

Article

A Biblical Poetics for Filmmakers

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Abstract: In this paper, we present a poetics, or guide manual, for making narrative films that resemble biblical narratives. It is similar to Aristotle’s Poetics, only his was for creating drama (though it is of course often used for film now) and was based on Greek dramas and epics. Our poetics is specifically for making films and is based on an even more ancient body of narratives—the Hebrew Bible. In articulating a biblical poetics for filmmakers, we draw heavily on the work of a few of the many biblical-narrative scholars of the last half-century, who draw in turn from the even more extensive research that has been done on narrative theory in general. Our project is one that Aristotle might have undertaken if he had read the Bible and its commentators and known about film.

Keywords: Hebrew; Bible; filmmakers; narrator

1. Introduction

In this paper, we present a poetics, or guide manual, for making narrative films that resemble biblical narratives. It is similar to Aristotle’s Poetics, only his was for creating drama (though it is of course often used for film now) and was based on Greek dramas and epics. Our poetics is specifically for making films and is based on an even more ancient body of narratives—the Hebrew Bible.

We first articulate a poetics for writing screenplays and then extend it to one for filming those screenplays. In articulating a biblical poetics for writers of screenplays, we draw heavily on the work of a few of the many biblical-narrative scholars of the last half-century, who draw in turn from the even more extensive research that has been done on narrative theory in general. These biblical scholars include Robert Alter (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*; *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*; *The World of Biblical Literature*), Shimon Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*), Adele Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*), and Jerome T. Walsh (*Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*). Their studies shed light on the nature of Jewish faith by articulating the engagement of readers with Hebrew narratives. From our poetics for screenwriters, we extrapolate a biblical poetics for filmmakers, drawing examples from the work of filmmakers such as Carl Dreyer (*Vampyr*, *Ordet*), Robert Bresson (*L'Argent*), Michael Haneke (*White Ribbon*, *Amour*), Abbas Kiarostami (*Tickets*), Carlos Saura (*Cria Cuervos*), Jim Jarmusch (*Broken Flowers*), and David Fincher (*Zodiac*). In this paper, we do not attempt to contribute to narrative theory in general, or to survey or further the study of Biblical narratives, or to enhance the commentary on the films we mention. Nor do we focus on how to make films about the Bible. We simply articulate a poetics for creating narrative films that resemble biblical narratives, not in their content, but in their intended purposes and forms. We aren't saying this is the only way to make good films; we are saying that it is a way to make films with something of the enduring literary qualities of the Bible. It is a project Aristotle might have undertaken if he had read the Bible and its commentators and known about film.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle found it difficult to decide whether epics (particularly Homer's) or dramas were the superior form. He admired what epic narrators could do: quickly move the action from one location to another and describe epic-scale scenes like battles. He admired even more what dramas could do: show viewers the details of the action and require them to interpret what was happening for themselves, which is what experiencing art is fundamentally about. If he had known about film, he may have wondered whether films with narrators or those without narrators were superior—that is, whether film narrators help or hinder viewers in interpreting scenes for themselves. Whether they do or don't depends, of course, on the type of narrator. In this paper, we consider narrators like those in the Bible, who, according to scholars, use various conventions and forms to help draw viewers into empathizing with opposing viewpoints of characters and hence into feeling a stronger need to interpret for themselves what is happening in scenes.

In response to this project, two concerns may arise that the above biblical-narrative scholars have already addressed: (1) How can biblical conventions be meaningful to us, a modern Western audience far removed from the text's original culture? (2) Granting that they can be meaningful to us, how can they be adapted to a media like film, the forms being so different?

To answer the first question, these biblical scholars emphasize that the form of biblical narratives isn't foreign to modern Western audiences. Alter observes, "The Bible is very pervasive in American homes... Most American homes—typically Protestant homes, of course—grew up reading the Bible" ([1], p. 42). He argues that the classic American novel is modeled on the Bible, the prose styles of Faulkner, Melville, Bellow, Hemingway, and Cormack McCarthy resembling those of the King James Bible ([1], pp. 42–184). Hemingway, in fact, is on record as acknowledging this himself, saying, "That's how I learned to write—by reading the Bible" ([2], pp. 128–29).

To answer the second question, these scholars see connections between biblical narrative and film itself. Berlin describes the Bible's use of point of view in terms of the optical point of view used in cinematography and editing ([3], pp. 43–44). She writes, "One reason that the film analogy works so well for biblical narrative is that biblical narrative, like film, is scenic", meaning, in the words Berlin quotes from J. Licht, that "the action is broken up into a sequence of scenes" ([3], p. 46). Bar-Efrat sees another similarity: biblical narrative, like narrative film, is "extremely dynamic, purposeful and condensed" ([4], p. 160), an insight further corroborated by the fact that the short story is generally championed over the novel as the best literary prototype for film and that biblical narratives themselves are short stories par excellence. Alter sees still other similarities: he compares biblical narrative's use of type-scenes to film genres ([5], p. 48); its repetitions used for dramatic remembrance and thematic understanding to similar repetitions used in film ([5], p. 90); and its creation of meaning out of composite narrative units to film's creation of meaning out of montage ([5], p. 140).

An additional question may arise: Are we describing a way of making films, or are we telling filmmakers how to make them? In other words, is the poetics we are presenting descriptive or prescriptive? To answer this question, we need to point out that the descriptive/prescriptive distinction is itself of modern origin. Since about the sixteenth century, scholars have distinguished between describing the way things are and prescribing the way things should be, and they have favored description over prescription. But for the ancients, prescriptive standards were built into the descriptions of things themselves. Things like shovels and tragedies had inherent purposes, and good shovels or tragedies were ones that fulfilled their purposes well. So the ancients would say that a scholar could discover and describe the purposes of things and hence the prescriptive standards for evaluating them. Aristotle, for example, might be said to have discovered and described the purpose of tragedies by studying over a thousand of them and finding that their purpose was to evoke fear and pity and purify those emotions in the viewer. So, according to Aristotle, good tragedies, ones we ought to write, are those that fulfill that purpose well.

Today, we no longer believe that we discover the purposes of things. We believe that we ourselves specify the purposes of things. But as we have moved into the post-modern age, many of us have returned to a view closer to that of the ancients. Like moderns, we believe that we ourselves still specify the purposes of things, but unlike moderns, we don't believe we can each do so from our own heads alone. We believe we can specify the purposes of things only by drawing on the past purposes we in our culture have had for those things, which itself lends authority to the purposes we specify.

With this in mind, our poetics, drawing on past cultural purposes for narratives, specifies purposes for a type of narrative and film that resemble biblical narratives. Hence our poetics provides a prescriptive standard for good narratives and films that resemble biblical narratives, namely those that fulfill these purposes well. In short, we are describing a certain type of film and prescribing how to evaluate films of that type by specifying purposes for this type of film, based on past narrative purposes.

The two main purposes of the biblical poetics we are articulating, along with two conditions that Aristotle would think of as formal conditions, can accordingly be stated as follows: Films that resemble biblical narratives are films with narrators who, in their storytelling and filming:

- (1) Enhance viewer empathy with the differing viewpoints of the main characters;

- (2) Incline viewers toward eventually sharing, to some extent, in the resolution of viewpoints these characters and the narrator come to;
- (3) Engage viewers in interpreting character development within tightly-constructed plots; and
- (4) Engage viewers in making sense of highly selective episodes in space and time.

Films that resemble biblical narratives are unlike plot-driven films that hide the presence of their narrators. They are unlike character-driven films that narrate from the perspective of only one character. They are unlike character-driven films that lack tightly-constructed plots and highly selective scenes. They are unlike message-driven films that don't empathetically arrive at a consensus of understanding. Put another way, these films do four things that bible stories do, but which few, if any, films do together: enhance empathy with multiple characters, promote sharing in consensus resolutions, employ tight plots with integrated character development, and present highly selective scenes.

In the rest of this paper, we flesh out sufficient means for telling and filming narratives so that they will accomplish the above four tasks. For scriptwriting, we draw on means found in biblical narratives. For filming, we extrapolate from the scriptwriting and suggest sufficient means of filming, realizing that these means, though sufficient to likely accomplish the four tasks listed above, may not be necessary to do so, and that other means may well be sufficient too. As we discuss these means, we hasten to add that we aren't suggesting that scriptwriters and filmmakers try out a few of these means. We are suggesting they try them all out, or some other sufficient group of means, if they want to create films resembling biblical narratives.

With those three concerns addressed, we now proceed to flesh out a biblical poetics for screenwriters. Following the first four chapters in Bar-Efrat's *Narrative Art in the Bible*, we discuss in detail the categories of narrator, characters, plot, and space and time.

2. Narrator

A screenplay that is written the way biblical stories are told narrates from multiple viewpoints, some closer to the characters, others farther from them, with language appropriate to each viewpoint. Berlin explains point of view in the Bible by contrasting film and theater:

In the theater the viewer sees all of the action from the same perspective... So his point of view is, on the one hand, restricted to his physical location, and on the other, is completely uncontrolled... In a [film]... the story is filtered through the perspective of the camera eye. It may focus on the entire scene or on any part of it. And it constantly shifts perspective[.]... The viewer's perspective is both expanded and controlled by the camera; he can see only what the camera shows him. Biblical narrative, like most modern prose narrative, narrates like film. The narrator is the camera eye; we 'see' the story through what he presents ([3], p. 44).

Unlike theater, in which the viewer has only one viewpoint, film and literature both use multiple viewpoints. Berlin writes, "The Bible excels in the technique of presenting many points of view and it is this, perhaps more than anything else, that lends drama to its narratives and makes its characters come alive" ([3], p. 70).

In a Bible-like screenplay, there is one narrator. There aren't multiple narrators—for example, one narrator setting up an unreliable narrator. But there is a narrator who narrates from three types of viewpoints. First, Berlin explains, "He may tell the story from an external point of view, as an outside observer looking at a scene or at characters. He would then describe things objectively, seeing what any person present could see." Second, "He may take an internal point of view, standing among the characters, or telling the perspective from one of them." And third, the narrator may express a critical point of view, either a character's or the narrator's own, stating "opinions or evaluations" of characters ([3], pp. 58–59). The narrator of the story of David in 2 Samuel 11, for example, begins with an external view of the king tarrying at Jerusalem, then moves in to an internal view of the king gazing on Bathsheba from his rooftop, and finally, after David has gotten Bathsheba pregnant and engineered her husband's death, ends with the brief, understated criticism, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Most often Bible-like narrators will adopt either an external or an internal point of view, since, as Bar-Efrat explains, "The mainstay of biblical narrative is, first and foremost, the scenes [the internal point of view], followed by the passages of summary account [the external point of view]." The story of Joseph and his brothers, from Genesis 37 through 50, for example, alternates between scene and summary. Bar-Efrat offers a reason for this alternation: "The reader should be able to be detached from time to time from the world of the narrative in order to ponder the significance of the events", but "emotional involvement is also necessary, for without it the reader will not adopt the values embodied in the narrative." So, in biblical storytelling, "a balance is achieved between excessive affinity and aloofness on the part of the narrator" ([4], p. 35).

When narrators in a Bible-like screenplay adopt an external point of view, they impart summary narration (exposition) with voice-over or montage or both. The language is factual and objective. Bar-Efrat explains, "When narrators give a summary account they regard the events from a remote (optical) point of view, unfolding a wide, comprehensive panorama in front of us" ([4], p. 34). This provides "a certain emotional distance", which "is a precondition for clear thinking, for without it, it is impossible to grasp the ideas in the narrative" ([4], p. 31). Exposition about "the characters and the background [may be] imparted at the beginning" or may come "at later stages of the narrative" ([4], p. 119), but no exposition comes "which does not have a definite function in the development of the action" ([4], p. 115); exposition "connect[s] immediately and organically with the account of the events themselves", creating "a direct and smooth transition from the exposition to the actual developments" ([4], p. 115), so that it creates "a natural point of departure for the action itself" ([4], p. 116). Opening exposition "is usually repeated in one way or another during the course of the story", either by the narrator or a character ([4], p. 121). Such repetition, Bar-Efrat observes, mirrors "the way we get to know people in real life. We sometimes obtain preliminary information about people before we actually meet them" ([4], p. 117). But biblical repetition always "serves to emphasize matters of importance or to hint at implied meanings" ([4], p. 117).

When Bible-like narrators move closer to the characters, they adopt the internal point of view and narrate through scenes and dialogue. Scenes are "vivid, dramatic, gripping and realistic" ([4], p. 31), the bulk of the scenes being dialogue. Bar-Efrat writes, "Conversation is the principal, often the sole component of biblical scenes, which present a specific event occurring at a defined time and place" ([4], p. 150). Narrating internally, the narrator becomes a sympathetic, not an objective, observer,

conveying events not coldly and factually but emotionally, “express[ing] empathy for the character.” The narrator will often write from the viewpoint of one character, then another, “looking first into one man’s heart and then into another’s, constantly transferring the point of view from one place to another” ([4], p. 17). But the narrator will make these transitions smoothly, shifting from one character interested in something or some person to another character interested in that same thing or person ([3], pp. 47–48), thus keeping what the characters are interested in—which is often the protagonist—at the center of our interest. Berlin cites Genesis 37 as an example. In the course of this one chapter, the narrator switches, several times, from an external point of view, to Jacob’s point of view, to Joseph’s, and to the brothers’, all of them with their interest focused on Joseph ([3], pp. 48–50). The narrator makes these shifts by using the Hebrew term *hinneh* (“behold”) ([3] pp. 62–63), to indicate what the point-of-view character is seeing, or by referring to others in a scene in relational terms, as when the narrator calls the sons of Jacob “Joseph’s brothers” when Joseph is the point-of-view character. As a result, Berlin writes, “Genesis 37 is fraught with ambiguity. There is no clear right or wrong. Each character’s actions are justified from his point of view.” This diversity of viewpoints “contribute[s] additional layers of meaning” and “introduces a dynamic element into a text”, Berlin explains. “Everyone of the points of view in a text makes claims to be the truth and struggles to assert itself in the conflict with opposing ones” ([3], p. 52). The reader, therefore, “is not a passive recipient of a story, but an active participant in trying to understand it. Because he is given different points of view and sees things from different perspectives, he must struggle to establish his own” ([3], p. 82). This disparity of viewpoints creates not only ambiguity and depth but also dramatic irony ([3], p. 51)—a contrast between the situation, as perceived or hoped for by a character, and the actual state of affairs. Often the actual situation is known to the reader but not to the character, so that the reader is immediately aware of the irony. Berlin cites examples of comedy, tragedy, and mystery generated by multiple viewpoints ([3], pp. 53–55).

When characters recount past events from their own points of view, the narrator in a Bible-like screenplay will often clue the reader as to when they are unreliable. Bar-Efrat writes, “Flashbacks occurring in the speech of the characters... do not [always] recount the facts as they actually occurred but rather as the speaker sees them or wishes them to be seen by the interlocutor, thereby making a marked contribution to the characterization of the persons in the narration” ([4], p. 180). Sometimes “an event is narrated three or even four times.” Usually “there are subtle differences between the three reports given by the characters on the one hand and between them and the account conveyed by the narrator on the other” ([4], p. 164). “Special attention should be paid to the differences which often exist between the first and second versions, such as additions, omissions, expansion, summarization, changed order and substitution (the replacement of one expression by another)” ([4], p. 162). Alter explains that such variation provides “commentary, analysis, foreshadowing, thematic assertion, with a wonderful combination of subtle understatement and dramatic force” ([5], p. 91).

Finally, Bible-like narrators may adopt a critical point of view, still empathizing with the characters but now also expressing moral judgment. Bar-Efrat observes that “empathy...is not the same as identification and may even include criticism” ([4], p. 39). According to Alter, in biblical narrative the critical narrator represents “the all-knowing, unfailing perspective of God”, mentoring readers in moving toward the divine perspective themselves ([5], pp. 157–59). But “the interpretations, explanations, and evaluations given by the narrator”, Bar-Efrat explains, “are both infrequent and

brief” ([4], p. 146). Left mostly on their own to assess characters, viewers are only periodically nudged by the mentoring narrator. As a result, readers are invited to stay open to the suggestions of the narrator—in traditional terms to exercise faith in the narrator as if God—but to still exercise their own judgment. The narratives thus foster a Judeo-sense of faith and devotion to a true and living God, not a more Christian/Protestant sense of adherence to orthodox views.

3. Characters

In Bible-like screenplays, character is conveyed by actions, dialogue, inner life, and narrator’s commentary, used in varying degrees. It isn’t conveyed by physical description. Bar Efrat observes, “There is no precise, detailed description of the physical appearance of characters in biblical narrative. ...[I]nformation about someone’s outward aspect functions only as a means of advancing the plot or examining its course” ([4], p. 48).

Character is most often conveyed by action, as Bar Efrat explains: “In biblical narrative, deeds do in fact serve as the foremost means of characterization” ([4], p. 77). He explains that biblical narrative focuses on those actions of characters that reveal their psychological or spiritual state:

[Biblical narrative] embod[ies] a clear tendency to regard the preparations preceding events and the reactions following them as more important than the events themselves, denoting a special interest in matters pertaining to the human mind, its motives, decisions and attitudes. In other words, the human aspects, whether psychological, spiritual or moral, are granted greater emphasis than factual components. ([4], p. 152).

For example, Amnon’s rape of his half-sister Tamar is described in just one short sentence: “And he forced her” (2 Samuel 13:14). His preparation beforehand and his rejection of her afterwards fill out the rest of the chapter.

Dialogue is the next most frequent means of characterization. Bar-Efrat explains what biblical dialogue is like: “Conversations in biblical narrative are... highly concentrated and stylized, are devoid of idle chatter, and all the details they contain are carefully calculated to fulfill a clear function” ([4], p. 148). Also significantly, conversations “do not usually convey thought and contemplation but deal rather with action, generally focusing on the future with plans and aspirations or with attempts to persuade and influence” ([4], p. 147).

Finally, the inner life of the characters—their memories and inner thoughts and intentions conveyed by the narrator—and the narrator’s own critical point of view or commentary are the least frequent means of characterization. Bar-Efrat says that in most cases “the biblical narrator tends to imply the feelings of characters through their speech and actions rather than reporting them directly”, so that “readers have to draw their own conclusions about inner emotions from external behavior.” But he also observes that the narrator sometimes “penetrates into the minds of the characters, revealing their thoughts and emotions, aspirations and motives clearly” ([4], p. 18). Whenever the narrator conveys a character’s interior monologue, feelings, or intentions, it is because the character is quite complex and mysterious, and the narrator is mentoring the reader in assessing the moral nature of his actions and words.

The biblical narrator creates three types of characters: functionaries, flat characters, and round characters. Berlin explains the three types:

In literary criticism it is customary to distinguish flat and round characters. Flat characters, or types, are built around a single quality or trait. They do not stand out as individuals. Round characters, on the other hand, are much more complex, manifesting a multitude of traits, and appearing as “real people.” In addition, to quote M. H. Abrams, “Almost all dramas and narratives, properly enough, have some characters who serve as mere functionaries and are not characterized at all” (21). I see here three categories (not [just] the usual two—flat and round) ([3], pp. 23–24).

We may say that the functionary, like the silent Bathsheba of 2 Samuel 11, is one-dimensional, merely moving the plot forward through her simple actions of merely appearing in scenes. The flat character, like David’s servant who identifies Uriah, is two-dimensional, known by both actions and dialogue, like a bit player in a film. And the round character, like Bathsheba in later chapters, is three-dimensional, known by actions and dialogue but also by an inner life of memories, thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and the narrator’s commentary.

Both flat and round characters reveal themselves by what they do and say, including what they say about themselves and others. The claims a character makes about others, Bar-Efrat writes, may say more about him than them:

When characterization derives from human beings, the question arises whether it reflects the author’s ‘objective’ view or only the character’s subjective one... On occasions these statements of ‘characterization’ are made solely to serve the speaker’s ends, thus revealing more about the individual who says them than about the one they purport to describe ([4], p. 54).

In other words, what a character says about others often reveals more about him- or herself than it does about them. The claims a character makes about his or her own self, Bar-Efrat writes, are also significant:

The evidence given by a character about his or her own emotions or knowledge is of particular interest, because, through introspection, people can know only the inner workings of their own heart and mind. It is, of course, possible for individuals to be mistaken about themselves too, or even to distort things deliberately, but even so, independent evidence of this kind should be accorded the respect it deserves, since in every instance it reveals something of the way people see themselves or want others to see them ([4], p. 62).

Regarding unreliable characters in general, Bar-Efrat writes, “The way in which the characters convey information often sheds light on their nature. The selection or formulation of pieces of information by one of the characters sometimes differs substantially from the actual facts as transmitted to the reader at first hand in the narrative” ([4], p. 76).

Round characters may also be revealed by the words and actions of flat characters. Bar-Efrat writes, “the minor characters play a structural role...paralleling and highlighting the main ones, whether through correspondence or contrast” ([4], p. 86). In other words, the reader can assess the actions and words of round characters by comparing and contrasting them with those of flat characters. In some cases, the narrator may even take on the point of view of a flat character to emphasize something about

a round character. Berlin provides a significant example in the story of Joseph. Joseph's father wants to know how his other sons are doing with their flocks, and so he sends Joseph to find out.

And a certain man found [Joseph], and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. (Genesis 37: 5–17).

Note that the man is the subject of the sentence and Joseph the object. This flat character, a man who simply sees Joseph “wandering in the field”, speaks and becomes the point-of-view character in this scene, conveying Joseph's inexperience and ineptitude.

Round characters often develop and change in Bible-like narratives. Bar-Efrat explains that in biblical narrative “character is not regarded as constant, but as something continually shifting and changing, even though stable components can be discerned. Character is existential rather than essential, since it is revealed in actual and transient real-life situations” ([4], p. 90). As a result, character emerges and changes, either gradually—as with Jacob “who steals the blessing intended for Esau his brother” and then “after twenty years of suffering in exile, begs his brother to accept his ‘blessing’”—or suddenly in response to potentialities for change in the background—as with Ahab who heard the “reprimand of the prophet Elijah” and immediately “rent his clothes” and humbled himself ([4], p. 90).

In screenplays that resemble biblical narratives, it will therefore often be difficult to fully understand a round character. Bar-Efrat writes, for instance, “David's deeds quite often give rise to questions, his intentions are frequently ambiguous, and his character appears to be enigmatic” ([4], p. 78). Alter claims that “an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology” ([5], p. 12). But Meir Sternberg explains that in biblical narrative, “The complexity of representation is inversely proportioned to that of evaluation: the more opaque (discordant, ambiguous) the plot, the more transparent (concordant, straightforward) the judgment” ([6], p. 54). In other words, when the action is ambiguous, the narrator's moral judgment is clear, and when the action is clear, the moral judgment is ambiguous, requiring more of the reader to interpret it. As a result, readers can always make some sense of the characters.

Bar-Efrat notes that “the narrator makes very few direct statements about the characters' personalities” ([4], p. 89), for he is mentoring readers in assessing for themselves, not assessing for them. We as readers thus “have to build hypotheses about people's motives. These hypotheses will be based on our knowledge of [their] actions and [their words], as well as on our understanding of human psychology” ([4], p. 78). In biblical narrative, Alter explains, there is “a horizon of perfect knowledge, but it is a horizon we are permitted to glimpse only in the most momentary and fragmentary ways” ([5], p. 158). The narrator prompts readers to assess the characters against this horizon of divine knowledge, inviting them to exercise their own judgment but to remain faithful to the suggestions of the narrator. The narrator is worthy of the reader's trust, for the narrator empathizes with the viewpoints of all the main characters. The narrator isn't just like another character but is a mediator between the characters and the readers.

Round characters, in Bible-like narratives, change by moving closer to the heart, mind, and will of the narrator as a representative of God. According to Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, “[Biblical] narratives are not just stories about people who lived in Old Testament times. [They] are first and foremost stories about what God did to and through those people” ([7], p. 81). Bible-like narratives point to a path of development that we as readers are invited to follow, until, at the end, we sense our own hearts, minds, and wills coming together with those of the protagonists, the narrator, and God. In Meir Sternberg’s words, “Each character observes the world from his own perspective. And it is their divergence—in interest, interpretation, world view, scenario, hope and fear—that keeps the action going, just as their convergence makes for its resolution” ([6], p. 172). It is the convergence of viewpoints that creates the overall theme of the screenplay that resembles biblical narrative.

4. Plot

The plots of Bible-like screenplays create tension on four levels: in the beats—which are the actions and events—the building blocks of the plots; in the scenes—which consist of several beats; in the sequences—which consist of several scenes; and finally in the narratives themselves—which consist of sequences of scenes. Bar-Efrat discusses these levels:

The smallest narrative unit is the one which contains one incident, whether an action or an event... The combination of several small units of this kind creates larger ones, scenes and acts. Some narratives consist of only one act, but most are composed of several. Various kinds of connections and relations exist between the units comprising the narrative system, thereby creating the structure of the plot. The principal relations between the various units are those of cause and effect, parallelism and contrast. ([4], p. 93).

Bar-Efrat writes that the beats carry more than the plot: “The smallest narrative units—the incidents—almost always have multiple purposes in biblical narrative, at the same time serving as components of the plot, as a means of characterizing the protagonists and as a way of expressing meaning” ([4], p. 95). There are “very few elements in biblical narrative”, Bar-Efrat says, “whose task is solely to characterize individuals or express meanings.” As a result, the task of characterization and thematic statement must be handled “by those units which also comprise the plot” ([4], p. 95). In other words, for screenplays that resemble biblical narrative, characterization and themes are brought out in the action of the beats, not separately; beats carry the plot, characterization, and theme.

What is described in the beats of a screenplay is the action, not the appearance of those in the action or the setting of the action. In biblical narratives, “the physical environment is not described at all, neither in detail nor in general outline” ([4], p. 195), since a description of setting, Bar-Efrat explains, would introduce “a static element” into the narrative, and “this is incompatible with the dynamic and vigorous nature of biblical narrative” ([4], p. 196). He illustrates this point with the narratives about the sanctuary of the children of Israel in the wilderness and the temple built by Solomon: there is no description of either, but there is “a very detailed account of the making of the sanctuary” and another of “the construction of the temple” ([4], p. 196).

Beats will contain nothing before or after them, or even within them, that doesn’t advance the action, which means there will be no first act to introduce characters before the action of the plot begins in the second act—as is commonly advocated in screenwriting text books. In biblical narratives,

Alter explains, characters are introduced quickly, followed perhaps by a statement of “habitual activity”—“a transitional statement in the iterative tense”, like, “This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts”, followed by a relevant scene or montage summary of scenes ([5], p. 82).

At the second level, beats are organized into scenes, which usually show only two characters interacting. Bar-Efrat writes, “In biblical narrative the number of characters involved at any one time is very small, usually not more than two”, though one may be speaking for a group ([4], p. 96). With only two characters to a scene, the reader is better able to compare and contrast their dialogue and to assess the emotional and thematic effect of their actions and words. Though dialogue accounts for the major part of scenes, the exchanges aren’t long. Bar-Efrat writes, “The characters generally express themselves in a succinct style and the dialogue usually contains no more than two or three rounds” ([4], p. 147).

A scene consisting of beats in a Bible-like plot will contain an issue to be resolved, what Jerome Walsh calls a “tensive question”—what readers and usually the characters themselves “wonder” about ([8], p. 16). This issue creates an arc of tension that ends once the issue is resolved. Walsh tells us how these arcs are indicated: “Arcs of tension... are often coterminous with scenes.” Thus, “conventions for marking the beginning and the ending of scenes can therefore be a clue to the thematic and tensive organization of the story” ([8], p. 18). Such conventions include “the shift to a new location, a new time frame, or a new character or character group” ([8], p. 18).

The scenes, in turn, are organized into “sequences” of scenes, which may follow each other (“similar to the acts in a play” ([4], p. 102), overlap each other (like a subplot that doesn’t end until another has already started), or be embedded in one another, which means the organization of the sequences can be rather complex. These sequences too have arcs of tension with issues to be resolved. During these arcs of tension, Bar-Efrat explains, “[T]here is almost always a collision between two forces, whether these be two individuals, a person and his or her inner self, a person and an institution, custom, or outlook, or an individual and a superhuman force, such as God or fate” ([4], p. 94).

Finally, the sequences of scenes are organized into the overall narrative, which also contains an issue to be resolved, what Bar-Efrat calls the “central issue” ([4], p. 122). Walsh explains that the arcs of tension in scenes and sequences are “limited and relative since their arcs of tension are subordinate to the larger arc of tension of the whole story” ([8], p. 14). In the Joseph story, the central issue is raised early by the boy’s dreams and succinctly stated by his father: “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (Genesis 37:10). Everyone, including Joseph, is wondering how this subservience could come about and whether it would be right. The brothers think it won’t happen. But to be sure, some of them plot to kill Joseph, mocking, “And we shall see what will become of his dreams” (Genesis 37:20). Others want to put him in a pit and leave him for dead. Instead, they decide just to sell him off as a slave. When Joseph’s brothers come to him in Egypt, he doesn’t reveal himself to them until they have revealed a change of heart: he doesn’t want subservience; he wants resolution. Regarding resolution, Berlin notes, “The issue is resolved when the disharmony is resolved... [A]t the end of the story all points of view coincide. All characters are reconciled and reunited and the ambiguity is eliminated” ([3], p. 51), if only for a while. Strong-willed characters, with diverse viewpoints, can thus become open to each other and to the suggestions of God and periodically come together in unity. Readers, with their own viewpoints, can become open to the mentoring narrator and periodically come to unity too.

A screenplay that resembles biblical narrative has, what Bar-Efrat calls, “a clear beginning” ([4], p. 94), which poses “the question which constitutes the basis of the tension” ([4], p. 122). Then “the plot line ascends from a calm point of departure through the stage of involvement to the climax of conflict and tension, and from there rapidly to the finish point and tranquility” ([4], p. 121). At the climax, there is a “turning point in the development of the plot” ([4], p. 123), which Bar-Efrat identifies as “the prime factor of change” ([4], p. 123). A biblical plot also has “a clear and unequivocal end” ([4], p. 132). This end needn’t answer every question raised, only the main issue. Bar-Efrat writes, “The narrative reaches a point of calmness at the end, the tension drops” ([4], p. 129). With this fall in tension come “incidents which are appropriate to serve as... finishing points”, such as death or a reward for the fulfilment of a task. “Consequently, we do not feel that the story we are reading is unfinished or incomplete” ([4], p. 94).

An example of a biblical narrative with an overall arc of tension and subordinate arcs of tension in scenes and sequences is the story of David in the first two chapters of I Kings. Walsh paraphrases the opening of the story: “David has grown old and is plagued, apparently with circulatory problems” ([8], p. 14). Several “tensive questions” or issues arise in the mind of an astute reader: Is the king about to die? Can he be kept alive? What will he do before he dies? Will a worthy successor succeed him? This last question emerges as the main, overall question of the narrative ([8], p. 17). This opening is followed by the first sequence, the attempt of David’s servants to warm his blood, which fails. Next follows the effort of one of David’s sons to be king, which is thwarted by Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother. By this time, we know the overall story is about succession. As we hear David’s last words and see Solomon following his father’s advice, we realize the overarching question is whether David will have a worthy successor and that it has been answered in the affirmative. What was first only a question in the mind of an astute reader emerges as the actual central issue of the narrative. Bible-like screenplays may thus initially feel full of diverse issues but will feel unified once a reader finds this central issue.

We have discussed the plot levels of what Bar-Efrat calls “the classic pattern” of biblical narratives. ([4], p. 121). But this classic pattern can include within it other patterns. Bar-Efrat explains that the scenes in biblical plots are often “organized in such a way as to show the parallel, contrasting or sequential relations between them quite clearly” ([4], p. 98). These relations may be reverse symmetries (such as ABCDC’B’A’[these are simply A’ namely A prime, so I just made the quote go the right way]), forward symmetries (such as ABCDA’B’C’D’), and asymmetries (such as ABCDC’XA’ or ABCDA’B’D’). For example, Walsh shows the reverse symmetry in a biblical story from 1 Kings about Elijah and the widow of Zarephath:

- a. Speech by the woman (17:18: “man of God”)
- b. Speech by Elijah (17:18: “give me your son”)
- c. Elijah takes the boy from his mothers’s lap (17:19b)
- d. He carries him up to the upper chamber (17:19c)
- e. He puts him on the bed (17:19d)
- f. He cries out to God (17:20–22)
- e. He picks the child up (17:23a)
- d. He brings him down from the upper chamber (17:23b)
- c. He returns him to his mother (17:23c)
- b. Speech by Elijah (17:23d; “your son is alive”)
- a. Speech by the woman (17:24; “man of God”) ([8], p. 180).

We often find crucial character decisions in the middle of reverse symmetries, increasing development in forward symmetries, and turning points at points of asymmetry ([8], pp. 7–11). Some film scripts use a few patterns like these. For example, they may start and end with matched scenes. Bible-like scripts would use these patterns more systematically. In one way or another, these plot patterns reveal the thoughts and intents of the mentoring narrator.

5. Space and Time

Bible-like screenplays move in realistic space and time. Bar-Efrat writes, “Unlike legends and fables, in which time and space are not mentioned at all or are not defined in any way (once upon a time, many years ago, in a dark forest, in a distant land), the action of most biblical narratives takes place within a well-defined framework of time and space” ([4], p. 184).

But movement through time and space isn’t continuous. Bar-Efrat observes, “Biblical narratives usually mention only the place characters leave and the one they reach, without dwelling on the territory in between” ([4], p. 187); and ordinary events, he explains, usually play no part:

People’s actions in daily life are hardly mentioned at all in biblical narrative, and we do not usually hear about the minutiae of their day-to-day routine. We meet the biblical characters primarily in special and unusual circumstances, in times of crisis and stress, when they have to undergo severe tests ([4], p. 79).

As a result of this selectivity, “Most biblical narratives are full of tension, containing numerous unusual events, dramatic incidents, sharp contrasts and fierce clashes. One crisis follows another, the characters become involved in complex situations and the reader eagerly awaits the disentangling of the threads” ([4], p. 160). The narratives, Bar-Efrat explains, possess “a quality of being oriented toward the future and of constantly aspiring to advance without delay. This feature contributes in no small way to the dynamic and dramatic character of biblical narrative” ([4], p. 184). This dynamic quality is common, of course, in plot-driven films but much less so in films that integrate plot with character development, as biblical narratives do.

In moving through space, the Bible-like screenplay will crosscut from one location to another naturally by following a character. But occasionally the narrator may crosscut to a parallel storyline independently of a character’s movements. In doing so, the narrator will preserve the tension of the action from the first storyline: Bar-Efrat explains that before presenting “a story-line separately, the narrator presents the two story-lines while they are still united” ([4], p. 170), thus splitting one storyline “into two parts” ([4], p. 171). Thereafter, the narrator crosscuts between them to produce the effect of simultaneity. Bar-Efrat makes three observations about the narrator’s crosscutting between storylines: first, “time is not reversed, and even though the narrative splits up into two parallel story-lines time passes by us only once”; second, the two storylines are connected by means of “go-betweens”—“runners, messengers, *etc.*, who transfer information from one place to another” ([4], p. 173); third, “the transitions from one story-line to another are usually smooth and natural” ([4], p. 173), and are often “based on mentioning the same issue (person, event, action) at the end of one strand and at the beginning of the other” ([4], p. 170). Bar-Efrat explains that the effect of simultaneity is produced through psychological means: “When we are absorbed in the development of one story-line, the images of individuals and events from the other one are evoked, usually being mentioned by the

characters within the narrative rather than by the narrator” ([4], p. 173). He explains, “As a result of the latent ‘presence’ of characters from the parallel story-line, its existence is not forgotten for a moment. Thus, the impression of simultaneity is achieved by psychological means rather than by intervention in the orderly flow of time” ([4], pp. 174–75). The parallel story-lines therefore are not independent but affect each other, so that what happens in the one reverberates in the others.

In moving through time, the Bible-like screenwriter, generally ensures that time, to use Bar-Efrat words, “flows in one direction, from the past to the future” ([4], p. 166). Still, biblical narratives sometimes move backward in time. Bar-Efrat observes that though “flashbacks introduced by the narrator are comparatively rare in biblical narrative”, they are sometimes used by the narrator to contrast characters’ past aspirations with their current situations ([4], p. 178), or to provide other “details about background and past” ([4], p. 175). He cites as an example the Ammonites considering a man as a possible leader in their war with Israel, at which point the narrator flashes back to the history of this man (Judg. 11:1–3). But he observes, “Flashbacks occurring in the speech of the characters, in contrast to those conveyed by the narrator, should not be regarded as deviations from the normal order of time since they are part of conversations taking place in the present” ([4], p. 180).

As for flashforwards, Bar-Efrat writes, “The rule is that the narrator avoids altogether informing the reader beforehand what is about to happen”, but, he adds, “There are a few exceptions” ([4], p. 179). He gives three reasons for breaking this rule: (1) to give “what is tantamount to an interpretation of events” before they happen, “thereby making the reader simultaneously aware of [future] developments and their significance”; (2) to shed “light on the deeper meaning of what is happening” now; and (3) to convey that “various events are not fortuitous but that there is a plan and a purpose” ([4], p. 179). Walsh explains that flashforwards draw our concern away from what will happen to how it will happen, or to how the characters will respond ([8], p. 60). He cites as an example “the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22” ([8], p. 45), in which the narrator tells us upfront that in this story, “God tested Abraham.” Thus, “we read the story relatively certain that this will not be a story of human sacrifice, but a story of measuring Abraham’s obedience” ([8], p. 45), and so our focus shifts to how Abraham will respond.

In Bible-like screenplays, flashbacks and flashforwards may imbue the past, present, and future with greater meaning through glimpses of a larger plan, whether these glimpses come in hindsight or foresight. But these flashbacks and flashforwards connect immediately and organically with the action, as Bar-Efrat explains in the case of biblical flashforwards:

In the majority of cases... when the narrator wishes to hint at what is to come this is done as an organic part of the action. One of the participants in the plot who has the capacity to see into the future [a prophet, an angel, or God]... informs one of the other participants of events which are about to occur. ([4], p. 179).

By being so selective in the use of flashbacks and flashforwards, and by motivating movements in space and time with the movements, reflections, and expectations of the characters, the narrator thus keeps representations of space and time organically integrated with the action and characters.

6. Filming

We now proceed from the foregoing poetics for writers of Bible-like screenplays to a poetics for filmmakers of such screenplays. We cover the film elements of production design, acting and actor blocking, camera blocking, lighting, and sound. We are not saying that our suggestions for these elements are necessary for filming a Bible-like screenplay. But we are saying that they are likely to be sufficient for creating a Bible-like film. Aristotle argues that some theatrical elements he specifies are necessary for a play to be a tragedy and fulfill its purposes, but, in general, he merely argues that together the elements are likely to be sufficient. We realize that other groups of elements may also be sufficient, and we don't attempt to show in this short paper that our suggestions are better than other possible suggestions. We simply show how a director, assisted by a production designer, a cinematographer, and a composer, can use these various film elements to create a film narrator who, like a biblical narrator, tells a tight-knit story from various points of view and coaches viewers in interpreting it. Along the way, we illustrate our points with examples from films.

6.1. Production Design

In biblical narratives, the writer sets a scene with characters and a few objects but doesn't describe them much at all. This is in part because, as we have learned from Bar-Efrat, describing places, characters, or objects would bring the ongoing narrative "to a standstill" ([4], p. 196), and hence stop readers from their ongoing assessment of character as shown in the action. So whenever there is scenic description in a biblical narrative, it fulfills some purpose of "advancing the plot or examining its course" ([4], p. 48). Contemporary fiction writing instructors similarly advise writers to keep the action moving by slipping in scene description during pauses in dialogue.

In Bible-like films, however, the production designer obviously must do more. Scenic description can be visually conveyed simultaneously with the scene itself, but the problem is that it can inundate the image with irrelevant details. Readers can get lost in enjoying the beauty of locations or costumes or props and not stay on task in assessing characters through their actions. As a result, the production designer guided by a biblical poetics needs to simplify the locations, spaces, props, and costumes, so everything has expressive value for the plot, characters, or theme, and nothing is there, say, to just convey atmosphere.

In preparing the set of *Ordet*, the Danish filmmaker Carl Dreyer first heavily decorated Borgen's farm to look like an authentic Danish farmhouse and then simplified the set, stripping away piece after piece until all that remained were pieces that would enable viewers to interpret the characters ([9], p. 73). For example, from the first scene of the film we see a tall grandfather clock in the living room and hear it ticking in the background. This is not at all incidental to the story. For when the protagonist, the faithful and pregnant Inger, passes away in childbirth about two-thirds of the way into the film, her agnostic husband, Michael, lapses into despair and turns off the grandfather clock, crying, "Life is meaningless. Meaningless!" The clock remains off until the last scene, when, at the end of the third and final act, Inger is called back to life by Michael's brother Johannes. After her revival, as Inger and Michael hold each other in a warm embrace, Anders, Michael's other brother, turns the clock back on. To the ticking in the background, Michael affirms, "I have found your faith, Inger. Now life begins", to which Inger replies, "Life. Yes, life."

The production designer can also use space itself to express the three main points of view of the film narrator. Deep space can be used to suggest an external viewpoint, shallow space an internal viewpoint, and layered space in front of gates, doorways, windows, or mirrors the narrator's critical viewpoint toward a character occupying that space. Michael Haneke does something like this in his film *White Ribbon*. Raymond Carney observes that in *Ordet* Dreyer sometimes symbolically moves the characters Inger and Johannes, who are quite near to the other characters and to God, closer to the edges of the frame and even to off-screen spaces—for example, when Inger is in the delivery room or in the coffin or when Johannes disappears for three days. They then seem to materialize on screen from otherworldly, unseen spaces behind the camera and behind the set.

The production designer can also rely on the cinematographer to simplify the sets. Lighting can be used to darken or blow out what is irrelevant. Shallow depth of field can be used to make clear what is most significant in the moment and to blur what is least.

With these techniques, the production designer can invite viewers to stay open to every relevant detail of the design. Viewing such a film with a simplified and expressive design could be like reading a biblical text.

6.2. Acting and Actor Blocking

The writers of Bible-like screenplays engage their readers in interpreting their characters. They let their readers infer from actions and dialogue that their characters are sad or happy, trusting or suspicious. They don't make the mental states of their characters obvious by telling their readers what they are. How can directors of such screenplays similarly engage their film viewers? Some directors urge their actors to interpret their characters' states of mind and then to directly play those interpretations. For example, if actors see their characters as sad or suspicious, they play their characters as sad or suspicious. The result is a performance that is said to be "on the nose": it is too obvious—the actors are telling viewers what the mental states of their characters are. In contrast, Robert Bresson urged his actors, at least until the ending of some of his films, to not be expressive. Directors guided by a biblical poetics can proceed in another way. They too may ask their actors to interpret the state of mind of the characters in the scene, but they then may go on to ask them what actions their characters are engaged in and what responses they are getting in the scene that would lead them to that state of mind. The actors can then rehearse playing those actions and experiencing those responses. This type of performance will allow viewers to interpret the states of mind of the characters as they emerge from their actions and the responses of other characters and even objects on stage. There are several ways for a director guided by a biblical poetics to help actors prepare, rehearse, and perform scenes in this way.

Before filming a scene, the director can ask an actor to describe in a simple way what the actor's character is intending to do (the character's arc of tension) so that it seems justifiable to the actor. The idea, to use Berlin's phrase again, is to make sure that "each character's actions are justified from his point of view" ([3], p. 52); in other words, to make sure no actor is playing a character as a villain without a self-justification for the villain's actions.

The director can then help the actor develop a beat-by-beat blocking plan for the scene: the character does A and A' happens, so he does B and B' happens, and so on. Playing this blocking plan will allow the character's state of mind to emerge from the action.

The director can also ask the actor not to interpret lines as he or she memorizes them. Instead, the actor can memorize the lines by saying them flatly and rapidly. Then the interpretation of the lines—their patterns of intonation—will emerge from the beats of the scene.

Before the filming, the director can practice warm-up exercises with two actors, by having each match at the beginning of his or her line the intonation at the end of the other's. This is like the biblical narrator transitioning from one line of action to another by repeating something.

Then during performance, the director can encourage the actor to focus his or her attention on what is happening in the scene, not on what he or she is supposed to do or has experienced in the past. The actor focuses on what is happening immediately in response to the action he or she is attempting to carry out.

All these ways of preparing, rehearsing, and performing help actors ground their characters' states of mind in the actions and words of the characters. And when the characters' states of mind are so grounded, the viewers are more likely to base their interpretation of the characters on their actions and dialogue, as readers of biblical narratives do.

6.3. Camera Blocking

As we have seen, a Bible-like screenwriter uses point of view to focus the reader's attention. The director of such a screenplay can use camera blocking in much the same way, blocking camera angles and moves to establish an external, internal, or critical viewpoint. In this way, the camera becomes a major tool of the film narrator who is telling us the story. The viewpoints of this narrating camera can be established by whether the camera: (1) moves autonomously; (2) tracks the movement of a point-of-view character; or (3) tracks the development of a point-of-view character.

To shoot from an external point of view, the camera can move or cut autonomously, in a single shot or a sequence of shots. For example, it may show the setting before a point-of-view character appears onscreen, or it may show the setting after a character disappears from screen, lingering on the shot to let viewers reflect on the scene. The character may appear or disappear either by moving on or off screen, as in Robert Bresson's *L'Argent*, or by the camera moving to or away from the character, as in the opening scene of Carlos Saura's *Cria Cuervos*.

To shoot from an internal point of view, the camera can cut or move according to the beats and movements of a point-of-view character, using one shot or one pair of reverse-angle shots for each main beat. In each shot or pair of reverse-angle shots, the point-of-view character can be kept as the focal point by being closer, more frontal, more matched with the camera's line of sight, more in-focus, more to the left, or more in motion (or still) than others (see [10], pp. 225–27). During reverse-angle cuts, the point-of-view character can be favored by cuts prompted by the direction of the character's look or pauses in the character's dialogue.

To keep the film narrator's presence felt during the internal viewpoint, the camera blocking may include the following: (1) with composure and steadiness, the camera can wait to begin or stop moving until clearly after the point-of-view character begins or stops moving, thus creating patterns of consonance (when the camera and the actors are both moving or both still, which makes the camera

less present) and dissonance (when one or the other is moving and the other isn't, which makes the camera more present); (2) The blocking can include characters entering into their own point-of-view (reverse-angle) shots; (3) The blocking can include characters walking in or out of shots, with the time it takes for them to reach their destinations shortened, similar to the way biblical narratives jump from the beginning of a journey to the end; (4) The camera can show the move between the point-of-view character and what that character is seeing, hearing, remembering, or thinking about, in one or more of the following ways, from the most noticeable to the least: (a) panning cleanly away from one to the other, (b) panning from one to the other but not cleanly, (c) rack focusing from one to the other, (d) starting a pan from one and cutting to the other, (e) starting a pan from one and cutting over the shoulder to the other, (f) simply cutting from one to the other, or (g) cutting from one to over the shoulder to the other. Most of these techniques are effectively used in Dreyer's *Vampyr*. They remind us of the camera's presence and maintain its autonomy as a narrating entity.

Finally, within a scene, the camera can establish a critical point of view by moving in response to the character's development, not simply in response to the character's physical movements. It may, for example, move in when a character acts compassionately or out when the character acts callously, to indicate narrator approval or disapproval, as it does in key places in Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers*. Or it may arc and pan around a stationary character to emphasize thematic statement, as it does in the final scene of *Broken Flowers* and in a central scene in *Ordet* when Inger's daughter pleads with her uncle Johannes to restore her mother's life.

In summary, a narrating camera can take: (1) an external viewpoint by moving autonomously; (2) an internal viewpoint by tracking the movements and beats of a point-of-view character; and (3) a critical viewpoint by moving in or out or around in response to the character development of the point-of-view character. The camera blocking of most films doesn't allow viewers to distinguish these three poetic modes of camera narration. As a result, most films don't allow viewers to sense the presence of a narrating camera. A director guided by a biblical poetics will never block merely for show or to bring out the beats of non-point-of-view characters or of music—as is often done in films shot in what David Bordwell calls the currently fashionable “intensive continuity style” [11]. Only a handful of directors have ever used camera blocking strictly for point of view: Dreyer, who uses the full range of external, internal, and critical point-of-view camera blocking in his films; Michael Haneke, who uses external and internal viewpoints in his Cannes Festival winners *White Ribbon* and *Amour*; Abbas Kiarostami, who uses external and internal viewpoints in *Tickets*; and David Fincher, who uses external, internal, and critical points of view in his acclaimed film *Zodiac* [11].

Besides cutting or moving to bring out point of view, the camera can cut in symmetrical patterns. It is standard for films to pursue the reverse symmetrical pattern of wide shot, medium shot, close up, medium shot, wide shot. Less often we find forward symmetrical patterns like wide, medium, close; wide, medium close. A cinematographer guided by a biblical poetics could explore a number of symmetrical patterns and asymmetrical variations of them. These shooting patterns, like the plot patterns we discussed earlier, help bring out the intentions of the mentoring narrator.

6.4. Lighting

The writer of a biblical narrative doesn't have to worry about a lighting plan; but, of course, a cinematographer does. When guided by a biblical poetics, a cinematographer can develop a lighting plan to bring out the three types of point of view. How the cinematographer brings out point of view is less important than that he or she does it in some way. If, for instance, the script or camera narrator adopts an external point of view, the cinematographer can use natural, even light. If the narrator adopts an internal point of view, the cinematographer can apply dimensional, three-point lighting to the point-of-view character. And if the narrator adopts a critical point of view, the cinematographer can convey the narrator's response to a character by expressively using either high- or low-key lighting, as Dreyer often does in *Ordet*.

6.5. Sound

Finally, sound and music, along with camera blocking and lighting, can bring out point of view. To convey an external point of view, the sound can be stronger and the music more melodic, harmonic, and orchestral, so as to emphasize the music's autonomy and observational objectivity. To convey an internal point of view, sound can be engineered around the point-of-view character, so that viewers hear only the sounds and speech that the character is listening to, as is the case in *Cast Away*. In addition, to convey an internal point of view, the music can be simple and less melodic to bring out the beats of the scenes, always following—never leading—the actions and words of the point-of-view character. To convey a critical point of view, the music can again be strongly melodic and harmonic, this time to convey approval or disapproval of what a character is doing or saying. But for the music to not compete with the character's dialogue, the orchestration that accompanies a critical point of view will need to be less strong than that which accompanies an external point of view, and the melody may need to be stretched or compressed to fit around the characters' dialogue. Sound and music designed to sustain point of view, may accompany and complement the efforts of the camera and lighting, so that together, the camera, lighting, sound, and music can represent something of the eye and voice of God.

7. Conclusions

In this study, we have proposed a biblical poetics for screenwriters and filmmakers and have suggested conventions likely to fulfill the main purposes and conditions of this poetics. Some films use some of these conventions. Most all films fail to use some of them. Bible-like films, using a group of sufficiently strong conventions like those we have suggested, will enable a mentoring narrator to invite viewers to faithfully look for the narrator's assistance as they empathize with the main characters, share in their resolutions, and, in general, interpret the tight action and character development and selective scenes of the film. Our hope is to help restore this early tradition of storytelling to the twenty-first century. We have applied the biblical poetics of this paper to some extent in making short and feature films and hope to apply it fully in making more feature films. We earnestly invite further discussion and experimentation from film theorists and filmmakers.

Author Contributions

Dennis and Jason met for about a year and a half, reading material on biblical poetics and writing notes for a paper. Jason provided the key concept of a mentoring narrator, which unified the paper notes. They then invited Preston on board, who joined in the discussion and note writing. Preston wrote the first few drafts, with input from Dennis and Jason, including the first submitted draft. Then Dennis revised the paper to address the concerns of the reviewers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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