

## SBL Annual Meeting Papers, November 2011

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### **Egyptian Returnees as Unwelcome Playmates? Winnicott's Psychopathology of Play' and its implications for the current state of biblical scholarship**

An all-too-brief introduction to Winnicott's theories. Others in PsyBibs have brought his work to our attention before (notably Underwood).

#### **A. Winnicott on the definition of the term 'transitional object' and the purpose of transitional objects.**

While earlier psychoanalytic theorists focused mostly on intrapsychic dynamics *within* an individual, Winnicott brought our attention to *the space between* an infant and mother. According to Winnicott, a newborn begins life experiencing the world in an entirely subjective manner, and believes that his needs and desires create reality.<sup>1</sup> A 'good-enough mother' (a term coined by Winnicott) will allow this illusion at first, presenting what the infant needs almost simultaneous with the need (e.g. a baby is hungry, and a breast or bottle is offered; to the baby it seems as if his hunger *creates* the breast/bottle). As the infant grows, the good-enough mother – as an agent of imperfect reality—introduces her child to 'the real world' by a slow and gentle process of disillusionment: the baby sometimes needs to wait for his cries to be answered, or his desires are only partially met. Thus, for the baby, there is dawning awareness of something beyond the subjective world of one's own making – the baby is learning that there is an objective world out there, beyond one's control.<sup>2</sup> The mother's work of disillusionment here serves to peel back her own actions from her child's subjective experience, and in doing so reveals an actual world. The child begins to experience his own interior-subjective reality, *and* an external-objective reality, *and* the space in between the two.

For Winnicott, a particular kind of symbol emerges from the meeting of a baby's subjective, interior experience and the 'objective' outside world<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity, in this discussion I will refer to the mother with the feminine pronoun and the child with the masculine pronoun. Of course the baby can be of either gender. And even the role of the 'mother' can be played by a primary caregiver of either sex, according to Winnicott's theory.

<sup>2</sup> Winnicott uses the term subjective to mean 'inner psychic reality,' and objective to mean 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common'. (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 5).

<sup>3</sup> According to Winnicott, a child's use of a transitional object constitutes his or her first use of a symbol.

According to Winnicott, as a mother and child are successfully negotiating the space between them, what will emerge are what he calls “transitional phenomena” or “transitional objects”. In the disillusionment, the mother has begun the process of introducing to the child the simple fact (yet complex truth!) that his subjective experience of the world and the actual world are *not* one and the same. But this is only the beginning of a child’s journey to discover what the relationship between subjective and objective reality will be for him. This journey of discovery starts with transitional objects. Winnicott defines his terms thus:

“I have introduced the terms ‘transitional objects’ and ‘transitional phenomena’ for designation of the intermediate area of experience...between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness.”<sup>4</sup>

Transitional phenomena help the baby move out of its subjective bubble and into the real world by holding aspects of both. A classic example of a transitional object is a child’s ‘blankee’. The piece of cloth holds life and meaning for the child that far exceed any shared understanding of what ‘blanket’ is. And this life and meaning come from the child’s inner, subjective world. The child’s primary creative activity (fantasy) has brought life and meaning to the blanket and created ‘Blankee’. But Blankee is not *only* a creation of the child’s mind: it is a blanket, that can be touched and seen and related to by the baby *and* by other people. The child understands that Blankee is Blankee *and* a blanket. The child is indebted to the actual world for creating a blanket out of which the child then created Blankee. It is by having these transitional objects to hold, and love, and play with, and suck on, and shred that a child learns to how to engage in “the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.”<sup>5</sup>

What I am proposing, by this analogy, is that we think of our translations and interpretations of scripture as transitional phenomena. Translations and interpretations of biblical passages hold a blend of the ‘objective’ (the text) and the ‘subjective’ (the primary creative activity that we unconsciously bring to the task of translation and interpretation). They thus help us enter into the intermediate area of experience between ourselves and the Bible. There is great value in this blend, **if we use these translations and interpretations as transitional objects**. They help us find our way into the Bible-reader’s version of Winnicott’s ‘perpetual human task’: ever more authentic relationship with the Bible, with the world, and with ourselves. Thus, this method of approaching the text is not seeking to throw off traditional interpretations as ‘wrong’ and offer

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For more on Winnicott’s understanding of symbols, see “The Fate of the Transitional Object” 53-54, “Notes on Play” 59ff, in *Psychoanalytic Explorations* (C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, M. Davis ed, Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989)

<sup>4</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2.

'right' interpretations in their stead. Rather it is bringing attention to traditional interpretations and translations as the transitional objects that were discovered/created by a few and have been used by many; *and* it is offering new transitional objects discovered/created by us.

**B. Winnicott on play – the thing we do with our transitional objects.** Winnicott has a word for the all-important thing a child does with his transitional objects in that crucial in-between space: play. It is by means of play - - uninhibited, unchallenged, creative play -- that a child moves into the real world, and learns how to be a lively, authentic participant in society.

“I have claimed that when we witness an infant’s employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child’s first use of a symbol and the first experience of play.”<sup>6</sup>

“Playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships; playing can be a form of communication....”<sup>7</sup>

“The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being.”<sup>8</sup>

Development of the capacity for playing IS socialization.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, it is only through entering into that space-in-between (between self and other, between subjective and objective, between undeveloped and developed) and freely playing there, with the transitional objects that are symbolic of such in-between-ness, that we can hope to grow into a meaningful relationship with an objective other.

So, if the transitional objects of biblical scholars are our interpretations, this step bring us to the question: what does it look like when a biblical scholar plays with her interpretation of a biblical text? The answer will be different for each of us, the results of this hermeneutical step as unique as each of us is, one from the other. However, there are a few universal things that can be said about this form of play. **This hermeneutic of play celebrates the value of bringing forward something that is actually in the text, and that has emerged through our particular subjective being.** And it is through this step that what has been “hidden” or “missed” or “buried” or “denied” or “also there” in the text, receives attention and comes to life through us. Also, playing with the interpretation will mean engaging it in ways one *enjoys*, using the skills and talents and knowledge and life experiences that one naturally brings into this space. As Winnicott simply puts it: “The characteristic of play is pleasure.”<sup>10</sup> And

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<sup>6</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Winnicott, “Notes on Play” *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Winnicott, “Notes on Play” in *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 59.

elsewhere: "Playing is doing."<sup>11</sup> This step is when we 'do our thing' with this transitional object -- this interpretation -- in an in-between space that holds both our inner-world and the concrete text in all its depth.

### C. Winnicott on the 'facilitating environment.'

A certain setting is necessary for a hermeneutic of play. Winnicott's description of play includes some important specifics about what is necessary for a child to enter this in-between space he has discovered, in order to engage in play.

"[T]he third part of life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated."<sup>12</sup>

"An essential part of my formulation of transitional phenomena is that we agree never to make the challenge to the baby: did you create this object, or did you find it conveniently lying around?"<sup>13</sup>

One sees that a crucial aspect is that this space is *not challenged*. And lest one think that such unchallenged, restful play areas are the needs of children but not adults (and certainly not scholars), Winnicott acknowledges that this 'playing' must continue throughout our lives, in various cultural endeavors and enjoyments:

"It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play."<sup>14</sup>

In biblical scholarly work, then, one must cultivate a particular attitude towards the space in which one plays with one's created/discovered interpretation: **one must be willing to suspend the tendency to challenge the validity of the space** ("Is this a legitimate exercise?" "Would others agree with this interpretation?" "Am I sure I didn't just imagine a woman in the text because I am a woman?" etc). And then one must be able to **lose oneself in one's experience** there. How will we know if we are doing it?

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<sup>11</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 96.

<sup>14</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 13.

Taking a hint from Winnicott, perhaps this part of our work will feel like a haven. It will offer relief. It will be fun. When we emerge from this play, we will feel recharged rather than depleted.

Something essential in addition to the transitional object and the unchallenged space is needed for a child to enter into the in-between-space and play there:

“In infancy this intermediate area is necessary for the initiation of a relationship between the child and the world, and is *made possible by good-enough mothering at the early critical phase. Essential to all this is continuity (in time) of the external emotional environment* and of particular elements in the physical environment such as the transitional object or objects.”<sup>15</sup> (emphasis mine)

For a child to have the ability to play, he needs an external emotional environment conducive to play; he needs a mother who can help him find/create just the right transitional objects, who can carve out and protect a safe, unchallenged space for him to play, and who can offer unobtrusive, but consistent, loving presence while he plays.

In our academic environments, are we offering such safe, unchallenged spaces? For instance, are we mindful that when Masters students come to seminary they need a space in which to **develop** their relationship with the Bible – a Bible that most probably already means something to them – and that disillusionment must happen *slowly* in an environment that is as emotionally consistent and responsible as it is intellectually vigorous.

## **Part II**

As part of Winnicott’s overall theory on the function of playing in human development, he discussed what happens when a child grows up *without* the elements that make playing possible – deprived of the sort of unchallenged spaces and consistent emotional holding environments described above. In some undated, handwritten notes on play that were found after his death in his “ideas” file, Winnicott wrote down qualities that he associated with this lack, under the heading “psychopathology of play”. Four of these qualities seem particularly relevant for our discussion on the health of biblical studies.

**\*The *loss of the capacity [to play]* associated with lack of trust, anxiety associated with insecurity.**

[For anyone here who has started to play with an idea regarding the Bible, and then finds the creative process short-circuited by doubt or by anxious thoughts regarding how it will be received, this is one way to think about that: “I just lost the capacity to play.”]

**\**Stereotypy in play patterns (anxiety re free fantasy)***

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<sup>15</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 13.

[To the extent that the research, teaching, and literature produced in the mainstream of the academy follow stereotyped patterns, we may ask: does this happen, in part, because of an undeveloped capacity to play? Does 'free fantasy' just make people too anxious to engage in more creative approaches?]

**\*Domination – one child only able to play his own game but involving other children who must comply.**

[Although I have been lucky in having academic advisors who have given me a great deal of room to chart my own scholarly course, I have heard that this might well describe the 'game' being played between some professors and PhD students. Often there is an unspoken but powerful ideology – the one adhered to by the advisor – that dominates the scholarly choices made by the students.]

**\*Failure to play a game (restless, deprived children) unless dominated by strict rules and a games-officer.<sup>16</sup>**

[In our scenario, do we ask SBL to function as an overly strict games-officer? Do we *allow* an overarching ideology to limit our work with the texts because in some way we are “restless, deprived children”? Does the academy need to offer us strict rules and encourage stereotyped scholarship, because too many scholars will “fail to play” without them?]

I am suggesting that – to the extent that this 'psychopathology of play' does reflect certain aspects of people's experience in biblical studies – **we in the academy are called to accountability as the holding environment.** For healthy forms of biblical scholarship to develop, we must facilitate more playful approaches to the task at hand. And I do believe we have such holding environments, even if they are still at the fringes of the academy. [I'll list a few examples including (I'm hoping!) this very PsyBibs section; also a section I was at last year led by Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, inspired by her book *...Democratizing Biblical Studies...* ] Sharing with each other where we have found such space and such emotional support is one way to support its growth.

### **Part III**

In this last section I offer an example. One of my own “transitional objects” in my work with the Bible, and the challenges I met when I first tried to play with it in the holding environment of my current academic situation.

My 't.o.' in this case is a potential biblical interpretation in the form of a question about the Ancient Near East communities who helped shape the Bible. Ala Winnicott it is truly a 'transitional phenomenon' in that it emerges from the space between myself and the Bible and my biblical studies at Union Theological seminary. As conjecture, there is a fanciful aspect to it that speaks to its source in

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<sup>16</sup> In these notes Winnicott lists seven qualities. Here are the other three (also fascinating, and possibly relevant, but in the interest of focus I won't be mentioning them) “Flight into *daydreaming* (a manipulated state halfway between true dream and play). *Sensualisation* – instinct appearing in crude form along with failure of symbolization....Flight into *physical exercise* from calisthenics right up to a need to be drilled, if to avoid inertia.” (Winnicott, “Notes on Play” *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 61)

what Winnicott calls “unconscious creative imagination” or “primary creative activity”. AND the conjecture emerged from my study of literary and historical ‘facts’.

In order to share the question here, let me first share the historical facts that contribute to the question (the blanket aspect of my blanke). I believe that these statements are all considered “true” by mainstream biblical studies.

The neo-Babylonian empire came to power at the turn from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE; in 586 BCE this Empire overtook Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and ended the era of Israelite<sup>17</sup> monarchy for good. This moment in history exacerbated the diaspora of the people of Judah in the following directions:

Some were forcibly taken into exile to Babylon

Some remained in the land.

Some sought refuge in neighboring regions, or in Egypt where there was already an established community at Elephantine.

By the end of that same century, empiric domination had shifted yet again from the neo-Babylonians to the Persians. Under this new rule, communities of the diaspora were allowed to return to Jerusalem and to the areas formerly known as Judah and Israel. Post-exilic politics were such that the Persian Empire authorized a particular faction of Jews (as they were now called) to write the law books for the people now living in the territories in and around Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, this authorized group was the Persian-sponsored returnees from Babylon, who thus became the elite, and their ideology dominated during whatever scriptural formation or consolidation happened during that time.

While scholarship today acknowledges that with the fall of Jerusalem, people dispersed to neighboring lands, to Babylon, and to Egypt; it acknowledges returnees from all of these places *except Egypt*.

My question – the imaginative aspect of my ‘transitional interpretation’ – has been this: **What about the communit(ies) in post-exilic Jersusalem formed by people who had been in Elephantine, in Egypt, and then returned? How do we see their experience reflected in the Bible?**

I have twice asked this question of established scholars visiting Union and Jewish Theological Seminary, and both times I immediately felt as if I had just tried to introduce them to my imaginary friend! Both times the response was

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<sup>17</sup> Northern Israel had fallen to the Neo-Assyrians already. The southern kingdom was technically “Judahite” not “Israelite”

immediate and abrupt. The first time it was simply, “But where’s the evidence? There is no evidence!” The second time I was told that it was astonishingly arrogant for me to assume I had seen something that hundreds of scholars had missed.

My initial response to these reactions was to feel duly shamed. I was stopped in my tracks. Honestly, I was embarrassed.

But on further reflection, and in light of Winnicott’s theories on play, I see my question, these responses, and the state of scholarship’s answer to the Egypt question in a different light. I have been bolstered by Winnicott’s insistence that in order for playing-with-the-transitional-object to serve its function, the validity of the exercise must not be challenged, especially in the initial stages: one must be willing to suspend the tendency to challenge the validity of the space [...in this case the space I enter into includes an imagined post-exilic Jerusalem that included returnees from Elephantine...] And then one must be able to lose oneself in one’s experience there. I was lucky to have an initial facilitating environment, offered by my colleague Tiffany Houck-Loomis, and I began to ask myself a series of questions which I share here, in what I hope will be another safe holding environment:

- A. These responses to my inquiry seemed so abrupt and so lacked any sense of curiosity or thoughtfulness, that it reminded me of the psychopathology of play. And so I ask, “What if scholarship in this area is operating under a strict tacit rule? That rule being: the possibility of Egyptian-returnees *cannot* be considered.”
- B. But that seemed like a very strange rule indeed. Even as I sensed this might be the case, I could not understand *why* there would be such a particular, strong, unconscious rule. But then it started to dawn on me. And, in searching for any scholarship about the possibility of an Egyptian-returnee community, I found an essay by Charles Carter entitled, “Ideology and Archaeology in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Excavating Text and Tell.”<sup>18</sup> Though Carter does not mention the possibility of an Egyptian return, he does give a strong clue as to the rules we might be operating under: In the essay, Carter describes

“the golah group that originated in Babylon and consider[ed] itself the legitimate extension of the ‘true Israel’. This group that actually [came] from outside of Palestine [had] the authority of the Empire behind it. As its ideology [was] enforced, its power base expands and its vision of Israel becomes reality.”

And what was its ideology?

“...one that would disenfranchise those who remained in the land, one

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<sup>18</sup> In *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp, eds. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003: 301-322.

that distinguished among a clean and accepted Babylonian community (Jer 24, 29), a rejected Egyptian community (Jer 24, 40) [still in Egypt], and an unclean and rejected community in Palestine (Jer 24, 29; Hag 2:20-24; Ezek 11:14-21; Ezra 10) *This ideology has ruled the day for some 2500 years and continues to dominate the interpretive landscape.*" (Carter 2003, 318)

Notice that in this last sentence the words "ruled" and "dominate" appear, which brings me back to Winnicott's qualities of pathological play: "*Domination* – one child only able to play his own game but involving other children who must comply [with his rules]."

Why were these the Babylonian gola's rules? We can see that by disenfranchising the people of the land, and discrediting the people who worshipped in places other than Jerusalem, the Babylonian gola could consolidate their own authority and power as the one and only "real" group of Jews in post-exilic Israel. *Why would it seek to discredit an Egyptian community as well – all the way down in Africa -- unless there was such a faction also practicing Judaism in post-exilic Jerusalem where it could pose a threat to their dominance?*

What if this ideology of the Babylonian gola was *very* successful in establishing the rules? In Carter's words: "**As its ideology [was] enforced, its power base expanded and its vision of Israel became a reality**". What if they were so successful at it that we, even in our modern scholarship, have been accepting their vision of Israel as historical reality? In a phrase, their rule was: **These Other Groups Don't Count**. What if their ideology of discounting a particular group of rivals – an *Egyptian gola* in post-exilic Jerusalem – *is still operative* in whatever biblical game we are playing today? What if this ideology that undergirds some of the formation of the Bible has succeeded in *wiping the existence of the Egyptian gola from our collective consciousness?*

It was only a few decades ago that biblical scholarship woke up to the fact that Jerusalem – and Israel as a whole – did not cease to exist during the exile to Babylon. Now this is referred to as "the Myth of the Empty Land"<sup>19</sup> And we understand that this myth was originally propagated by Babylonian returnees who believed that for the time that they were not in Judah, Judah was for all intents and purposes empty. What if we have yet to lift the veil of another aspect of that myth: "the Myth of Persian Yehud without an Egyptian gola."

I suggest that it would be virtually impossible to "prove" the existence of a gola from Elephantine *according to the rules we play by now*. The way scholarship has interpreted all of the 'evidence' up until now reaffirms the assumptions scholarship starts with: that there were no Egyptian returnees to count. And I also suggest that this game is, in Winnicott's terms, pathological.

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<sup>19</sup> See Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, Part I. "The Myth of the Empty Land Revisited" 3-92.

But if we approach the history, the archaeology, and the biblical texts without a dominating set of rules already in place telling us how to do it, we might playfully bring some textual and historical “evidence” together, along with our own primary creative activity, to see where it may lead. In science this is known as making hypotheses. In Winnicott’s language it is called playing with your t.o.

Here I have jotted down four “transitional interpretations” that bring together established historical facts about the Elephantine community and particular biblical passages, but I don’t think there is time to play with them here. (Maybe in the discussion time?) So at this point I just want to offer the following questions, “Why is the burden of proof on showing evidence that there *was* an Egyptian returnee community in post-exilic Jerusalem? Why wouldn’t there have been? Where is the proof that there *wasn’t*?” It is clear that the ideology of the Babylonian *gola* would logically be invested in discounting such a community, but it is not clear that modern scholarship has taken account for this ideology in trying to discern a picture of post-exilic Judah (Yehud).

Perhaps some of you are already playing with transitional objects of your own along these lines – sparks of ideas that come from your objective knowledge of biblical text and of history, and your unique way of thinking and being in the world. If that is the case, then I do not need to harp on my transitional interpretations, I need only say, “Please Play!” and **“What can we do to create a facilitating environment for those explorations to continue?”**

This brings us back to the origins of any “psychopathology of play”: an inadequate holding environment.

Let us take a moment to imagine the holding environment of post-exilic Judah. Pentateuchal scholars tell us that the *torah* (law) that was formed under Persian sponsorship was written down by Jews who were accountable to empiric domination.<sup>20</sup> The Persian Empire ruled *through* these laws written down by Jews for Jews. Thus, Persian-sponsored Babylonian returnees did not have complete freedom to play as they wrote their texts. They were sponsored by the Persian Empire. And while that empire was a less violent “mother” than previous empires had been, she was still not good-enough, in Winnicott’s terms.

In this light, what is miraculous to me is that so many diverse voices are at play in our Bible. Different parts of the academy hear different voices, and call them different names: “J, E,P, and D” “P and non-P”, polytheism and monotheism, the “fluidity-model” and “anti-fluidity model” of theological intuition.<sup>21</sup> Male authority and female authority. These many voices may be dominated by an overarching ideology that tells us which voices to privilege, but they are nonetheless **all given space in the text**. Part of what is so powerful about the Bible is the paradox *that the voices that have been silenced also remain there to be heard*. I suggest that even as we refuse to recognize the

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<sup>20</sup> Of course this theory is a transitional object too. And I am not suggesting that the *torah* created in that setting is necessarily equivalent to the first five books of the Bible that we have now. Many scholars currently believe that the Pentateuch was first assembled as such during this time.

<sup>21</sup> See Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 2009.

existence of returnees from Egypt, this community speaks to us from scripture. They say that history is written by the winners; but in the case of the Bible it is more complex than that.

To what do we owe this miracle? Why are these voices all there, together? Literary genius? Effective political subversion? Divine providence? More possibilities to play with....

But what I will end with here is a return to our current holding environment. Regardless of what the ancient holding environments were that shaped the formation of these texts, we need to consciously create the rules by which we interpret them. I come back to Winnicott's notes on the pathology of play and the questions I asked earlier: "*Stereotypy* and... *Failure to play a game* (restless, deprived children) unless dominated by strict rules and a games-officer." **Do we *allow an overarching ideology to limit our work with the texts because in some way we are "restless, deprived children"*?** Does the academy need to offer strict rules and encourage stereotyped scholarship, because too many scholars will "fail to play" without them?

If so, then we need to be conscious of how we are the facilitating environment for the next generations of scholars. We need to give them the means to play. So they will be ready to make use of an academy that no longer needs to be a strict games-officer, an academy that will offer unchallenged, emotionally consistent spaces for those future scholars who will have the ability to play.

[end]

Four “transitional interpretations” of the Bible that take the experience of an imagined Egyptian Gola into account.

1. There seems to be a pattern in Genesis of protagonists (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph) who leave the land, and become wealthy abroad (note also that within this pattern Abraham and Joseph both go down to Egypt). Historically, those who went from Israel to Babylon were taken into captivity, but the community at Elephantine (and perhaps other such settlements in Egypt) were not created from forced migration. Scholars believe that the Jewish settlement at Elephantine was begun as a military garrison in the Neo-Assyrian era. People from Judah and/or Israel came down to help Egypt fight against Neo-Assyrian domination. Thus Jewish soldiers and their families at Elephantine enjoyed prosperity there, and were on good terms with the pharaoh, for hundreds of years, through the Persian era, until around 400 BCE. How might Abraham, for instance, be a recognizable and sympathetic character for a community of post-exilic Jews whose ancestors had left Judah/Israel under different conditions and for a different destination than the ancestors of the Babylonian gola, and who returned under different circumstances as well. How might we hear the following two verses about Abram’s departure from Egypt: “And Pharaoh put men in charge of [Abram], and they sent him off with his wife and all that were his. From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that were his...” (Genesis 12:20-13:1)

2. Also in the Abraham story: as ‘Abram’ he has a son Ishmael with Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant; and -- after the covenant -- as ‘Abraham’ he has Isaac with Sarah. Much has been written about the echoes between the Hagar/Ishmael stories and those about Abraham and Isaac. Is it possible that – like two simultaneous games of ‘telephone’ – the stories of “Abram” and the stories of “Abraham” are parallel strands of stories that developed in the Egyptian and Babylonian communities concurrently? I imagine that the saga as we have it, might have been a way to weave the stories of Abram told in post-exilic Jerusalem by Egyptian returnees (stories in which the Egyptian-born Hagar is a heroine unduly harassed by Chaldean [= Babylonian!]-born Sarah) with stories of Abraham told by the Babylonian gola; note that in the interwoven story it is clear which side of the family is authorized by the covenant – Sarah’s.

3. The whole story of Exodus, featuring Moses, is about a people being brought up from the land of Egypt. In its post-exilic telling, I wonder *with whom would such a story resonate the most?* Interestingly, the book of Exodus begins by describing how a large and prolific community of Israelites slowly grew out of the original “sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob.” (Exo 1:1-7). They had been on good terms with the pharaoh, but then “a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” (1:8). Thus begins the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt, which leads to their exodus under Moses. In conjunction with this textual information, I offer the following historical data: during post-exilic times the

Elephantine community continued on good terms with the Pharaoh while that position was held by the successive Persian emperors. But that all ended when there was an Egyptian uprising against the Persian Empire, and an Egyptian-born pharaoh, Amyrtaeus, came to power in 404BCE. For roughly four years, Upper Egypt, where Elephantine was located, was still under Persian control. But after that, Elephantine was no longer a safe haven for the Jews there. *Where did those people in the Elephantine community go?* History books are strangely silent. Would not some of them seek to return to their ancestral land, especially since it was still under the dominance of the Persian Empire with whom they had good relations?

4. Interestingly, the timing of this Egyptian uprising – circa 400 BCE – corresponds to the date that some scholars believe that the ‘second wave of return’ from Babylon took place, under the authority of Ezra and others. Perhaps this was a time when the ideology of a “pure” and Babylonian-born community being the only true Jews emerged. As we see in the Bible (and as Carter highlights in his discussion of ideology, mentioned above), the religious practices of those who had been in Judah all along were otherized as “Canaanite” and the religious practices of all those who had returned from places near and far (other than Babylon of course!) were accused of having been tainted by the cultural influences of those peoples and those lands. We read in Ezra 9:1 a description of all the various ‘tainted’ communities who have returned from the diaspora, but have let themselves be corrupted by the cultural influences of those lands: “... The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land whose abhorrent practices are like those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the **Egyptians**, and the Amorites.”

From “Notes on Play” in Winnicott’s *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, the following are listed under the heading *Psychopathology of Play*<sup>22</sup>

**\*The loss of the capacity [to play] associated with lack of trust, anxiety associated with insecurity.**

**\*Stereotypy in play patterns (anxiety re free fantasy)**

**\*Domination – one child only able to play his own game but involving other children who must comply.**

**\*Failure to play a game (restless, deprived children) unless dominated by strict rules and a games-officer.**

Further Reading on Winnicott’s theories of play and their relevance for biblical studies:

Winnicott, Donald W. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1971; repr. Hove/New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002.

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Brueggemann, Walter. “Psychological Criticism: Exploring the Self in the Text.” Pages 213-232 in *Method Matters*. Edited by Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards. Atlanta, Ga: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Jones, James William, “Playing and Believing: the uses of DW Winnicott in the psychology of religion.” Pages 106-126 in *Religion, Society and Psychoanalysis: Readings in Contemporary Theory*. Edited by Janet Jacobs and Donald Capps. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997.

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<sup>22</sup> Winnicott, Donald W. *Psychoanalytic Explorations*. Edited by C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, and M. Davis. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 61.

- Strawn, Brad D. & Strawn, Brent A. "Preaching and/as Play: D.W. Winnicott and Homiletics" in *Homiletic* 31 no 2 (Winter 2006), 13-28.
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- Underwood, Ralph, L. "Primordial Texts: An Object Relations Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics" in *Pastoral Psychology* 45.3 (1997), 181-92.