their essential barbarity, and their portrayal in the Bible increasingly can be viewed as the fore-runner of many literary demonisations, replete with the required imagery, language, thematic consistencies and stock characterisation.

Indeed, since, as Jonathan Culler notes, 'literature is said to corrupt through mechanisms of identification' (Culler 1997: 113), the constant biblical identification of the people of Israel with the power and goodness of God leads to the inevitable categorisation of the Philistine as intrinsically violent, untrustworthy and genetically anti-Israelite. Naturally, those who read the Bible will engage in their own acts of identification, thereby further reinforcing the isolation of the Philistines. Given the David versus Goliath scenario, readers will almost universally identify with the underdog, seeing in his triumph their own personal victories over whatever challenges they have faced in the course of their lives. This, then, reinforces the image of the Philistines as evil, but, ironically, the application of literary theory allows readers to deconstruct this portrayal into its constituent parts, and through the recognition of the process of narrative construction a tentative re-evaluation of the role of the Philistines as the epitome of the biblical Other begins to emerge. Literary theory allows the reader to become aware of the nascent textual constructs that underpin literary productions and thereby creates an environment in which the very act of reading itself becomes a site of contestation and enquiry.

In Judges 13.1-5,[1] the Philistines make an early biblical appearance as the nemesis of the people of Israel, significantly identified by Samson as the 'uncircumcised' (Judges 15.19). This nomenclature clearly identifies the

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1. This and subsequent biblical references are from *The Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968).

Philistines as non-Israelite, characterised not by their inherent generic traits but by their difference to the *chosen people* of Yahweh, the patent narrative 'Other' to the Israelite 'Self'. Indeed, their appearance is directly as a result of the Israelites behaving in an undisclosed manner that 'displeases Yahweh' (Judges 13.1), and throughout the books of the Old Testament the Philistines are regularly held out as the ultimate external threat should the Israelites in any way depart from Yahweh's interpreted wishes. Although the exact cause of the conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines remains largely unexplained, it would appear that disputes over land form the basis of the difficulties between them. The primary socio-narrative function of the Philistines, therefore, is to act as a cultural mirror to the *chosen people*, as the anonymous Outsiders whose essential barbarism reflects the inherent superiority of the Israelites. This carefully constructed model of the Otherness of 'the Philistines' provides the Israelites with a crucial objective correlative group against which the emerging notion of the Israelites as a collective identity is based.

Deconstruction of Literary Texts and its Relevance to the Biblical Narrative

However, this narrative portrayal begins to unravel somewhat when considered in the light of one of the most influential texts in the emergence of literary deconstruction in the 1970s. Jacques Derrida, in his seminal essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, asserts that 'language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique' (Derrida 1988: 108). This crucial assumption permits the reader to enter into a realm in which the reading and interpretation of a text is conducted in an environment of semantic free-play within which deterministic meanings of texts become increasingly problematic. This interpretation seeks to rid texts of a pre-ordained order of signification, a process that calls into question, for example, the idea that the truth of the Bible is somehow contained outside of the text. Derrida's model allows the reader to draw conclusions that would certainly view the Bible as a narrative construct that can be gradually and systematically deconstructed in the same manner as other literary texts.

The idea that there is a transcendental essence, or truth, which will give meaning to every aspect of human existence pervades the Bible, and the clear narrative expression of this essence (God/Yahweh) is that this truth is beyond the narrative itself. The assumption is that the narrative of the Bible continually articulates a truth or presence that is beyond the narrative itself, thereby freeing the text from the rigours of deconstruction that apply to every other human discourse. Derrida's model operates by allowing a close reading of the portrayal of the Philistines to be seen in the light of other

literary portrayals of intrinsic evil. For example, the ubiquitous fairy tale 'baddies' invariably are marked out by their difference from the heroes, and their stock characterisation in the tales makes their narrative appearance essential. So, if this deconstructive model is accepted as workable, then the Philistines can be perceived as a narrative essential, condemned not by their inherent tribal characteristics but by their pre-determined stock role in the narrative. In other words, if it were not the Philistines who occupied the role of arch-villain in the Old Testament then it would have been another homogenised, narratively-constructed group. For the Philistines, it is a narrative case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, as indeed it was for the Irish and the Indians during the nineteenth-century hay-day of the Victorian novel.

Indeed, Derrida's model for deconstruction of texts can equally be extended to the biblical portrayal of the Israelites, with their role as the *chosen people* reflected in much of nineteenth-century colonialist literature, from Kipling's *Kim* to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In these texts, the socio-cultural dominance of the coloniser over the colonised is given a credence through the narrative: the coloniser's right to control the colonised is presented as a pre-ordained, natural occurrence, founded upon the pre-sumed social, moral and political superiority of the coloniser. Likewise, the books of the Old Testament, and in particular their portrayal of the Philistines, provide the primordial model of a natural colonial order, and it is through the works of Derrida and other literary theorists that the role of narrative is seen to be a crucial element in the overall construct of a model of 'national' identity. The role of narrative in the construction of the myth of nationhood cannot be underestimated. Moreover, it is in the close textual readings favoured by deconstructive criticism that the inherent instability of all narrative constructions begins to crystallise.

Roland Barthes, in his extraordinary book *S/Z*, published in English in 1974, divides narrative texts into small units (often no more than a few clauses or lines) called 'lexias' (Barthes 1974: 13). In reflecting upon these relatively minute textual fragments, he argues that a meaningful reading of a text is much more than a question of passive consumption, but demands ongoing engagement by the reader, who interacts with the text on a variety of levels and within a variety of often unarticulated codes. Barthes' insistence on the plurality of the meanings within narratives gradually moved literary criticism away from more traditional forms of academic criticism (dominance of literary history and these readings, etc.). When applied to biblical studies, his insights breathe new life into a narrative too often weighed down by the reluctance of critics to move beyond tradi-tional methods of textual enquiry. The difficulty with deconstructive criti-cism is that it often suffers from the same malaise as post-modernism, in that the moment it begins to espouse the basis of a theoretical positioning,

its inherent distrust of such theories kicks in, and a counter-theory is almost immediately articulated. However, although this is the ground upon which it is most frequently attacked, this should be seen as one of its principal strengths in that it is continually seeking to erase the boundaries of its own discourse and thereby maintains a vital and sustaining self-criticism.

Already earlier, Ernest Renan, in his 1882 treatise on nationhood, identified a 'heroic past' (Renan 1990: 19) as an essential element of what he refers to as the 'spiritual principle' that is a 'nation', and he brings to the fore the galvanising effects of shared memories of 'suffering' over such concepts as identifiable unitary experiences. Renan's concept of the existence of a national spirit is predicated upon common 'glories' of the past. An element central to the construction of national identity is the identification of an intrinsically evil Other, whose actions elicit the required responses that will encourage the development of national consciousness. Thus, the Philistines—the virtually anonymous enemies who are repeatedly referred to in the collective sense—perform this precise function in the world created by the authors of the Old Testament.

The 'Philistines' and Modern Colonialism

From the point of view of the biblical authors the actual history of the Philistines is irrelevant. Indeed, their anonymity is essential if the *chosen people* are to articulate their own identity. In other words, the purpose of the Philistines in the narrative is merely to fulfil the role of the 'Other' in opposition to the Israelite 'Self'. Thus, the role of the Philistines in the story of the Israelites can be seen as the progenitor of the experience of a variety of colonised groups whose textual existence is predicated on the perspective of the dominant socio-cultural forces operating within the colonial paradigm. The question, however, extends well beyond the biblical periods.

The consequences of the biblical Philistine factor can be devastating in the modern period, resulting in what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o refers to as the 'internalisation' (Ngugi 1986: 18) of negative cultural imagery, to the point that cultures become marginalised, incapable of self-definition. When this emerges, complex cultural constructions are diluted to reductionist clichés and labels, whilst an entire people can become a byword for those perceived to fall outside the artificially created socio-cultural standards of the dominant petty-bourgeois consensus. Indeed, the travails of the Philistines fulfil one of Homi K. Bhabha's ideological conditions regarding the formation of the 'political unity of the nation' (Bhabha 1990: 300), in that their very existence at the border of the Kingdom of Israel facilitated the creation of the 'signifying space' within which a burgeoning concept of Israelite Self and nationhood began to crystallise. However, despite the

ample evidence for such an interpretation, it would be an over-simplification to present the Philistines as the primordial Other, in the unique case of the Bible, a text with many layers, written over a long period of time, and, in some cases, by authors other than those alleged.

Indeed, Ashis Nandy, in his book *Intimate Enemy*, identifies a crucial weakness in the post-colonial binary of Self-Other, namely the inability of historians or theorists to identify the 'non-players' (Nandy 1983: xiv), i.e., those individuals or groups who do not easily fit into either the category of the colonised or the coloniser, and whose political affiliations undermine the terms of such definition. Ittai of Gath, a Philistine whose uncommon and unexpected declaration of loyalty to the Israelite King David (2 Samuel 15.18-23) functions as one such 'non-player', and acts as a crucial correlative to the relentless duality of the Book of Samuel. He and his six hundred Gittites—residents of the Philistine city of Gath—pledge their allegiance to David, the leader of their traditional enemies, exacerbating the model of the Philistines as untrustworthy. This change of allegiance, therefore, is a complicated business, in that it achieves a dual propose: it underlines the moral superiority of the Israelites while simultaneously portraying the Philistines as both disloyal and treacherous. Such an episode is a crucial step in the attempted unravelling of the nature of apparent polarisations. The importance of such textual incidents is expressed by Ranajit Guha, the leading exponent of Subaltern Studies:

> Blinded by the glare of a perfect and immaculate consciousness the historian sees nothing, for instance, but solidarity in rebel behaviour and fails to notice its Other, namely betrayal (Guha 1983: 46).

It is, however, part of the overall trend of the biblical portrayal of the Philistines that the non-player in this case defects from the Philistines to the Israelites, and not *vice versa*, thereby providing further proof of the moral and cultural superiority of the latter over the former. In fact, Ittai's defection could easily be viewed as entirely consistent with the systematic narrative portrayal of the Philistines, his only distinguishing feature being his clearly implied enlightenment in choosing to pledge his allegiance to David. It is certainly arguable that it is only when this betrayal occurs from the Self to the Other that a text can be perceived as potentially undermining its pre-eminent ideologies. Indeed, the nature of the concept of identity in general is given an early airing in the biblical portrayal of the Philistines. The debate between essentialist concepts of identity and a more contingent notion of a rolling, constantly shifting series of identificatory signifiers places the portrayal of the Philistines firmly in the former camp.

The contemporary need for the nation-state of Israel to create a solid, intractable and immutable identity in the face of large-scale resistance appears to fly in the face of accepted notions of a fractured past and an

unstable, divided present. Post-modern societies' contempt for history as
the fallacious recreation of the past for some current political gain usually
leads to wholesale revisionism in which previously treasured historical
icons come in for some harsh reinterpretation. The Bible has played a
crucial role in the creation of the essential identity of the contemporary
State of Israel and any attempt to re-evaluate the narrative role of the
Philistines will necessarily meet a degree of political resistance, exacerbated
by the current Palestinian *intifada*. The concept of rolling cultural signifiers,
brilliantly exposed by Roland Barthes in his 1957 masterpiece *Mythologies*,
places texts such as the Bible in the context of series of markers of identity,
rather than at an unchanging and immutable centre where its role in the
construction of models of national identity is a perceived given. When the
critical reader accepts that every culture that attempts some form of self-
definition has its own narrative version of the Philistines the process of the
demythologisation of the latter can be said to have well and truly begun.

Borders and Boundaries

In the 188 references[2] to them in the Old Testament the Philistines are
generally portrayed in a manner reminiscent of the stereotype of the
'Indians' in early, *pre-politically-correct* Hollywood westerns, ready at all times
to upset the civilised advance of a clearly superior, recognisable and
identifiable culture. However, there are significant individual examples
which merit close examination because in their deconstruction lies the
origins of their cultural exclusion.

Only three Philistines are portrayed in any textual depth in the books of
the Old Testament, the first being King Abimelech who swears an oath
with Abraham at Beersheba (Genesis 21.27), an episode that Eugene H.
Maly describes as a moment when 'the pagan king acknowledges the
divine origin of Abraham's material success' (Maly 1968: 22), immediately
establishing the ultimate Philistine authority as secondary to that of the
chosen people represented by Abraham. It is not until the two books of
Samuel, however, that the Philistines emerge as the true nemesis of the
people of Israel, their constant threatening presence galvanising the often-
shaky monarchies of Saul and David.

The clear inference in 1 Samuel is that of the divine nature of the army
of Israel and its battles, ably supported by Philistine cannon fodder. It is,
however, only on the later appearance of Goliath (1 Samuel 17) that a fuller,
more recognisable model of Philistinic Otherness and implied colonial
Israelite superiority begins to emerge. David, the iconic future King of

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2. These 188 reference are taken from the NIV Study Bible Complete Library search
engine.

Israel, first comes to prominence by offering his services to Saul as the only Israelite combatant ready to face Goliath, a giant Philistine 'shock-trooper', measuring 'six cubits and one span tall' (1 Samuel 17.4-5), corresponding roughly to an equivalent of ten feet and three inches tall,[3] a remarkable and scarcely credible height. The setting for this epic battle is a town called Socoh described by James Turro as 'the frontier land between Israel and Philistia' (Turro 1968: 171) evocative of a biblical *High Noon* in which David exemplifies that 1952 film's by-line - 'The story of a man who was too proud to run'.[4] The frontier is a traditional setting for conflict, the boundary between the civilised known world and the mysterious land of the Outsider, at once exotically mysterious and threateningly foreboding, and the Bible certainly has played a very significant role in the creation of the liminal border as a site of cultural, economic and political friction.

Throughout the books of the Old Testament, the land beyond the border of Israel evokes the territorial manifestation of the Other. For example, in Joshua, the land ascribed to the people of Judah is bordered by 'the wilderness of Zin' (Joshua 15.1) while the 'portion awarded' (Joshua 17.1-5) to Manasseh, the son of Joseph, includes 'the wilderness that goeth up from Jericho'. Again, in Numbers, when the Israelites leave their own territory they encounter 'the wilderness that borders Moab' (Numbers 21.11), while the land of the Amorites is also accredited as a wilderness, bounded by desert and salt-sea. Indeed, this literary portrayal of Israel as a moral, cultural and physical oasis is explicitly expressed in Malachi when Yahweh, venting his anger against Esau, announces that 'I turned his towns into a wilderness and his heritage into desert pastures' (Malachi 1.2-5) while any land outside the land of Israel 'shall be known as Unholy Land', thereby firmly cementing the link between land and the nation, confirming Bhabha`s assertion of the essential territoriality of tradition.

The constant repetition of the 'wilderness' moniker (name) in relation to lands beyond the borders of Israel provides an early narrative construct that was to feature prominently in what Edward Said refers to as 'Orientalist' literature, cornerstones in the construction of colonial models of identity (Said 1978: 177). Indeed, Said's fascinating study of European intellectual appropriation of the Orient provides valuable parallels to the role played by the Philistines in the constructed model of Israelite identity. Said traces the development of scholarly enquiry in Europe concerning the Orient into something a good deal more manipulative and sinister. He argues that 'as a system of thought about the Orient, it always rose from the specifically human detail to the great transhuman one' (Said 1978: 96) in which individual, almost anecdotal, experiences and encounters with a

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3. James Turro calculates Goliath`s height to be 'about 10 ft.' (Turro 1968: 171).
4. See http://www.filmsite.org/high.html, accessed on 30 March 2004.

foreign culture are transcribed into general social, cultural and political policies designed to cope with this mysterious yet fascinating Other. He condemns the 'debased position of the Orient or Oriental as an object of study' (Said 1978: 96), a situation brought about by the transformation of spurious individual evidence into anthropological truths.

The stories of Goliath and Delilah fit neatly into this category, their personal characteristics and actions being used in the Bible to epitomise the inherent nature of the Philistines as a whole. In many ways it can be argued that the crucial cultural and intellectual processes outlined by Said have their gestation in the alienated, marginalised and essentialist portrayal of the biblical Philistines. The homo–Philistinus becomes the quantifiable Other, a sub-set of the Israelite norm and the object scorn, detestation and ultimate destruction, with the portrayal of individual Philistines appearing increasingly important to the overall political agenda of the Bible. The models of Goliath and Delilah serve the narrative function of microcosms of the macro portrayal of the detested Philistines and as such are crucial constructs in the overall textual narrative.

David and Goliath

The choosing of single combat as a means of resolving a conflict was 'not unheard of in Old Testament times' (Brown 1968:171), and the portrayal of David standing alone against the Philistine giant at the edge of civilisation is a powerful image *of national imagining*, the classic icon of the Saidian personification of a national ideal galvanised by the necessary presence of the ultimate threat to that ideal. David's combat with Goliath is without doubt one of the Old Testament's most recognisable single events and the victory of the future Israelite king against seemingly overwhelming odds is a scenario that can be found in the cultural mythologies of nearly every ethnic grouping. All national imaginings rely upon a legend of resistance in which the actual combat of two individuals is transformed through the methodology of myth, the signified strength and unity of a people being crystallised in this one moment of almost supernatural physical heroism.

In Ireland, for example, a sculpture of the mythological Celtic hero, Cuchulainn, strapped to a pillar with a crow picking at his dying flesh, occupies a central position on the ground floor of the General Post Office in Dublin. This iconic piece, located in the heart of the building that personifies the resistance of the 1916 rebellion, doubly reinforces the blood-sacrifice image that forms a central plank in most nations' self-perception. This sculpture is Ireland's equivalent of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, beloved of the colonial powers as the embodiment of the mythology of sacrifice and the crystallising monument to the existence of the nation. Once this moment has been mythologised, in whatever manifestation, it

becomes politically and socially dangerous to even question its origins and any attempt to do so is almost inevitably seen in terms of cultural and even racial discrimination. Roland Barthes, however, emphasises the crucial importance of such questioning when he concludes *Mythologies* with this plea:

> And yet, this is what we must seek: reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge (Barthes 1973: 159).

Goliath's grotesque height clearly identifies the Philistines as capable of producing genetic freaks, a fact attested to by the appearance of yet another physically unusual Philistine at the battle of Gath, 'a man of huge stature with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all' (1 Chronicles 20.6) who is coincidentally slain by Jonathan, David's nephew. Goliath's physical advantages are supplemented by elaborate descriptions of his armour in which his entire body appears to be covered in bronze, suggestive perhaps of some latent fear of the indomitable Israelites. These descriptions serve to highlight the impending impossibility of combat with such a warrior and are classically constructed to merely heighten the perception of the nature of David's inevitable victory. In stark contrast to Goliath's fearsome appearance David is described as 'a youth, a boy of fresh complexion and pleasant bearing' (1 Samuel 17.42), implying a clear ethnographic divide between the Israelis and the Philistines. This is a typical colonial textual construction in which the Other, in this case Goliath, manifests physical features that are simultaneously grotesque and supernatural. As with the description of Celtic heroes, Goliath's weaponry appears almost superhuman (described as 'not typical', in Torro 1968: 171), his spear the thickness of 'a weaver's beam' and the head alone weighing in at 'six hundred shekels of iron' (1 Samuel 17.6-7). This portrayal fits neatly into what Benita Parry refers to as 'the wide range of stereotypes and the shifting subject positions assigned to the colonised in the colonialised text' (Parry 1995: 41), with Goliath's massive frame representing the impenetrability of the Philistines, while David's fresh features simultaneously suggest a purer form of genetic inheritance and an implied tactical *superiority*.

However, a problem with the standard portrayal of the colonised Other arises with the very weaponry that Goliath parades before the terrified Israelites. In a typical colonialist construct, the technological advantages of the colonisers are foregrounded to suggest the immutability of their dominance, clearly superior and sophisticated weapons coolly facing up to unsophisticated fanaticism, implying the inevitable victory of science over passion. However, Goliath's weapons place him in a very different league to his Israelite opponents, an acknowledgement made by the author (or authors) of the Book of Samuel of the historically accepted superiority of Philistinic iron work at the time. His technological supremacy, therefore,

would appear to give him a distinct advantage over David whose rejection of Saul's armour prior to the upcoming combat merely adds to the created narrative tension. The righteousness of David's cause, therefore, is also *clearly* implied by his lack of armour in that he states that the only protection he will need is the 'name of Yahweh Sabaoth' (1 Samuel 17.45), and the relative simplicity of his sling and 'five smooth stones from the river bed' (1 Samuel 17.40), if anything, emphasise the barbarity of Goliath, thereby cleverly portraying technological supremacy as an implied evil. Clearly, then, the Philistines are in a no–win situation, damned if they do and damned if they don't, the lack of subtlety in their portrayal merely reinforcing their narrative bind.

Goliath's great size and weaponry ultimately count for nothing in the combat and his threat to feed David's flesh 'to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field' (1 Samuel 17.44) only serves to highlight Philistinic arrogance which is depicted as clearly inferior to the steely will of the divinely inspired David. He castigates Goliath for coming only with 'sword and spear and javelin' (1 Samuel 17.45) while he brings his faith, his belief in an order that clearly does not include the Philistines in its cosmic view. This exchange is a crucial and definitive enunciation of the nature of the biblical Other with Goliath exposed as fatally ignorant of the divine will which will overcome whatever physical or material obstacles are placed in its path.

The Genocide of the Philistines

The nature of the Philistine's Otherness, therefore, is dictated by their denial of the power of Yahweh and their continued attempts at usurping the power of Israel. They personify the arrogance of denying the power of Yahweh, while the Israelites ironically personify the parallel arrogance of unshakeable belief. In fact, Yahweh's interventions against the Philistines are portrayed in certain passages of the Old Testament as more than mere Davidic evocations of divine assistance. In 1 Chronicles 1.14, for example, the Philistines square up to the Israelites once again on hearing of the accession of David to the throne, and a battle is prepared for at Rephaim. The usual narrative structure of these battles is for David to ask for Yahweh's general and covert help ('Will you deliver them into my power?' (1 Chronicles 14.10) which invariably materialises in the form of a Philistinic massacre. However, at Rephaim, after an initial victory for David, the Philistines rally for a second round of combat, prompting Yahweh to give David an unusually elaborate and specific series of instructions:

> Do not attack them from the front; go round and engage them opposite the balsam trees. When you hear the sound of steps in the tops of the balsam trees, launch your attack, for that will be God going out ahead of you to rout the army of the Philistines (1 Chronicles 14.14–15).

Clearly in this particular encounter Yahweh has seen fit to depart from his typical interventionist *modus operandi*, namely, that of promising without specifying the means the deliverance of the Philistines into the hands of the Israelites. His specific instructions to David explicitly leads the Philistines to their destruction, the peculiar narrative motif of the sound of footsteps audible in the treetops acting as the mark of divine intervention. As is typical of the aftermath of Philistine/Israelite battles, punitive raids are carried out on Philistine positions with the chroniclers listing the enormous resultant casualties with barely concealed glee.

Edward Said notes a chilling echo of this post-combat punitive slaughter when recounting the nature of French military '*riazzas*' in Algeria in the 1840s, what he translates as 'punitive raids on Algerians' villages, their homes, harvests, women and children' (Said 1993: 220). According to Said, these raids formed 'the core of French military policy' and were justified by one General Changarnier on the basis that 'this type of activity is taught by the scriptures…in which Joshua and other great leaders conducted "de bien terribles *razzias*" and were blessed by God'. The consequences of such actions are brutally outlined by Said in which 'ruin, total destruction and uncompromising brutality are condoned not only because legitimised by God but because, in words echoed and re-echoed from Bugeauad to Salan, `les Arabes ne comprennent que la force brutale` (Said 1993: 220), an attitude that can arguably find its origins in David`s valedictory psalm towards the end of the second Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 22):

> I pursue my enemies and destroy them,
> nor turn back till an end is made of them;
> I strike them down, and they do not rise,
> they fall, they are under my feet.
>
> They cry out, there is no one to save,
> to Yahweh, but there is no reply;
> I crush them fine as the dust of the squares,
> trample them like the mud of the streets.

Indeed, this genocide against the Philistines is not limited to the activities of David. In Amos, for example, amongst the various punishments listed under the heading 'Judgement on the Neighbours of Israel and on Israel Itself' (Amos 1.2) only the Philistines suffer the approbation of total annihilation. While Tyre, Phoenicia, Damascus and Judah are prophetically to suffer various punishments from burnt palaces to exile, Yahweh is not going to rest until 'the last of the Philistines is dead' (Amos 1.8), confirming the narrative drive throughout the Old Testament towards the ultimate elimination of the Philistinic race. This destruction is further visited in Jeremiah when 'the word of Yahweh that was addressed to Jeremiah against the Philistines' (Jeremiah 47.1) announces their fate in highly dramatic and evocative, and indeed literary, imagery:

Men shout aloud, and there is wailing
from all the inhabitants of the country,
at the thunder of his stallions' hoofs,
the crash of his chariots, the grinding of his wheels.
Fathers forget about their children,
their hands fall limp
because the day has come
on which all the Philistines are to be destroyed (Jeremiah 47.2-4).

These images of complete and utter Philistinic destruction strike chilling contemporary chords. In his detailed, inside account of the infamous David Irving libel trial in April 2000, for example, historian Richard J. Evans, in the course of his expert demolition of Irving's Holocaust denial, quotes from the diary of Josef Goebbels, dated April 1942, in which the latter notes the 'barbaric procedure' (Evans, 2002: 95) that was underway in Poland to remove all trace of the large Jewish population. He notes 'the prophecy that the Führer issued to them' and warns that 'one must not allow any sentimentalities to rule in these matters'. The 'annihilation' he refers to is clearly designed to not just target the Jews as part of an overall political strategy (again a parallel with the portrayal of the Philistines) but to utterly eradicate every trace of their existence in Europe. The similarity in language and imagery is frightening and indicates that the biblical portrayal of the Philistines has consequences far beyond its apparent parameters. Moreover, the recent dire warnings issuing from Al Qu'ida circles are couched in equally apocalyptic language in which the common theme appears to be some form of divinely inspired genocide.

Samson and Delilah

Within the books of the Old Testament, there appears to be no tactic that the Philistines will not employ in their inherently futile struggle with the people of Israel, from open combat to licentious subterfuge. The latter tactic finds its most eloquent expression in the story of Samson and Delilah in which the Philistines appear to hatch an elaborate plan to foil the armies of Israel, but inevitably they end up as the dupes of the all-knowing Yahweh. This strange interaction between Samson and the Philistines is predicated upon the direct insistence of Yahweh, who sends an angel (Judges 13.8-25) to forecast the conditions of Samson's conception and birth, and the child is stated as clearly being possessed of 'the spirit of Yahweh' (Judges 14.25). His birth is announced as a direct result of Yahweh 'who was seeking an occasion for quarrelling with the Philistines; since at this time the Philistines had Israel in their power' (Judges 14.4). This marks a significant shift in the interventionist policies of Yahweh who appears to create Samson for the very purposes of disposing of the Philistines rather

than merely responding to another attack. Samson, therefore, is a Trojan horse whose infidelities are directly manufactured by a pro-active Yahweh who appears very well briefed in the possible Philistine responses to Samson's activities.

The main tactic employed by Samson to antagonise the Philistines is to arrange a marriage with a Philistine woman, who notably does not even merit a name. Throughout Judges 14, Samson's wife is referred to as 'one of the daughters of the Philistines' (Judges 14.1), or 'this one' (Judges 14.4), or by other various badges of anonymity, thus reinforcing the Otherness of not only the Philistines but particularly of their female members. What is particularly interesting about this episode is that Samson's provocative behaviour and the Philistine's inevitable response reverses the usual Old Testament duel between the Israelites and the Philistines, in that the latter are seen to respond to a provocation rather than acting as initiators. Their response parallels the typical Israelite reaction to some perceived Philistinic threat, yet it is the latter who ultimately suffer the greatest losses. It would appear, therefore, that the Philistines are never to be granted an opportunity to speak back, while even their self-defensive actions are placed clearly in the context of their intrinsic ruthlessness.

Conversely, Samson's clearly murderous behaviour, which springs from a persistent and immutable Israelite self-belief, is depicted as morally superior to his Philistine counterparts, each act of Samsonite rage and slaughter being firmly contextualised and justified with the divine world view of the people of Israel. Delilah, who became Samson's paramour after the murder of his first wife by the Philistines, is the traditionally feminine mirror image of Goliath, utilising her beauty and charm to persuade Samson to reveal the source of his prodigious strength. It is clear in these exchanges that the Self and Other binary, so consistent throughout the narrative, is now operating within the male/female opposition. In a typical binary opposition, Samson's great physical power is exemplified as a great virtue, while that of Goliath appears grotesque, even carnivalesque. The inherent inconsistency of this portrayal of physical strength merely reinforces the perception of the narrative bind that constricts the emergence of a balanced perspective. What is seen as an admirable attribute in Israelite hands is clearly seen as an unnatural malformation in the hands of those destined to be the less than an objective cultural correlative.

Samson's prodigious strength is employed solely for the destruction of the Philistines and one of the many ironies of the Book of Judges is that while Samson's disobedience to Yahweh results in his death, it is the Philistines who appear to suffer the greatest losses. When he tells Delilah of the source of his strength, Samson reneges on the deal made between his mother and the angel of Yahweh, while his role as 'he who will begin to rescue Israel from the power of the Philistines' (Judges 13.5) is fatally

undermined. Samson's humiliation at the hands of his foes—he is blinded—clearly indicates one of the strongest underlying themes of the Book of Judges, namely Yahweh's protection is dependant upon strict obedience to the covenant, and the only consequence of this form of disobedience is Philistinic oppression. Significantly, although Yahweh appears to have deserted Samson and placed him under the control of the Philistines, at the last moment he allows Samson to destroy the temple of Dagon and simultaneously achieve the notable feat of killing more Philistines at his death then over the course of his life. Consequently, one of the primary messages of the Book of Judges is that Yahweh will punish the Israelites if they dare to betray the covenant, but this punishment will clearly amount to no more than a 'slap on the wrist', and the opportunity to establish a range of new anti-Philistine mythologies which will sustain future punitive raids on their hapless neighbours. While Dominic Crossan notes that 'God's presence insures the strength and God's absence opens the way for oppression' (Crossan 1968: 160), the consistent logistical losers in the final analysis of Yahweh's turbulent relationship with the Israelites are the Philistines.

While Samson's swashbuckling twenty-year career as a judge in Israel comes to a dramatic and blood-soaked conclusion, no mention is made of the fate of Delilah, the Philistinic woman whose guile led to his ultimate demise. As a female counterpart of Goliath, Delilah perfectly fits the Book of Judges' poisoned view of the Philistines. Motivated by material greed—she is offered eleven hundred silver shekels by each of the chiefs of the Philistines—Delilah uses her sexual hold over Samson to tease out the secret of his God-given powers. Clearly, then, the Israelites have to be on their guard from every possible Philistine subterfuge and the crossing of cultural boundaries by Samson results in his eventual demise. In Judges 16.4, it is noted that 'Samson fell in love with a woman in the Vale of Sorek', highlighting Samson's tender nature and the clear danger posed by Delilah's geographical heritage. His innocence, a consistent element in such a burlesque character, is manipulated by Delilah with strong sexual undertones in that she 'lulls' him to sleep on each occasion, utilising her physical attributes to the maximum, in much the same manner as Goliath attempted to use his natural physical superiority over David. While Delilah succeeds in tricking Samson, crucially it is Samson's own admission of the source of his strength that proves to be his undoing, rather than any direct action by Delilah. The role of Delilah, therefore, entirely fits in with the regular biblical template of Philistine behaviour, guided by the overarching and immutable principal of the ultimately futile attempted destruction of the Israelite people.

Conclusion

We have seen that the dominant thrust of certain books of the Old Testament is to portray the Philistines in such a negative light that their very presence acts as a justification for the emergence of the Israelites as a distinctive group, defined over and against the perfidious Philistines. Invariably, 'the Philistines' are the 'fall guys', and enjoy a prominence in the narrative only insofar as they constitute the perennial evil neighbour. If the negative attitude recurs throughout the large number of references to them in the Old Testament, the figures of Goliath and Delilah function as foils for the deeds of the heroic individuals David and Samson.

Such portrayals are stereotypical in the construction of 'national' identity. In his complex analysis of the foundational principals of nationhood, Homi K. Bhabha argues that:

> the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical (Bhabha 1990:300).

This crucial signifying space of the nation is predicated not only upon physical boundaries but also on the presence of ethnic groups whose major defining characteristics merely serve to justify the existence of that space and its inhabitants. In the case of Israelite self-identification the myth of the Philistines and their intrinsic brutality is an essential composite element in the Davidic myth of the Israelite 'nation', and a narrative contextualising of the one could certainly assist in the unravelling of the other.

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