Yoav Elstein and Avidov Lipsker

(Bar-Ilan University)

THE HOMOGENEOUS SERIES

IN THE LITERATURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE:

A THEMATOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY[1]

(Translated from the Hebrew by Ruth Bar-Ilan)

The Scholar embraking on an investigation of the abundant narrative material that has accumulated in world literature or in any of the national literatures confronts two types of questions, corresponding to two levels of comprehension. The first level concerns the narrative as an isolated piece and raises questions about how it is associated with, or differs from, other literary works. The second level relates to the narrative as a product of the prevailing culture in a given time and place and raises questions about the relationship between the work and its socio-historical background.

These two approaches are bound up with historicism – one of the major patterns of modern thought – according to which the knowledge of a 'thing,' including the literary 'thing,' is possible only through an awareness of the different transformations and chronological sequences along which that 'thing' acquired its particular identity. This holds true whether the given 'thing' was permanently fixed in the cultural consciousness or faded from memory from time to time, only to re-emerge in a new guise.

Regrettably, it is oftentimes the case that this crucial aspect of literary research is totally neglected. While investigating some literary work, or even an entire literary phase, scholars frequently pay no attention to the very historical contexts that prompted its emergence and shaped its development. Thus they may overlook the

impact of the transformation that occurred in the very literary conventions and structures that hold together a given work. Furthermore, the same nonchalance toward the historicistic aspect is displayed with regards to the emergence and development of the raw materials of the work (such as episodes, imagery, time and place, the characters, and the ambiance of the work). Yet without an awareness of the particular way in which these materials developed, the investigator will fail to understand how they function in the particular work with which he is concerned. Historicism has already permeated the consciousness of modern man; we must allow it to make its imprint on literary research as well.

The discontent with literary research in its current state can also be presented from an epistemological point of view. We embrace the principle that no clear cognizance of a given object is likely to occur without a concomitant discernment of the existing variant of closely-related objects operating within the same system. Knowledge means the ability to distinguish a particular object from others that resemble it in some ways but strikingly differ from it in other ways. The application of this fundamental position to the literary domain may be formulated as follows: a clear cognition of a literary object depends on grouping the works, classifying their variants, and providing a comprehensive description of the latter as a solid basis for generalizations.

Such an approach to the literary text seems to be implicit in the very definition of the term 'theme,' as formulated by Ziolkowski:

> The term 'theme' issued to designate the specific literary shaping of an exemplary or
> archetypal life familiar from myth, or sometimes, history.[2]

Ziolkowski's words reflect the fact that a literary theme acquired its intensity and full value from the recognition of its close connection with its ancient roots in myth and the developmental process originating therein.

The historicistic approach is indispensable not only because of the cognitive principle it involves but also on account of the historical reality of literature. An examination of long-term historical development (with the view of understanding the developments as such, as well as any isolated literary phase, which is necessarily

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[2] Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 11-2.

anchored in the wider context) must not use the novel or the short story as a test case, for these are late developments. On the contrary, an examination along the lines we suggest must encompass the literary raw materials before their crystallization at the structural level. It is a fundamental fact of the literary reality as manifested in the course of history that literary or poetic 'themes' are those that were traditionally transmitted from one generation to the next. Precisely these themes must constitute the primary object of literary research, once literature is viewed and evaluated from a historical perspective.

Such a perspective gains support from another claim, namely that literary themes (or images) are crucial to the study of the cultural consciousness of humanity in general and of national cultures in particular. The literary themes can be viewed as archetypes or basic images unfolding along with the general evolution of the human race. They can be detected in variation layers and sectors of literature as well as in the paraliterary products, such as religious literature, homilies, and patterns of folk life. They find their way into didactic fiction for young readers and are reflected in paintings, illustrations, and frescos as pictorial idioms.

By following up the creative manifestations of literary theme as they unfolded over many centuries, and while simultaneously paying attention to its embodiment in the complementary paraliterature – and only by pursuing this direction – the investigator can arrive at the vantage point that will allow him to grasp the true nature of the theme in question. The present authors deliberately strive toward shifting the perspective of literary research from the narrow angle of the specific work or the isolated phase to the panoramic, all-embracing genealogical view of the continuous and diversified process of cultural transmission, which is the very core of literary reality.

This is particularly relevant to the research of Jewish literature, where one can detect long-term processes that need to be thoroughly examined.

The Early Beginnings of Jewish Thematology

Before introducing our thmatological methodology, let us first turn to the rudiment of Jewish thematology.

In the history of Jewish literature, the nineteenth century is distinguished by an extremely important phenomenon, which had broad repercussions on the growth of modern Hebrew literature as well as on the emergence of a thematological approach to Jewish literature as a whole. What we have in mind is the massive publication of Jewish narrative collections. To get some idea of the amazing wealth of the thematic material stored in these collections, consider the following representative list:

Representative List

of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Collections

1842	*Das Buch der Sagen und Legend Juedischer Vorzeit.* A. M. Tandlau. Frankfurt.
1842	*Sefer ha-Ma'asiyyot.* El'azar Arakie. Calcutta (Bagdad).
1847 ff.	*Sippurim.* Wolf Paschelles. 5 vols. (in German). Prague.
1856 – 1857	*Geheimnisse der Juden.* H. Rakendorff. Leipzig.
1866 – 1870	*Oseh Pele.* Joseph Sabta Parhi. Livorno.
1887	*Sihot Mini Kedem.* Jacob Yaabez. Warsaw.
1890	*Ma'asim Tovim.* Solomon Bechor Huzin. Bagdad.
1898	*Kol Aggadot Yisrael.* Y. B. Levner. 2 vols. Pietrekov.
1901 – 1908	*Yalkut Sippurim.* Ze'ev Wolf Gruenwald. 3 vols. Warsaw.
1908 – 1912	*Sefer ha-Aggadah.* Bialik & Rabhnitzki. Krakaw-Odessa.
1910 – 1912	*Die Chassidischen Buecher.* Martin Buber. Berlin.
1912 – 1927	*Die sagen der Juden*. M. J. Bin Gorion. 5 vols. Frankfurt a. M.
1912 – 1938	*Legends of the Jews.* Louis Ginzberg. Philadelphia.
1913	*Me'Ozar ha-Aggadah.* M. J. Berdyczewski. 2 vols. Berlin.
1916 – 1923	*Der Born Judas*. M. J. Berdyczewski. 6 vols. Leipzig. (The complete edition was published in 1924.)
1916 – 1922	*Darkhei Hayyim.* Hayyim Ha-Levi Zagol. Jerusalem.
1924	*Exempla of the Rabbis.* Moses Gaster. Leipzig.
1924 – 1925	*Zefunot ve-Aggadot.* M. J. Berdyczewski. Leipzig.

	1924 – 1929	*Sefer ha-Ma'asiyot.* Mordekhai Ben Yehezke'el. 6 vols. Tel-Aviv.
	1927	*Shmu-ot Mini Kedem.* Z. Jaabetz. London.
	1929 – 1938	*Mi-Dor Dor.* Mordehai Lipson. Tel-Aviv.
	1931	*Malkhei Rabanan.* Joseph Ibn Ma'im. Jerusalem.
	1939	*Mimekor Yisrael.* M. J. bin Gorion. Tel-Aviv.
	1947	*Or ha-Ganuz.* M. Buber. 2 vols. Tel-Aviv.
	1955	*Maisalech un Mesholim.* Naftoli Gross. New York.
	1969	*Kankan ha-kesef.* Eliezer Steineman. 4 vols. Ramat-Gan.
	1970	*Avoteinu Sipperu.* Moses Rabbi. 3 vols. Jerusalem.
	1983	*Sefer ha-Dimyonot shel ha-Yehudim.* Pinehas Sadeh. Jerusalem & Tel-Aviv.

This narrative material which is large in quantity and deep in its historical dimension thrived in the consciousness on the Jewish community. The emergence of these collections signifies a maturing of consciousness as to the value and meaning of a literary heritage that has been continuously transmitted and expanded in the course of many centuries.

Apparently, the roots of this ripening of consciousness can be traced back to some similar development in European culture. In 1773 Herder wrote an essay on Ossian's poetry, which had been published in English for the first time in 1765. In this essay Herder's positive regard for the ancient texts finds a special expression in his acclaim of the ancient jewish midrash.[3]

The fascination with the past, which latter became the hallmark of Romanticism was validated in the work of the Grimm brothers (editions: 1812, 1819, 1837, 1857) who paid homage to all the archaic and authentic cultural manifestations of their people, including the popular and peripheral phenomena of its cultural existence. Through their work, the Grimm brothers inspired the notion that each people must treat the deep layers of its own literature with the same veneration.

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[3] See H. B. Nisbet, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelman, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe* (London: Cambridge university Press, 1985), pp. 153-61.

At the time when the Grimm brothers carried on their monumental project, and especially as it gained popularity, as witnessed by its successive editions, the work of collecting the Jewish material began in full force. The collections of Tendlau (1842) and Pascheles (1847) attest to a direct influence of the Grimm brothers. Other Jewish compilers were not so directly inspires; nonetheless, their work bears an interesting phenomenological resemblance to the Grimms' endeavor. A case in point is the collection titled *Shivhei ha-Besht* (1815) which is the product of the East-European Jewish community. A similar cultural orientation among Eastern Jewry is reflected in *Sefer ha-Ma'asyyot*, a narrative collection compiled by Elazar Arakei, which was published in Calcutta in 1842 – notably in the very same year that saw the publication of Tendlau's collection in the German language. A large portion of the collections of the Eastern Jews were written in Judeo-Arabic with a Hebrew transcription. These too represent an authentic and integral part of the literature of the Jewish people.

The Jewish collections date from 1842 up to the present, stretching over a span of approximately 150 years. All in all they are huge reservoirs of narrative material, containing a rich variety of characters, images and narrative conventions, beginning with the brief anecdote, the riddle and the fable, and down to long narratives that proceed with multiple turns of events. These anthologies became the driving force that set in motion two interrelated systems: The first one consisted of the founders of modern Hebrew literature, who were attentive to any accessible literary material, particularly that which reminded them of the early formative life at home. The second system consisted of the readers, the would-be recipients of modern Hebrew literature.[4] In spite of the unusually large scope of the material stored in these collections, so far it has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

Concerning this corpus of narrative collections, it is worthwhile to dwell on some important landmarks. In *Yalkut Sippurim* (1899-1901), Ze'ev Wolf Gruenwald arranged the material in the traditional way, following the scared, canonical order of the Torah portions. What singles out this work is that he went beyond the

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[4] In evaluating the cultural impact of the anthologies one must take into consideration not only their large number but also their numerous editions. Greunwald's *Yalkut Sippurim* was printed in five editions; Y. B. Levner's *Kol Aggadot Yisrael* went through nine editions by the 1950's*; Sefer ha-Aggada* by Bialik and Rabnitzki was printed in sixteen editions; and the two German-written collections compiled by Berdyczewski were printed in five editions.

conventional principle of organization to indicate the parallels of each story. Indeed his annotations contain extensive cross references to parallel versions, including those found in Jewish mystical literature.

Berdyczewski's work marks the first turning point in the method of presenting the material. He was the first to turn away from the normative order of the Torah, having arranged the stories on the basis of a thematic and chronological grouping principle. In addition, in the German editions of his collections, especially in *Der Born Judas* (1916), Berdyczewski attempted to form an intricate apparatus of cross-references to parallel versions and to the pertinent research literature. His son, Emanuel bin Gorion, followed in his footsteps. It was he who provided the elaborate and extensive comparative notes to *Mimekor Yisrael*.

The end-result of the anthologies was an enormous accumulation of valuable material distinguished by a wide range of themes, a richness of literary means, and a depth of language layers. This in itself called for a systematization of the material for research purposes. Indeed, as early as the 1930s, bin Gorion put forward such a demand in his introduction to the new edition of *Mimekor Yisrael*, claiming that Berdyczewski's archives need "arrangement, systematization, so that the reader can realize the great wealth inherent in the products of the collective imagination and will also easily find what he needs at any time."[5]

The arrangement of the material in *Mimekor Yisrael* falls short of this valid requirement. The first and the second parts of his book were ordered chronologically; the other parts were arranged in a mixed order, either by genre (folk tales, riddles, fables and aphorisms) or by theme (within well-defined boundaries, such as the grouping of "Stories of Elijah the Prophet" or within diffused boundaries, such as "Wisdom Tales").

In evaluating the enterprise of the early compilers, special mention must be made of Moses Gaster's contribution, whose work undoubtedly profited from the pioneer work of his predecessors. As a folklorist, Gaster was fully aware of the important of literary parallels. His index to the *Exempla of the Rabbis* made

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[5] See Emanuel bin Gorion, "Introduction," in Micha Joseph bin Gorion (Berdyczewski), *Mimekor Yisrael* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1939), p. x. (and in the subsequent, one-volume edition, p. ix).

references to hundreds of stories in manuscripts form. [6] For each of the stories appearing in this book he provided an extensive list of antedating and postdating parallels. The large number of parallels thus indicated suggests the ongoing generative power of these narratives.

Gaster never specified the principle underlying his indexing system. However, his attempt to indicate all the known versions that revolve around the same theme, and to do so chronologically, demonstrated for the first time the need for accurate listing of thematic series.

Haim schwartzbaum made the first step toward imposing a thematic order through the elaborate comparative notes that he included in the following: *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (1968), his study on Alfonsi Petrus's *Disciplina Clericalis* (1962), his Prolegomenon to the *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (1971), and finally his study on *Mishlei Shu'alim* (Fox Fables) by R. Berechiah ha-Nakdan (1979).[7]

A thematological bent is discernable in Schwarzbaum's study of *Disciplina Cleicalis*, especially as compared to his *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore*. In contrast to the latter, which places emphasis on motific materials, the study on *Disciplina Cleicalis* displays a striking tendency to compare complete versions. It is here that we find a prominent shift from the study of the material to the study of function. Schwarzbaum's comments on narratives such as "The Chosen Dream" or "The Test of Frindship" reflect a quasi-thematological orientation.[8]

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[6] Moses Gaster, ed., *Sefer ha-Ma'asiyyot (Exempla of the Rabbis)*, (1924; New York: Ketav, 1968).

[7] See Haim Bwarzbaum, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968); idem, "International Folklore Motifs in Petrus Alfonsi's 'Disciplina Clericalis', in his *Jewish Folklore between East and West*, ed. Eli Yassif (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 1989), nos. 2 and 19, pp. 261-66, 291-301 [first published in *Sefarad*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1961), pp. 289-94; vol. 22, no. 1 (1962), pp. 37-46]; idem, "Prolegomenon," in *Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, ed. Moses Gaster (New York: Ktav, 1971), pp. 1-124; idem., *The Mishlei Shu'alim* (Fox Fabels*) of Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979).

[8] Haim Schwarzbaum, "International Folklore Motifs" (see note 7), pp. 261-6.

The entire material of notes and cross-references as accumulated in these studies and in other papers by Schwarzbaum forms a sort of an encyclopedic organon that holds together many variants of themes, motifs and literary functions.

The same is true of M. Ben-Yehezki'el commentary to *Sefer ha-Ma'asiyyot* and to Bialik's *Va-Yehi ha-Yom (And It Came to Pass).* In his case too, the thematological potential remained unfulfilled.[9]

Among the major studies in Jewish folklore, the following are noteworthy: Goebel's work of 1932,[10] Dov Noy's series of books,[11] which constitutes a representative selection of folk tales from the Israel Folk Tale Archive (IFA); Dan Ben-Amos's annotations to *Mimekor Yisrael*, the english edition,[12] which on the one hand supplement Emanuel bin Gorion's notes to the Hebrew edition, and on the other hand open up further possibilities of comparisons.

Though their work was not systematic and tended to fluctuate between the level of the material and the functional level, these scholars groped for a thematological direction. They did not unwittingly; hence the latent potential for breaking fresh ground did not materialize.

The thematologist is faced with some crucial questions concerning this rich material: What are the processes that were involved in compiling these collections? What criteria were used in selecting the material? In what way did these criteria change over time? How do values, taste, imagery and language-layers vary in the different collections? What influences or environmental interactions account for these and other differences?

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[9] See M. Ben-Yehezkel, "Sefer *va-Yehi ha-Yom*," in *Bialik: Yetzirato le-Sugeha bi-Re'I ha-Bikkoret*, ed. G. Shaked (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), pp. 337-72 [first published in Kenesset (1951), pp. 29-63].

[10] See F. M. Goebel, *J?dische Motive in M?rchenhaftem Erz?hluhgsgut* (Gleiwitz, 1932).

[11] See Dov Noy, *Folktales of Israel* (Chicago, 1963); idem, *Yefet Schwili Erzהhlt* (Berlin, 1963); also the following Hebrew-written works by Dov Noy*: The Beautiful Maiden and the Three Princes: Jewish Folktales from Iraq* (Tel-Aviv, 1965*); Jewish Folktales from Lybia* (Jerusalem, 1966); *Jewish Folktales from Tunis* (Jerusalem, 1966); *Jewish Folktales from Morocco* (Jerusalem, 1967).

[12] See Dan Ben-Amos, Introduction and Notes to *Mimekor Yisrael*, ed. M. J. bin Gorion (Bloomigton, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990; English, abridged edition).

This group of questions leads us to the major research question, soon to be dealt with: What is the typology of changes that characterizes the narrative versions abounding in the literature of the Jewish people?

Additional Comments on bin Gorion's Thematological Thinking

Before presenting a new thematological methodology, it is worth mentioning that already in the work of Micha Joseph bin Gorion (Berdyczewski) one can detect the rudiment of a morphological system that has broad implication for the thematology of the literature of the Jewish people. In the German-written paper published 1920 he put forward the proposition that the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) and the story of Ruth draw on a common genotypical plot, which the Bible respectively transformed into an elegy and an idyll. Both stories were designed to tell about the lineage of the House of David. [13] Berdyczewski substantiates his view by quoting the blessing bestowed on Boaz: " Let thy house be like the house of Peretz whom Tamar bore to Yehuda. " Through these words, says Berdyczewski, "the narrator uncovers the prototype of this story."

Berdyczewski's original formulation were enlightened by his son, Emanuel bin Gorion, who elaborated the thematological line of pursuit initiated by his father. In connection with the two biblical stories, bin Gorion reconstructs the following hypothetical master story:

> Once upon a time, a young and childless woman was widowed. She was not of the daughters of Israel, but her husband belonged to the tribe of Judah and he died prematurely. Some say that he died because he had angered God; others add that he refused to establish a line of descent for his deceased brother and this is why he was punished; still others account for his early death by pointing out that he had emigrated from the land of Israel. After his death, his widow was long waiting for redeemer. She pinned her hopes on the head of the family – a brave man, a widower, or otherwise unmarried and childless like her, someone whom she considered a father and a patron. She decided to act cunningly and seduce him so as to conceive his child and carry on the line of descent of the tribe she had joined. Some say that she pretended to be a harlot and veiled her face so that the man she desired would not recognize her; others say this was at night: she sneaked into his bed and bestowed her favors upon him. Afterwards, her conduct became public knowledge – and still the man did not estrange himself from her. What actually happened is controversial: some say that she was

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[13] A Hebrew version of this paper, by Micha Joseph bin Gorion, was published in *ha-Poel ha-Tza'ir* 37, nos. 5-6 (1944), pp. 9-10, supplemented by E. bin Gorion's notes and commentry. This version is reprinted in *Ginzei Micha Joseph* (Tel-Aviv: Reshafim, 1986), p. 17.

pregnant and the man acknowledge her right and admitted that he was the father; others say that the man pronounced himself her redeemer and only when she became his wife, and they received the grace of the Lord, he fathered the child. Whichever the case, it turned out that her house was blessed and she had the privilege to become the progenitor of King David. The story of her life also impressed upon us the nature and value of an ancient commandment and an early custom: the levirate rites.[14]

Elsewhere bin Gorion attempts to construct the paradigms of the basic story:

1st. The widowing of the heroine and the death of the two brothers.

2nd. The widow takes initiative to attain motherhood (Tamar seduces Judah and Ruth seduces Boaz) by pinning her hopes on an older kid.

3rd. The rejection of the levirite marriage and the ensuing trail.

4th. Both stories relate to different links in the same genealogical chain – the history of the House of David.[15]

In another text Bin Gorion lists the descriptive units in greater detail:[16]

1st. The departure

2nd. Marrying the female member of a different tribe

3rd. The death of the two sons

4th. The appearance of the "third brother" or the redeemer

5th. The father of the deceased seduced the widow

6th. The person destined to mate with the widow is widowed

7th. The woman veils her face

8th. The harlots' pay

9th. The incident will not become public knowledge

10th. The Torah commandment of the levirite marriage and the first redeemer's refusal

11th. The trail

[14] *Ginzei Micha Joseph* (see note 13), p. 17.

[15] See Emanuel bin Gorion, *Olam ve-Olamot Bo* (Tel-Aviv: Reshafim, 1986), pp. 103-4.

[16] *Ginzei Micha Joseph* (see note 13), pp. 16-7.

12th.   Perez (the circumstances of his birth or the story of his life)

The two lists together cover the entire range of the descriptive units found in the biblical stories of Tamar and Ruth. This combined list comes very close to meeting the demands of a systematic thematological research.

General Thematology and Folkloristics versus
the Research Needs of the Thematology of Homogeneous Series

The systematical thematological research of the overall Jewish literature as initiated by the present authors aims to map as fully as possible the geographical time, as they are represented in the five languages spoken by the Jews: Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), and Judeo-Arabic. The texts comprising the versions thematic series were moulded by diverse literary conventions and they belong to a variety of genres. In other words, a narrative that runs through a homogeneous series may at times take the form of a midrash; at other times it may appear as a folk tale; at still other times it may manifest itself as a medieval exemplum or a modern ballad. The same narrative can appear in the material interpolated in the exegetical and homiletic literature, in the philosophical and mystical literature, in the Responsa, in travel books, memories and in vernacular literature such as calendars, didactic works and *Groschen Bücher*.

By its very nature, this entire corpus requires a method that would fit in with its inner character and handle the problems arising from it.

Let us consider the state of the art of those disciplines that in one way or another have some bearing on investigating the thematic corpus of the literature of the Jewish people, which is the focus of this discussion. These disciplines are supposed to enlighten us in devising a suitable methodology for our own research object.

The nature of the overall corpus of European literature, which transcends national boundaries, determined the prevailing system of general thematology. Comparative literature borrowed from general thematology the notion of theme (or type) – a family of works, or various parts of works, sharing a rather fluid narrative formula. Accordingly, material is gathered around a theme of character (such as "prometheus," or "Ahasver, the Wandering Jew") or around a situational theme (such

as Paradise Lost).[17] Such a unit of material is formed by grouping works together according to their external resemblance. Henceforward we will refer to such unit as a *heterogeneous theme*.

In Jewish literature, on the other hand, the dynamics of the internal components in successive versions of the same basic narrative; the striking continuity of the narrative, as reflected by the large number of parallels versions; and the extensive historical and geographical diffusion of the series – all of these dictate the need to turn away from the concept of 'theme' as an umbrella term for a heterogeneous family of stories and, instead, to set up a more unified category of grouping.

This phenomenon of massive occurrence of successive versions modeled upon a single, solid narrative formula was uncovered by the thematological research of the literature of the Jewish people. We designate such a series of interrelated texts a homogeneous series of versions, or *homogeneous theme*.

Examples of such homogeneous theme are: "Joseph who Honors the Sabbath"; "The Death of Moses"; "Treasure under the Bridge"; "A Neighbor in Paradise"; "The Weasel and the Pit." This is just a small sample of a wide range of themes that run through the literary history of the Jewish people. These themes, and many others, find their expression in long series of parallels texts, oftentimes anounting to thirty or forty versions per series.

In view of this variety, the conceptual system to be employed in the thematological methodology of the homogeneous series must be valid across the boundaries of genres and disciplines. It must also function as a regulator that can

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[17] Trousson makes a distinction between a situational theme and theme of character. A situational theme, he says, may introduce a well-known character, but this character is bound to the other characters and is therefor context-depended. For instance, "Antigone" is a theme/myth of situation. In contrast, in the theme of character the protagonist is not restrained by his or her environment but rather makes an impact on it, so that everything is focused on the protagonist's actions, as is the case with the theme of "Prometheus". See Raymond Trousson, "Plaidoyer pour la Stoffgeschichte*," Revue de Litt?rature Compar?e* 38 (1964), pp. 104-5. This dichotomy of the theme was also mentioned in Ulrich Wesstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, trans. by W. Riggen, in collaboration with the author (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 142-3. Though Weisstein is somewhat sympathetic to this idea, he comments ironically that Trousson's distinction is analogous to hair splitting (ibid., p. 142).

reconcile the investigator's description and analysis of the entire genealogical sequence of the thematic series with his description and analysis of the isolated text.

The attempt to be assisted by the tools of general thematology also presents us with a different kind of problem: the lack of uniform terminology. Indeed, a large number of general thematologists admitted that the terminology of their field is not sufficiently clear-cut. For instance, cinsider the term 'motif': In folkloristics it means the smallest unit of the material; in literary criticism it refers to the recurrent element in the isolate work (designated in German by the term 'motiv,' which refers to the element that carries forward the action of the piece); in art it is considered an element of the composition, which is identifiable in different works of art; in music it refers to a basic element in the melodic sequence of a given piece.

Other themtological terms pick up different nuance of meaning and change their semantic field as they move from one language to another. Thus there is no international consensus as to the accurate use of the terms of international thematology, so much so that Harry Levin referred to this as a terminological "Tower of Babel."[18] Francois Jost devoted a whole chapter to this issue in his *Introduction to Comparative Literature*. He tried to improve the existing terminology, but fell in to the same trap of ambiguity.[19]

Since general thematology cannot meet our specific research needs, can we, instead, benefit from the research methods employed in folkloristics? Now, indeed the term 'type' as proposed in the historical-geographical school of folkloristics is associated with a historical development. However, in the current state of affairs, 'type' seems to be a rather formalistic and static term, while what we have in mind is a more organic form, which is marked by some definite developmental features rooted in cultural contexts that are impregnated with meanings.

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[18] For a discussion of this problem see Adam John Bisanz, "Stoff, Thema, Motiv: Zur Problematik des Transfers von Begriffsdestimmungen zwischen der englischen und deutschen Literaturwissenschaft," *Neophilologus* 59 (1975), pp. 317-23. Harry Levin made the reference to the 'Tower of Babel' in "Thematics and Criticism", in The *Discipline of Criticism*, ed. Peter Demetz (New Haven, CT: Yale Universirty Press, 1968), p. 125.

[19] See Francois Jost, *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merill, 1974), chp. 13, pp. 175-87, and notes, pp. 289-92.

In fact, one might say that the term 'type' has not gone beyond the taxonomic mapping of folklorristics and has not been exploited to interpret the processual dynamics of change at the various levels of a preliminary structure. Yet is precisely such approach which is most needed at present so as to refresh the current literary research.

Another method in which we perceive the first kernels of our approach is Vladimir Propp's morphological system. Propp's breakthrough in the formalistic description of the narrative and in the classification of narrative types is important in itself. Nonetheless it presents several difficulties, especially in view of the introductory remarks presented above.

Propp proposed a morphology consisting of thirty-one narrative functions derived from limited corpus of Russian folk tales. He dealt with certain cross-section representative of full-fledged versions and overlooked the fact that each narrative text in itself is the outcome of a long genealogical series of versions with an independent history of its own. It is plausible that for each of the resulting series, an independent morphology could be devised, which would be just as valuable and valid as Propp's morphological proposal concerning his own sample of versions. To a large extent, his abstract formulation of the narrative functions of the individual version, as well as his formalization of the entire corpus, obscure the internal hierarchical relationships between the functions and veil the significant position of each in relation to the others. In connection with the last point, it is worth citing Jan Muka⌐ovsky's criticism of Propp's formalistic approach. While raising questions about the dominance of functions in works of art, Muka⌐ovsky argued that the latter are subject to a 'hierarchy of (general) functions.' In each work, he maintained, a particular dominant function (whether aesthetic, moral, or utilitarian) is given special emphasis as a result of socio-cultural pressure, which in the final analysis determine its forms and contents.[20] Accordingly, though each work displays a mixture of functions, on the

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[20] See Jan Muka⌐ovsky, "Poetic Language as a Functional Language and as a Material," in *On Poetic Language* (Gent: The Peter de Rider Press, 1976), pp. 7-16, esp. pp. 9-11. On the dynamics of normative changes (in the context of functions) see Muka⌐ovsky, *Function, Norm and Aeshetic Value as Social Facts* (febrw edition), (Tel-Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me'uhad and Sifriyat Po'alim, 1983), chp. 9, pp. 25-53, esp. pp. 41-4. For further criticism on Propp see Dundes's introduction to the second edition of V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. By L. Scott (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. xi-xvii.

whole it is governed by a single function, which plays a decisive role in shaping the character and formal qualities on the work in question. Now, the notion of a hierarchy of functions can be applied not only to the overall function of the work, but also to the specific functions that Propp established in reference to the folktale. In connection to this system of thirty-two functions, one may pose two questions that Propp failed to address: (1) What is the internal hierarchy of these functions in a given narrative? (2) In the transition from one tale to the other, to what an extent does the socio-cultural context produce hierarchy changes in the narrative functions, as well as in the concrete linguistic and narrative fashioning of the functions?

Propp's disregard for the historical context and his failure to take into account the socio-cultural factors were counterproductive not only in so far as the relationship between the (Proppian) functions are concerned, but also in terms of the relationship between different narratives. He thus unwittingly undermined the most important basis of comparison in the research of comparative literature.

Toward a New Thematology

The ample narrative material that was laboriously collected by the modern compilers accumulated through a continuous process of transmission and expansion. Throughout the long history of the Jewish people, every generation made its own contribution to the collective effort, beginning with the canonical collections of narratives, such as the Midrash and the Aggadah, through the didactic (moralistic) and homiletic literature, the medieval stories, the mystical literature, and Hasidic tales, down to the present-day folk tale.

In the field of Jewish literature, the abundance of material presents a serious problem to the thematologists who strives to trace the development of genealogical sequences. Each thematic series under investigation cantinas a large number of versions modeled on an identical though changeable formula. In order to analyze this material the investigator must adopt a systematic approach that will take into consideration that particular nature of the research material. At the current state of affairs, the discipline of general thematology does not provide us with research tools that are applicable to the thematology of the literatures of the Jewish people.

The methodological problems inherent in general thematology as a whole, and in Propp's morphological analysis in particular, have led us to formulate the necessary requirements of a method designed to deal with the narrative as a historical phenomenon. In other words, we were looking for a method that classifies, analyses and categorizes narratives on the basis of collecting and generalizing data. The requirements may be summed up by postulating the following prerequisites for any thematological method:

1. Such a method must establish clear-cut criteria for grouping the variants of a given narrative formula and assigning them to a series of versions sharing internal resemblance.

2. The method must set up well-defined criteria for a diachronic mapping, as accurate as possible, of the individual versions.

3. The method is to be based on a conceptual system that will enable the investigator to follow up the successive transformations of the versions over time so that each historical phase will be examined equally and uniformly, without obscuring historical and cultural distinctions and other diverse features of the variant.

Motivated by these prerequisites, we sought a theoretical and operative solution in the specific area of the thematology of the literature of the Jewish people. Our quest led us back to basics. We had to grapple with the following questions:

1. In the analysis of any given text, what is to be considered the smallest unit?

2. How can we arrive at a formula that will elicit identity and change in narrative versions and how should the changes be characterized?

3. Since there are different levels of changes, how can we impose on the conceptual system a hierarchical order, so that each concept will represent the changes occurring at a lower level of the text?

The Conceptual Scale

If one were to examine the changes occurring in a homogeneous series of versions, one would find out that these changes concern four levels of the literary text:

the level of the material, the level of function, the level of structure, and the level of ideas.

This division into four levels (along with the changes occurring in each of them) requires us to match each level with a corresponding term. Since the thematological study of homogeneous series aims to uncover the recurrence of a narrative formula in the different versions, and as the four-level system imposes on the thematic series four distinct sequences, the resulting complexity calls for no less than four terms of analysis, one for each level.

Such a group of terms must be capable of setting the boundaries of a thematic series in a scientific manner, according to well-defined objective criteria. In other words, the terms we seek are meant to establish the axis of constancy that runs through the series. Conversely, they must be instrumental in identifying the axis of change, which indicates the individual transformations within the versions.

It follows that the terms in question are supposed to serve as a tool that allows for a full grasp of the series in its totality. However, since this conceptual system, by definition, arranges the concepts in a hierarchical order, it is also instrumental in shedding light on the isolated version as far as its structure and texture are concerned.

On the basis of these requirements we devised four terms: motif, motifeme, constanta and telos, which correspond to the four levels of analysis (the level of the material, the functional level, the structural level, and the level of ideas). These terms relate to each other in the following hierarchical order:

the level of ideas -----> TELOS
the level of structure -----> CONSTANTA
the level of function ----->MOTIFEME
the level of the material -----> MOTIF

Let us now clarify each of these key terms.

The Motif

A *motif* is a group of signs at the level of the material that is embedded in a narrative syntax. This term is borrowed from folkloristics, where it is represented by Thompson's well-known Index. In devising his index, this folklorist was primarily

motivated by the aspiration to design a detailed mapping of the deployment of international motifs. In addition, ha was interested in formal taxonomy. In accordance with these concerns, the research of folklore strives to set up formalistic units, which initially have nothing to do with meaning. The motif is therefore perceived to be found in an abstract situation, detached from its function in the concrete text. This unit is handed to us at the level of a sign without a signified.

Undoubtedly, the folkloristic preoccupation with massive data on the distribution of motifs is incompatible with an exploration of meaning. This orientation of spatial mapping characterizes the positivistic-accumulative approach that prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. The opposite holds true for the literary scholar, who is interested in literary functions. Since he recognizes that the motif is found only at the level of *Stoff* and that, furthermore, it must never be removed from its literary environment (where it assumes a specific meaning), the literary investigator must move up to the level of function by employing a supra-motific term.

The Motifeme

The term *motifeme* indicates a unit at the level of function which serves as a grouping principle that brings together several motifs under the same umbrella term. The term 'motifeme' was coined by Dundes in reference to Propp's 'function'. We prefer 'motifeme' over 'function' because the widespread everyday use of the latter has robbed it of its specialized meaning.[21]

The motifeme is a unit of generalization while the motifs are units of specialization. The motifeme has the value of carrying the action forward[22] or as a

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[21] See Alan Dundes, "From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales*," Journal of American Folklore* 75, no. 2 (April-June 1962), pp. 95-105. We do not embrace this paper in its entirety, but accept the principle that the motifeme has the status of a functional principle that brings together the material subordinate to it and provides it with meaning.

[22] The notion of the thematic element as carrying the action forward underlies Thomashevsky's paper. See B. Thomashevsky, "Thematic," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. by L. T. Lemon and N. J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 61-95.

poetic function (such as exposition or moral epilogue). The meaning of a motif can be fully grasped precisely from the viewpoint of the motifeme, where the latter serves as a principle that groups together several motifs on the basis of some generalization. Tell full value of this principle and the full meaning of the material subordinate to it by way of specification can be appreciated only by examining in detail how a motifeme finds its realization in a number of thematically related texts.

When the motif is treated in the light of Thompson's notion, namely as a unit that is independent of context, it does not lend itself to hermeneutic interpretation. In contrast, the motifeme, by its very nature, is anchored in the text. When we approach the motif thematically and identify it within the context of the motifeme it is perceived in relation to the text and given to hermeneutic interpretation.

To illustrate this point, here are some motific realizations of the motifeme "Hero receives information/revelation from heaven":[23]

Heavenly Voice

When the Israelites gave precedence to 'We will do' over 'we will hearken,' a heavenly voice went forth and exclaimed to them: "Who revealed to my children this secret…?" (TB, *Shabbat* 88a)

The Revelation of a Dream

And they said to this sage in his dream: "You should know that no rains will fall unless a certain shopkeeper is summoned to lead the prayers…" (Isaac of Egrisso, *Yalkut me'Am Lo'ez*, in Ladino).[24]

The Holy Spirit

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[23] The example are taken from Y. Elstein, "He Who Prays for the Rains,' a thematological study of a Jewish Oriental version (in Y. S. Parhi's *Osse Pele*) and a Hasidic version (in A. Y. Soibelman's *Sippurei Zaddikim he-Hadash*), " *Bikkoret u-Parshanut* 30 (1994) (in print).
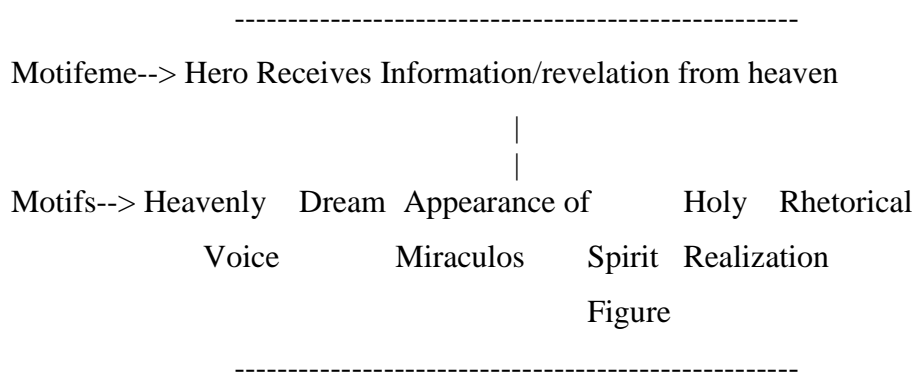
[24] See Isaac of Egrisso, *Me'Am Loez* (in Ladino, Constantinople, 1741[1]). Trans. Into Hebrew by S. Yerushalmi (Jerusalem, 1968), Leviticus, the portion of *Kedoshim*, chp. 3, pp. 233-4.

…Hacham Shabbazi said that there was a certain butcher in town who deserved to open the gates of heaven…"I am a very simple Jew and I know no word of the Torah," cried the butcher and added: "I was not taught and I do not even know how to pray…" "You are the one who deserves to open the gates of heaven," said the Rabbi, "*I see with divine inspiration* [lit., I see with the aid of the Holy Spirit], that you deserves this," (IFA 4343, Yemen)

The Revelation of a Miraculous Figure

…an abundant light was seen from afar and what looked like a human figure was approaching the tree…As it drew nearer, all the beasts fled as if threatened by fire…Indeed, the figure had a human face, which was shining like the sevenfold light of the sun and a glittering sword was hanging down from his belt…and in a heartwarming voice he called out to him: "I have come here at the command of the Most High to let you know that He has heard your prayer…   Now listen to me and do as I say." (Joseph Meyuhas, *Ma'asiyyot Am li-Benei Kedem*).[25]

In the excerpts cited above, the motifs appear as a figure of speech, a vision or a dream, and as a human figure or an inanimate object. The following scheme illustrates hoe the motifs are subordinate to the motifeme:

Motifeme--> Hero Receives Information/revelation from heaven

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|

Motifs--> Heavenly   Dream   Appearance of   Holy   Rhetorical
             Voice   Miraculos   Spirit   Realization
                                  Figure

The story "Agunot" by Agnon offers a much more intricate example of the condersation of several motifs within a single motifeme. In the following excerpt, the motifeme "Hero receives revelation from heaven" is rendered in a powerful way

[25] See Joseph Meyuhas, *Ma'asiyyot Am li-Benei Kedem* (1938; Ramat-Gan: Devir, 1969), pp. 170-1.

through the intertwining of a number of motifs: the dream, a heavenly voice, the appearance of the Divine Presence in the guise of a woman, and the heavenly vision.

> That night, when the Rabbi was drowsing over the Talmud, he *saw in his dream* that he would be exiled from his place of residence. In the morning he put the best possible interpretation on his dream and then fasted the whole day. After he had tasted a morsel and resumed his studies *he heard some voice*. Raising his eyelashes he saw *the Shechinah* in the guise of a lovely woman dressed in black and without adornment. She was nodding at him mournfully. The rabbi startled out from his sleep, rent his clothes in grief, and again explained away his dream. He then fasted all day long and all through the night. At night he inquired as to the signification of his dream. He *was shown from heaven* a number of things concealed from mortal sight (italics ours – Y.E/A.L).[26]

The above examples demonstrate that in a system of meaning that goes beyond mere form, and in relation to the totality of the theme, it is the motifeme, rather than the motif, which should serve as the smallest hermeneutic unit. Because of its importance in the system under discussion, the list of motifemes is assigned the value of a thematic codification and accordingly is indicated by capital letters: A, B, C, etc. (For further clarification see the list below).

To illustrate how the motifemic analysis works in practice, let us apply it to the first version of the thematic series "Joseph-who-honors-the-Sabbaths." This version derives from the Babylonian Talmud (*Shabbat*, 119a), where it appears in Aramaic. Here is the English translation (as appears in the Soncino rendition):

> Joseph-who-honors-the-Sabbaths had in his vicinity a certain gentile who owned much property. Soothsayers [lit., Chaldens] told him, "Joseph-who-honors-the–Sabbaths will consume all your property [i.e. it will eventually pass into his possession]. [so] he went, sold all his property," and bought a precious stone with the proceeds, which he set in his turban. As he was crossing a bridge, the wind blew it off and cast in into the water, [and] a fish swallowed it. [Subsequently] it [the fish] was hauled up and brought [to market] on the Sabbath eve towards sunset. "Who will by now?" cried they. "Go and take them to Joseph-who-honors-the-Sabbaths," they were told, "as he is accustomed to buy." So they took it to him. He bought it, opened it, found the jewel therein, and sold it for thirteen roomfuls of gold

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[26] S. Y. Agnon, "Agunot," in *The Works of S. Y. Agnon*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1934), p. 347. For an English translation of the whole story see Nahum N. Glatzer, trans., *Twenty-One Stories by S. Agnon* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 30-44.

denarii. A certain old man [an authoritative figure] met him [and] said, "He who lends to the Sabbath, the Sabbath repays him."

By mapping the entire text, from beginning to end, we arrive at the following list of motifemes (indicated by the letters A-H):

1st.   A hero who honors the Sabbaths has a wealthy gentile in his vicinity.

2nd.   A supernatural source of information discloses to the neighbor that his fortune will eventually pass into the hero's possession.

3rd.   The wealthy man attempts to annul the decree by investing all his fortune in a valuable item, which he conceals in his garments/turban.

4th.   Some element of nature (the wind) snatches the piece of clothing and casts it into the water, where the precious item is swallowed by a fish.

5th.   The fish is caught and brought to the market just before the Sabbath, which makes it difficult to sell it.

6th.   The hero gets involved in the negotiations about selling the fish.

7th.   The hero buys the fish, finds a jewel inside it and gets rich.

8th.   A figure of authority says: "He who lends to the Sabbath, the Sabbath repays him" (moral epilogue).

By replacing the motif with the motifeme as the smallest unit of analysis we have arrived at a higher level of interpretation. Envisioned from the point of view of the motifemes, the literary field of objects is perceived in terms of relationships and functional meaning, and not as a mere assemblage of unrelated items that carry no literary meaning. This approach to the taxonomy of literary reality is in line with the view of modern philosophers and psychologists such as Edmund Husserl, Jean Piaget and others, who maintain that the human mind derives concrete data from abstract, a priori categories of thought and not vice versa.[27]

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[27] As early as the beginning of the twentieth century the notion about human cognitive gave precedence to the abstract over the concrete. In particular this is evidenced in the development of paintings. In reference to the artistic conception of archeologist Emanuel Levi (as present in *Nature in Greek Art*, 1900), Moshe Barash writes as follows: "Realism… the faithful description of nature… is not the beginning of artistic development but rather its end. Its beginning, according to Levi is a conceptual image that does not correspond to any realistic state or sight. The 'image in memory' is formed out of real sights which, once perceived, sink in memory and are transformed into an unrealistic

The Constanta

The *constanta* is a solid group of motifemes that run through all the versions of the homogeneous series. This group provides the blueprint of the series. At the level of competence, the constanta is percieved as the axis of constancy that brings together all the thematic versions of the series. It is in reference to this axis that one can identify the actual changes within any particular versions, namely those changes that occur at the level of performance.

Within the bounds of the series, any deviation from this regularity attests to the creativity of the series, which in itself is of special interest to the investigator who follows up the diversificsations within the various versions.

Incidentally, precisely because the motifemic structure is basically fixed, the series allows for certain modifications in fashioning the individual version.

The interplay between constancy and change raises the question as to what extent of deviation is allowable in any given version without aoutomatically removing it from the series. To answare this question we must distinguish between two types of motifemes: major and secondary. As long as the change concerns the secondary motifemes, it has no bearing on the membership of the version in the given series. If, however, the change occurs in the major motifemes, the version will be automatically excluded from the thematic series.[28]

The present methodological approach provides the investigator with a research tool that enables him to assess the changes and accordingly to use his own judgment in deciding whether any given version should be assigned to the series. In making this decision the inversigator takes into consideration the factors of addition, reduction, replacement as well as other significant changes in the internal organization of the motifemes.

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image that captures the quintessence of the represented thing or body." See M. Barash, *Demut ha-Adam ba-Omanut* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency, 1967), p. 223.

[28] See Rella Kushelevsky, "The Typology of the Theme" (in Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Stidies* (Jerualem Aug. 16-24, 1989), Division D., Vol. 2 (1990), pp. 59-65.

Once the investigator concludes that a given version crossed the boundaries of a given series, he must assign it to a neighboring series. Indeed, in itself a neighboring series may be of a great help in establishing the boundaries between various series. [29]

The Telos

The term *telos* is derived from the term 'teleology' coined by Aristotle. Telos means the inner purpose of genealogical processes, namely what is called 'Motiv'' in German and 'main idea' in others languages.

The thematic series as a whole strives toward a single idea which serves as its rationale. Telos is an abstract principle of grouping which lends meaning to the principle of organizing the components of the theme into a solid whole. This is a bridging, bipolar term that relates both to the internal text and to some external idea from outside the text. It follows that the thematology presented in this paper utilizes an extraneous factor, inherent in the socio-cultural setting, in order to uncover the internal components of the text.

Theological Mediators: Configuration and Substructure

In the presnt conceptual system, each of the four terms is superimposed on the other in a hierarchical order, therby expanding and condensing the meaning of the preceding, subordinate term, thus lending itself to an increasing hermencuit pursuit. In other words, there is a direct correlation between the expansion of contextuality and the condensation of meaning.

Thus, the motifeme encompassas the motifs; the constanta is built upon the motifemes; and the telos permeates all the levels thet are subordinate to it. Now, within the given complexity, two additional terms operate as teleological mediators: configuration and substructure. When introduced into the system, the expanded conceptual scale appears as follows:

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[29] See Avidov Lipsker, "The Bride and the Seven Beggars – Telos Shifts as a Change in Cultural Values, " *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 13-14 (1992), pp. 229-48.

The Expanded Conceptual Scale of the Thematic Series

the level of ideas ------> TELOS

teleological mediator = = = = = > SUBSTRUCTURE

the level of structure ------> CONSTANTA

the level of function ------> MOTIFEME

teleological mediator = = = = = > CONFIGURATION

the level of the material ------> MOTIF

Confuguration

The term *configuration* indicates a cluster of two or more motifs thet are positioned in a fixed pattern.[30] This invariable combination of motifs conveys a cultural-processed life-experiece that has become ingrained in the collective consciousness. Accordingly, the configuration occupies an intermediate position, in between the material-oriented motif and the function-oriented motifeme. As teleological mediators, configurations fall under two categories:

1st. Visual representations

1.   Pictorial representation of material (a pearl inside a fish)

2.   An iconic image (a pearl as the halo of the *zaddik*)

2nd. Rhetorical representations − figures of speech ("a mouth pouring forth gems [pearls]")

The first category consists of context-depended motif clusters in a state of transition from the material-oriented level to the function-oriented level. Accordingly, it serves as a dynamic factor that shapes the functional meaning of the material.

The theme of the *Totentanz* (the dance of death) yields perfect examples of configurations. In Agnon's "Aggadat ha-Sofer" (Tale of the Scribe) a typically thematic configuration that intersects two motifs, "The bridegroom's dance with his

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[30] See how Erwin Panofsky treats the interconnections of motifs in art, in his *Studies in Iconology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), introduction, pp. 5-6. See also Lilian R. Furst, *The Contours of European Romanticism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), chp. 8, pp. 127-40.

bride" and "The appearance of the dead person's ghost in the world of the living," assumes a rather complex form. Consider the following excerpt:

> At that moment his soul was awakened and he went back to the desk, took out the quill and filled in the letters he had inscribed in the scroll in memory of his deceased wife's soul. When he finished, he rolled up the scroll, lifted it upwards and burst into a joyful dance. He was prancing about, dancing and singing in honor of the Torah…[31] Raphael the scribe came toward Miriam and bowed before her with the Torah scroll held in his arm. He could not see her face because she was wrapped gown… He stood facing the *aron* and looked into its dark void. Suddenly ha noticed the little bag of earth from the Land of Israel… His hand faltered and the earth spilled to the floor of the house… And Miriam stands in the center, her face covered, dancing with her shoulders, her arms raised into the emptiness of the room. She approaches Raphael's scroll… Suddenly a tongue of flame leaped up and illuminated the room. Its light framed the face of Raphael the scribe who sank down with his scroll. His wife's wedding gown was spread out over him and over his scroll.[32]

The hero, Raphael the scribe, who has just finished writing a Torah scroll in memory of his dead wife, bursts into a dance of joy. Yet his mind transforms the solitary dance into a dance with the deceased. While he is dancing, the figure of the dead woman appears before him and dominates the scene. The motif of "the dancing bridegroom" and the motif of "the appearance of the dead woman" merge to produce the configuration of the dance of death, which involves the dancing of the living and the dead together.

The above configuration is intricately intertwined with another one, which intersects the aforementioned motif of "the bride's wedding gown" with the motif of "the mantle of the Torah." The latter configuration is presented as follows: The hero is described as holding in his hands the Torah-scroll, which is dressed in its mantle, in the presence of his bride, who is dressed in her wedding gown. He is standing facing the black void of the *aron*. But what is it exactly? In reference to the woman's garment it can be a piece of home furniture, a wardrobe. However, in view of the fact that the hero is holding the Torah scroll, this connotes the Holy Ark. On the other hand, the "black void" suggests a coffin. (The image of the coffin is reinforced by the

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[31] S. Y. Agnon, *Works*, vol.2 (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1967), p. 142. For an English translation of the whole story see *Twenty-One stories by S. Agnon* (note 25), pp. 7-25.

[32] Ibid., pp. 144-5.

bundle of earth from the Holy Land which it was customary to use for burial purposes). Through the triple chain of possibilities the generic term *aron* acquires a polysemic meaning that carries over to the other components of the configuration. This analysis illustrates how thinking in terms of configurations proceeds from the level of the motifs to the level of the motifeme.

At an earlier stage of his work, Agnon placed the configuration of the dance of death at the center of a short story titled "Meholat ha-Mavet" (Dance Macabre), whose first version was written in Yiddish. This narrative is reminiscent of the portrayal of the dance of death in European romanticism. After describing how the dead bridegroom dances with his living bride, the narrative focuses on the dance of souls that came out of their graves: [33]

> Night after night, precisely at midnight, when the cock-crow is heard once again, and the stars changes their course in heaven, from inside the heathen graves below a woman would silently emerge. Totally wrapped up, veiling her face in fear of the night guards, she would mournfully steal her way toward the Great Synagogue. It is then, in the still of the night, that her dead bridegroom, whose blood had been shed under their wedding canopy, would come up from his grave. Baring his arms he would hold his bride tight against his heart and together they would dance the Dance of Death. Therefor the priests do not tread on that mound, nor do they set up wedding canopies in that place to this day.[34]

The text combines the motif of "the dance of the bridegroom with his bride" with "wedding in the cemetery," a Jewish folkloristic motif that is rooted in the customs of the Jewish communities of Vohlynia and Podolia. These communities adopted the unusual practice of 'the Cholera Wedding' – a wedding ceremony held in the cemetery and featuring wedding dances performed amidst the tombstones. This form of *dance macabre* gained popularity especially in the aftermath of the persecutions of the Jews (1648-1649). Records of this phenomenon were made by the ethnographic

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[33] Ibid., p. 359. On the configuration of the 'Dance of Death,' its transformation in Agnon's works and its ties with European art see N. Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art of Indirection* (Leiden/New York/ K?ln, pp. 135-49).

[34] Agnon, p. 359.

delegation headed by Ansky in 1917.[35] In this particular instance of the configuration (where the wedding ceremony intersects with the cemetery environment), folkloric residues weave several motifs into a singular composition.

Introduced into the Christian world in the fourteenth century, this folk tradition prevailed in wedding feasts, religious ceremonies and various other church-sponsored events. In the Christian dance of death, people wearing death masks were dancing hand in hand with the wedding guests. This joint performance was meant to strengthen the control of the Church by intensifying the fear of death and instilling despair over the futility of life. The macabre dance also left its imprint on the church art work.[36]

Because of its symbolic power, this custom found its way into the Jewish society as well. A living testimony to this effect is provided in *Die Memorian der Glückel von Hameln*. Describing her daughter's wedding, which took place in the principality of Kleve around 1670, the chronicler provides some interesting details: "After the royal visitors and the guests had consumed the confects and drunk well the wine, the table was cleared and removed. Masked dancers entered and presented different poses quite nicely and suitably to the entertainment. They ended with the Dance of the Dead. It was all very splendidly done."[37]

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[35] See A. Rechtman, "Bridegroom-Bride-Graves," *Yiddish Ethnography and Folklore* (Buenos Aires: YIVO, 1958). On the residues of the Dance of Death in folklore see David Katz, "Der motiv fun Toitentanz in der Trandizie fun Literatur bei Yidden" [the motif of the Dance of Death in the tradition of Jewish Literature], doctoral dissertation in Yiddish (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 1993), pp. 210-2.

[36] Particularly well known is the painting of the Dance of Death in the Church of Mary in L?beck. In romantic painting, the configuration of two motifs, love and death, is presented as a maiden and a skeleton dancing together, as can be seen in "The Maiden and Death," a copper etching by Adrian Ludwig Richter (1803-1884). Around the same time (in 1826), Franz Schubert composed the quartet in C minor, "Der Tod und das M?dchen." This configuration found a plastic expression in the cemeteries of Basel, from which it was copied by symbolist artist Arnold B?cklin (1827-1901) and served as a source of inspiration to several of his paintings of death. For a review of art works related to the Dance of Death see David Katz's dissertation (note 35), pp. 84-114.

[37] *The Life of Glueckel of Hameln*, trans. and edited by Beth-Zion Abrams (New York, 1963), p. 79. Originally published in Yiddish-Deutsch as *Die Memorien der Gl?ckel von Hameln*, ed. David Kaufman (Frankfurt a. M., 1986).

Since the poor were part and parcel of the wedding feast the motif of the beggar in the wedding was introduced into, and formed an integral part of, the configuration, as demonstrated in a number of Yiddish- and Hebrew-written works of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The folkloric grouping of the three motifs – 'wedding,' 'the dance of the beggars as wedding guests,' and 'the dance of the living with the dead' – in a single configuration marks some key works in the history of modern Yiddish and Hebrew literatures. A case in point is *Sefer ha-Kabtsanim* (The Book of the Beggars) (1888) by Mendele Mocher Sefarim (S. Y. Abramovitz).[38]

With regards to another genre, the Yiddish plays of the beginning of the twentieth century, two striking examples are worth mentioning. In Y. L. Peretz's *Bei Nacht oifen alten Mark* (At Night in the Old Market; 1907), the third act concludes with a wedding scene governed by the powerful dominion of death. In this scene Nathan the drunk makes contact with the ghost of his bride, who comes out from among the dead. Then the dead summon Nathan to read the Torah in their presence, thus dooming him to death. The ensuing dance of the dead transforms the wedding into a funeral.[39]

The same cluster of motifs appears in a powerful way in *"ha-Dibbuk"* (1916), the Yiddish play written by S. Ansky (Solomon Zeinwell Rappeport).

Generally speaking, in the transition from one version to another, deliberate shifts in the relative weight of each of the three motifs form the configuration, play a crucial role in shaping and modifying the motifeme that dominates them in its various verbal realizations.[40]

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[38] See Mendele Mocher Sefarim (Shalom Yaakov Abramovitz), *Works* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1947), pp. 98-9. *Sefer ha-Kabtzanim* presents the wedding of Finshke the Lame with the blind woman who inhabits the cemetery as a macabre-satirical version of the wedding in the cemetery which is designed to "scare away" the cholera.

[39] On this motif and its significance in Peretz's work see Abraham Noverstern: "The Dance of Death: Y. L. Peretz's 'Bei nacht oifen alten Mark' and the Beginning of modernism in Yiddish Literature," *Hulyot* 1 (Winter 1993), pp. 93-123.

[40] We discern telos shifts that bring about a textual change: In romantic literature, the description focuses on the motif of the wedding and the Dance of Death. However, when the telos shifts in the ironical-macabre direction, the description focuses on the motif of the dance among the

Substructure

The term *substructure* refers to climate of opinion, states of mind, and feeling-tone,[41] which play a part in shaping the constanta and conveying its meaning. The substructure goes through a long-term process of change that produces parallel modifications throughout the thematic series.

How does the substructure differ from the telos? Unlike the telos, the substructure does not represent canonical ideas of a rational character that have become fixed within a well-defined cultural system (such as Judaism, Christianity, the Islam or Taoism). Rather, it concerns prerational and subconscious frames of minds, which are essentially fluid. One example of the substructure is courtly love, which was the bedrock of medieval romances, being a form of behavior anchored in contemporary life.[42] Another example is the 'heavenly city' as presented in eighteenth century thought.[43] Still another example is the combination Eros-Tanatos, which plays an important role in the poetics of German romanticism of the beginning of the

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graves and the dance of the beggars. Idiomatic configurations, such as the Yiddish figure of speech, "Zwei Meithim Geien Tanzen" (two dead persons go dancing), retain only a narrow range of the teleological possibilities – in this case, the ironic sense of a state of inefficacy.

[41] See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), esp. the introduction; Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, chp. 1: "Climates of Opinions" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932^1; 1975), pp. 9-29. The term 'feeling-tone' is inspired by Jacobi's explanation that complex is a representative group with a well-defined feeling-tone; See Jolan Jacobi, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung*, trans. by R. Manheim, Bollingen Series No. 57 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 6.

[42] See Clive Staples Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), esp. chp. 1, pp. 1-43.

[43] See Carl L. Becker (note 41).

nineteenth century. All these are climates of opinions and states of mind that have not attained cultural canonization.[44]

To give a clearer idea of the substructure and its development through time, let us turn to Jewish literature. A well-known story about king Solomon's daughter who was destined to marry a poor man and was locked up in a tower in an attempt to avert her fate produced numerous versions in the course of time. The basic Hebrew version found in the Tanhuma, which dates back to approximately the eighth century, elaborates on some biblical verses and through a free play of the imagination introduces fantasy into the narrative. The captivating tale is intended to lead to the moral lesson specified in the epilogue. At this point it is clear that underlying the enchanting plot is an ethical orientation that must have established the narrative as a Jewish response to the prevailing contemporary topos of the wheel of fortune.

The same narrative is approached in a much more lighthearted and open way in two manuscript versions dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, respectively. These later texts respond to the contemporary mood of their own milieu-the blossoming of the imagination and the attraction to glittering fantasy. Compared to the midrashic narrative, these versions have a completely different flavor. To illustrate this point, let us trace the particular manifestation of an identical group of motifemes in the three texts. We shall begin with the ancient midrash:

> In due course the poor man who was the maiden's [Solomon's daughter's} destined spouse set out on a journey by night. Now ha was ragged and barefoot, starving and thirsting, and had nothing on which to lie. Ha saw the carcass of an ox flung away in the field and crept in between the ribs to keep himself warm. There he fell asleep, and a huge bird came and took the carcass and bore it away to the roof of the tower above the maiden's room.[45]

In the version of the Cambridge manuscript of the twelfth century the motifemes in question are presented in a different way. The following excerpt clearly suggests medieval residues of chivalrous practices:

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[44] What we designed as substructure is labeled by Erik Newton as 'state of mind.' See his *Romantic Rebellion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), chp. 4: "Romantic States of Mind," pp. 52-6, where he presents other states of mind typical of romanticism.

[45] *Midrash Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, part 1, introduction, par. 42, p. 136.

One day a blind man came to Jerusalem, led by his son. This son was handsome, nice, and clever. He paid respect to his father by treating him with food and drinks. One of Joab's horseman saw him and wanted to employ him, because ha was impressed by his virtues. He said to the boy: "Son, join me in the regiment and I will do you a great favor by hosting and providing for your family." He said to him: "Let me think about it." In the evening ha came to him and said: "I want." The lad went with the horseman into a cave [valley?]. His master commanded him: "Son, do not walk around the soldiers and horsemen and champions lest you get lost and be caught by the enemy. When they entered the area, this lad began to wander in the whereabouts of the regiment until he got lost, for he was not used to this. His master looked for him but did not find him and lost hope of ever finding him. When evening came, what did the boy do? He went into the field and got off the horse and he fell asleep under a tree, and his arm and hand became dirty with the excrement of the horse. Now the enemy raiders killed the horse. They did not kill the lad because they thought he was dead. In the morning, when he woke up, he saw that his horse was dead and the entire field was covered with dead bodies, men and beast, and the birds were devouring them. What did he do? In sorrow he skinned the horse and opened up its stomach and crept in between the ribs and a hoopoe, which is a big bird, saw him and took the carcass of the horse in its beak and lifted it up and rested on the tower where the maiden, king Solomon's daughter, was situated. When the lad realized that the bird had carried him to the tower, where ha saw the maiden, he greatly rejoiced. Taking out his knife, he struck the beak of the hoopoe and chased it away.[46]

In another version, which is found in the Oxford manuscript of the thirteenth century, the narrative, although the same courtly ambience was preserved, went through motific and motifemic changes. In this version it is told that all the birds, in obedience to king Solomon, spread their wings over the guests invited to his feast, thus protecting them from striking sun, so much so that the sunlight is obscured. Suddenly one bird dropped its wing all of a sudden and through the opening that was formed the striking light streamed out. It was then that the bird communicated a hidden message to king Solomon, who was versed in the language of the birds. This bird let Solomon know that the daughter of a nobleman was predestined to wed a bastard. Solomon locked up the girl in a tower to test whether the soothsaying would take effect and so

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[46] MS Cambridge, the Taylor-Schecter collection K27/19. The text was published by A. M. Haberman in *Moznayim* 40 (1975), p. 89.

on.[47] This narrative is set against the background of the prevailing medieval topos of birds of omen – those creatures that divulge to the elect the secrets of the world.[48]

In contrast to the paratactic structure of the Cambridge version, the Oxford version is characterized by a hypotactic structure: each episode sets the ground for the next one and the bridging element of the bird, the one that communicated the agitating news, brings together the version passages. The above citations suggest that in the translation from the earlier versions to the medieval ones, the modifications of materials of functions did not result from an ideological change (at the level of the telos). Rather, they were the by product of changes in frames of mind, climate of opinions, and emotional states. In other words, these changes are determined by the substructure, which in the present case is imbued with the ambiance of the medieval romance.

It is also noteworthy that in some cases the substructure concerns attitudes that are not only a-canonical but are on the whole anticanonical. These attitudes stir in the consciousness of society like turbulent undercurrents (sometimes sweeping along prehistorical, mythological residues). This point gains support from Eliade's words:

> The Arthurian cycle and the Grail theme incorporate, under a varnish of Christianity, a number of Celtic beliefs… The trouveres elaborate a whole mythology of women and love, making use of Christian elements but going beyond or contradicting Church doctrines.[49]

In sum, these are the major differences between the telos and the substructure:

1.   While the telos tends toward the rational plane, the substructure tends toward quasi-rational or mixed states.

2.   While the telos tends toward permanence and definiteness, the substructure tends toward fluid states.

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[47] MS Oxford-Bodleian 1466, 333b. For a summary of the story see E. A. Urbach, *Universita* 18 (1973), p. 70 n. 6.

[48] See V. Apptowitzer, "Die Seele als Vogel," *WGWJ* 69 (1925), pp. 150-69; on the discourse of birds see H. Guenter, *Die Christiliche Legende des Abendlandes* (Heidelberg, 1910), pp. 64, 65, 80; H. Schwarzbaum, *Studies in Jewish and World Folklore* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 139-41, p. 466-7.

[49] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 174.

3.   Although both the telos and the substructure depend on literary as well as extraliterary contexts, while the substructure is a teleological mediator that shapes the constanta in a concrete way, the telos is the primary drive that brings about its very existence.

'Theme' versus 'Motif' and 'Type' in Folklore Studies

The thematological terms of our methodology must be distinguished from similar ones in general thematology and from those employed in folkloristics as a bordering discipline. In general thematology, miscellaneous texts with different genealogical lines of development may form a single group on the basis of a specific religious or cultural theme which is traditionally venerated. In such a grouping, the given works relate to each other in a rather fluid way. Basically, this approach was employed not only by literary scholars but also by folklorists such as Propp (in his *Morphology of the Folklore*),[50] who examined the full-fledged narrative formulae underlying Afanasev's collection of Russian tales, from which he elicited the scheme of function they have in common. As these tales were heterogeneous texts, each of them actually belonged to a different genealogical sequence, thus representing an autonomous series.

In contrast, the thematological approach introduced in this paper shifts the research emphasis to the homogeneous series, which consists of a chronological succession of versions not only sharing the same theme but also revolving around exactly the same narrative formula. Without obviating the need for the heterogeneous research per se, the homogeneous research must be given priority as a preliminary stage which in principle must set the stage for the heterogeneous research. In other words, one cannot enter the second floor without previously passing through the first.

Similar reservations are applicable to the term 'type' in folkloristics, as opposed to 'theme' in our conception. The term 'type' was coined to accommodate the specific goal of folkloristics, namely the research of oral works (as opposed to written literature), which are distinguished by their formulaic features. In contrast, the term 'theme' does not limit the investigation to oral texts. Rather, it is deliberately

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[50] V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folklore* (1928[1], in Russian), trans. by L. Scott (London and Austin, Texas, 1968).

designed to cover an entire series of texts regardless of their mode of production. Whether oral, written, or rewritten, as long as they form part of Jewish culture they belong to the theme. The methodological problems concerning this matter can be summed up as follows:

1. The folkloristic term 'type' refers exclusively to the oral story, while 'theme' applies to all kinds of stories, whether written, rewritten or oral.

2. General thematology deals with heterogeneous series of texts, as demonstrated by Propp's and Thompson's work; the present thematological research explores homogeneous series.

3. In order to establish the common denominator of heterogeneous texts originating in different cultures, Arnea and Thompson eliminated and abstracted cultural signs and contexts, thus arriving at the narrative formula designated 'type'.[51] In contrast, the counterpart term 'constanta' retains the material-cultural character of the configurations that are embedded in any given context. Hence the constanta serves as a criterion for grouping versions.

4. In devising a scheme of thirty-two basic functions, Propp sought to elicit the meaning of each individual function (motifeme) within the context of this basic chain. In contrast, by integrating the telos in our system, we expand the context of meaning to the point of making contacts with the overall cultural system.

This teleological approach embeds the text in the socio-cultural setting within which it was communicated (whether orally or in a written form) and, moreover, expands this context to encompass the cultural predispositions underlying the series as a whole. In our opinion, Propp has stopped short of this necessary expansion.

Thematology as an Aspect of Culture

The thematology of the literature of the Jewish people concerns a corpus of versions that are modeled upon a single narrative formula and are arranged

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[51] A. Arnea and S, Thompson, *The Type of the Folktale* (Helsinki, 1964). See also Dan Ben-Amos, "The Concept of Motif in Folklore," in *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Venetia J. Newall (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, London, 1980), pp. 17-36. In this comprehensive review, Ben-Amos raises many questions concerning the term 'motif'. (See his article in this volume.)

chronologically along the same geneological sequence. Such as organic chain of versions is likely to transcend the conventional boundaries that demarcate literary works on the basis of authorship, historical period, genre, or style. The thematic series thus defined is perceived as the objective of a preliminary research that in principle must precede any literary research in the field of Jewish literature, comparative literature, general thematology or folklore.

Other studies on the literature of the Jewish people either focused on a cross section of a certain period, or dwelt on earlier layers that were instrumental in exploring some later work. This practice resulted in a failure to envision the complete developmental process of an entire sequence of versions, which is a valuable pursuit not only in itself but even more in the ramification it has for a fuller understanding of literature.

The thematological methodology herein proposed aims to elucidate the processes of change that occur in a complete thematic sequence of versions. Accordingly, it lends preference to a process-oriented perspective over the selective perspective. The homogeneous theme is perceived as a transcendental suprahistoric entity in its own right, which is embodies as a literary-historical awareness.

From this perspective, all versions of a given series are deemed equally important, with no priority given to any particular version according to generic or chronological considerations. All members of the series are equivalent because each of them is directly related to the same spiritual basis. This unitary character allows for a full hermeneutic interpretation of the series as a whole.

One might compare the process whereby the theme unfolds in the different versions to a ray of light proceeding from its source and passing through a number of prisms. In each prism the ray is refracted differently, thus producing divers impression of color. This analogy suggests not only the factors of continuity and change that operate within the series but also the equivalence of the versions with regards to the their original source. One cannot apply a preference test by period or genre so as to determine in advance which version are major and which are only marginal.

Such a notion of the series calls for a reassessment of the current literary categories, especially as related to the dimensions of time and space. Since the thematic series as a whole contains numerous time frames and spatial boundaries, all of these together establish the time and space of the theme. Hence in addition to the synchronic orientation we have presented here, we also treat the versions in a rigorous

diachronic-chronological manner. This twofold orientation is not self-contradictory because the two approaches, the historical-geographical on the one hand, and the ideational-phenomenological on the other, can be united in our consciousness. Just as the thematic versions, as equal members of the series, respond to each other, so should the scholar be attentive to their reciprocity*: "Zueinandergehören, einander hören können.*"[52]

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[52] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (T?bingen: Mohr, 1965; 1972), p. 343.