WRIT OF PASSAGE: A RITUAL FRAMEWORK FOR FICTION

by

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(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

Utilizing certain ritual theorists and their terminology, this research constructs a framework with which to analyze the religious or ritual nature apparent in the consumption of fiction literature. Fiction literature has the agency to guide its readers through rites of passage and form ritual communities around the text in much the same way as religious texts. The ritual framework that is constructed from the work of Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and Catherine Bell is applied to an analogous event: the celebration of Passover by those who do not believe that the historical event of the Exodus took place, to illustrate the efficacy of application of this structure to ritual observances where the adherents can be said to have a fictional view of the text. By exploring the history of Passover commemoration, and locating recent innovations within a broader context, the survival of ritual force is evident in spite of a less-than-historical view of the text.

INDEX WORDS: RITUAL, RITUAL STUDIES, RELIGION AND LITERATURE, FICTION, RITE OF PASSAGE, PASSOVER, MIRCEA
ELIADE, VICTOR TURNER, RONALD GRIMES, CATHERINE BELL
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I began my Masters research my primary interest was in how fiction literature might be utilized for religious functions. This began as an interest in the work of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and branched out into other authors whose purposes had a less explicit religious frame, but their fictional work was also intentionally constructing worlds of meaning. This next group, including authors like Flannery O’Connor, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison illustrated the capacity of fiction literature to assert a pull on its readers in a fashion similar to that of religious texts. This phenomenon interested me greatly, and although I did not fully understand the methods or implications, as someone with an interest in both religion and literature, the overlap drew me in like a moth to light. 

When I began attempting to tie my thoughts to my academic research my specific contribution to the connections between religion and literature were difficult to pin down. The sub-discipline of arts, literature, and religion, began by Nathan Scott and taken up by other scholars including my advisor Carolyn Medine have accomplished much in incorporating the study of arts and literature within the discipline of religion, and I wished to continue their work. With regard to the phenomena that I wished to explore, my struggle to define the occurrences resembled US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s struggle to define pornography, I could not define but I too “knew it when I
saw it.”¹ The path to define the phenomenon in precise and original terminology took a
step forward when I narrowed my work from not simply religion but more specifically
ritual. For reasons that will be spelled out in the following chapters, ritual served as a
more a helpful lens to view the connections, as it limited the scope of my research, and
honored in a few of the particular ways that fiction literature is used, rather than on the use
in toto.

The next step of the research process was to read and survey the field of ritual
studies and its more prominent scholars to acquaint myself with the discipline. While I
was sorting through the material of Ritual Studies to build a theoretical framework with
which to reflect on fiction literature, I made an interesting discovery. In the context of a
course on Judaism, I discovered the proclamation by Rabbi David Wolpe during his 2001
Passover service that the Exodus did not occur as the bible records it. Having already
been aware of other Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist attitudes toward the
historicity of the bible, I did not give much thought to Wolpe’s proclamation. However,
upon reflection, I realized that the commemoration of Passover accompanied with a
belief that the text was not historical was an event located somewhere between traditional
religious observation of rituals and this type of ritual observation of literature that I was
attempting to schematize. Upon this realization I began work to explore this idea, and
developed it as a mid-way point between ritual studies and religion and literature, and to

¹ This famous quote is not original to Justice Potter, but is famously recorded in his concurrence with
respect to Jacobellis v. Ohio.
illustrate how the ritual elements of Passover are retained, though in different ways, in this other “fictional” commemoration.

I am fully aware that the word fictional when applied to a religious text invites a value judgment, and has different shades of meaning. It also implies that if some texts are fictional, others are not. In the context of this research, and in this thesis, I invoke the term for the sake of brevity, and denote a sense or understanding of the text that is somewhere between pure history and pure fiction. I am not concerned with arguing for which perspectives should be adopted with regard to any particular texts, but rather with how the perspectives already held by readers of texts interact with their ritual observance of them. Many voices reject the invocation of the terminology of fiction with regard to the Exodus, even if they challenge the historicity of the biblical account, but I hope this terminology can be permitted with a certain caveat and with a particular purpose, not to “lower” religious texts to the level of fiction but to elevate fictional texts and show how they have a power to act on their consumers similar to that of religious texts.

After learning about Wolpe’s pronouncement I dove into the study of Passover both ancient and modern and discovered the depths of complexity of its origin and practice. The more I researched the holiday and its commemoration the more confident I became about its applicability in this research, the specifics of which will be illustrated both in my exploration of the history of the ritual, and in my application of the theoretical framework constructed in Chapter 2 to a particular form of commemoration, characterized by a suspension of belief in the historical narrative of the Exodus. My thesis will utilize what is undoubtedly a false dichotomy in Passover celebrations, that of
what is described by me as “modern” and what I call “traditional.” I understand full well the complexity of Passover and the spectrum that exists in its practice. The dichotomy assumed here is utilized as a hermeneutic device to explore the differences between these two types or categories, and how those differences lead to different constructed meaning in the context of the ritual. The modern versus traditional paradigm I deploy does obscure some the variety of denominational practice of the Passover ritual as well the diverse cognitions of the participants, but perhaps these detractions can be allowed in light of the greater good that the comparison hopes to achieve.

I have divided the chapter based both as the research proceeded for me chronologically, and how it hopes to proceed methodologically. Chapter 2 contains the work of ritual theorists that I found most useful for the comparison I wish to develop. Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, Ronald Grimes, Catherine Bell and others have contributed heavily to the field of ritual studies, and elements within their study lend themselves well to comparing the impact and meaning-making capacity of religious ritual and fiction literature. Chapter 2 hopes to focus on those aspects of their work most useful in this particular endeavor, while still locating those ideas within the greater context of the scholar’s own work, and the critiques, comments, and contributions made to their work by their contemporaries. Because the purpose of this research is to build connections between ritual studies and the discipline of religion and literature, allusions are also made to contexts where fiction literature provides parallels, particularly in this case, the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. In the context of Chapter 2, the examples stand as anecdotal and not fully developed to show the availability of the application of a ritual
studies schema to something like Harry Potter, even though a full analysis based on the framework constructed is not contained in this work.

Chapter 3 is an overview of the history of Passover focusing on the elements and developments discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 hopes to locate these modern or metaphorical adaptations in their historical contexts and give a background of the development of these specific practices and how they relate to the celebration of Passover as a whole. The understanding of the historicity of the text is key to the perspective of Rabbi Wolpe and many others who hold his view of the Passover narrative, and this view is a direct result of biblical critical scholarship particularly with respect to the authorship of the Torah. The other elements that are reviewed are the Haggadah, the script of Passover, and the Seder, the ritual meal that takes place on the first night or first two nights of the ritual cycle. Innovations in both the Haggadah and the Seder are best understood in the context of the normative and traditional strictures of commemoration.

The fourth chapter focuses in on the innovative facets of the modern celebrations of Passover and discusses them with respect to the theoretical terminology and framework in Chapter 2. This type of celebration is deployed in the form of a case study to show how the ritual force of Passover is maintained when the script is “fictional,” and to show the applicability of this terminology and framework to the way fiction literature is consumed and commemorated. By focusing in on instances on innovation with regard to the Passover ritual and the way that these innovations construct meaning, I hope to convince the reader that a phenomenon exists that deserves greater scrutiny, and that is the celebration of fiction through religious ritual. For many scholars, the analogies
between religious myth and fiction literature are already firmly established, and the
methods being deployed here are already in use, however this research is intended as an
appeal to those who still wish to exclude the study of literature from the field of religious
studies to allow it, once they have seen the efficacy of shared methods, and a shared
discipline.
CHAPTER 2
RITUAL AND RELIGION THEORY

The work of three ritual theorists has been fundamental to my developing the
connections between ritual and fiction in society: Mircea Eliade’s development of the
literary character in rites of passage, his conceptions of myth and sacred; Victor Turner’s
concept of *communitas*; and, Catherine Bell’s notion of *ritualization*. Each sheds a
particular light on the discussion of this issue. In the following, we will briefly
summarize the topics within the context of each of these scholars’ work and then develop
how each concept is useful in the discussion of a ritual function of fiction literature. In
each case, there are points at which my own constructed theories diverge from those of
the aforementioned authors. I will discuss these divergences as they are relevant to the
topic at hand. Eliade’s work especially has fallen out of favor for many modern scholars,
due to several factors including his totalizing, some would say fascist, characterizations
of religious experience. While this critique and others may be well founded, his work
serves as a launching point for the modern field of ritual studies, and functions similarly
in my own research.

Mircea Eliade is best known for his work on the sacred and the profane, and the
distinctions that he draws between these two states of existence. He argues that the sacred
reveals itself as such through the manifestation of the gods, which he terms the
heirophany. Eliade goes on to say that the sacred and the profane are “two modes of
being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man.”

Eliade develops a parallel binary, juxtaposing the man of archaic societies with the modern man of the desacralized world. Eliade grounds his theories in the perspective of the archaic man, in the hope that, reading these, the desacralized man can be helped to achieve a perspective from which he can view religious experience. No matter how earnestly the modern man has divested himself and his experience of the sacred, the archaic modes of existence surface again and again, Eliade contends, often in very strange ways and places—in unusual sites of survival. At the University of Chicago, Eliade’s academic home and one of the centers of the formation of arts, literature, and religion as a discipline, fiction was understood to be one of those strange sites. The implicit, even subconscious, participation in ritual on the part of the modern man, through new vehicles such as literature, is a foundational principle in developing a ritual function of fiction literature. The idea that literature is one of Eliade’s survivals is a logical starting point for exploring how literature may serve to guide individuals through a subconscious ritual process, otherwise devoid of a religious context. This ability of literature, an extension of Eliade’s notion of myth, is evident in the meaning-making capacity of ritual scripts in religious contexts, even when the individuals within the ritual have disparate beliefs with respect to the ritual script. We will see an example of this capacity in the modern Passover celebration.

The element of mythic expression in Eliade’s mapping of ritual sheds light on my work in two specific ways. The first is his characterization of the importance of

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heirophany: the establishment of center. For Eliade, the heirophany, reenacted in the ritual, is the event that founds and centers reality. The heirophany, an invocation of the sacred interrupts or interjects into profane time, and everything that follows begins from that point of interruption. The narrative flow of the ritual necessitates a starting point, and what Eliade terms the “founding of the world”\(^3\) is that starting point. All relevance in the ritual, and in life in general, is in relation to that fixed point. Eliade is arguing that the modern man has lost this fixed point in his desacralized world, and I am arguing that fiction can provide this point beyond the confines of traditional religious expression. The dialectic that exists between the possession of belief, and the formation of myth, which Eliade sees only as a progression from the former to the latter, is an important addition to a shortcoming in Eliade’s theory. In the case of fiction literature, we can see that it is the story that proceeds the rituals, and in the case of religious myths, Eliade’s singular model is not at all universal, and accepts the assumptions of many religious texts uncritically.

Proceeding from this characterization of heirophany is Eliade’s understanding of ritual, and his principle of eternal return. For Eliade, the execution of the ritual invokes the original sacred time and space of the original sacred event. Sacred time and space can be recreated in perpetuity with proper execution of the rite, and that is his principle of eternal return. As he states, “Sacred time [re-actualized by the festival] is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable.”\(^4\) This attachment of the ritual to the re-invocation of

\(^3\) Ibid., 21, 63.

\(^4\) Ibid., 69.
the original sacred event is abundantly evident in the script of Passover. This is true both for those who practice the ritual according to a historical reality, and also for those who might experience as a “fictional” or perhaps more aptly a metaphorical reality. While Eliade may not have imagined his eternal return being available in this sort of metaphorical commemoration, it is strongly undergirded by the modern developments in ritual studies that I will discuss in this chapter.

This principle is more generally applicable to fiction literature in another way that Eliade develops: the invocation of sacred time. Specifically, Eliade believes that the sacred time that is re-actualized in the ritual makes one “contemporary with the gods” – that is to say contemporary with the historical event. In the case of fiction literature this contemporaneity is symbolic and rooted in the act of creation, of devising and writing the fictional universe. For Eliade, New Year rituals, those commemorating the event of creation, are focused on the act of creation, and he argues that the act of creation is the basis of all ritual: “the creation of the world becomes the archetype of every creative human gesture.” In the context of fiction literature, this is resonant in that the consumption of a piece of literature must always call back the sacred time of that


6 The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion, 45. In this sense, all ritual in some way reenacts creation, and thereby wishes to re-actualize the time of creation. For Eliade, the time of creation is the time of the gods, and to inhabit that time is not only to share time with the gods, but also to share space with them, even though he notes the mystery that though they are present, they are not always visible. We can also reflect on these terms the symbolic presence of a literary author while their work is consumed, they too are present as voiced in the text, but are not always visible, and their agency is often subsumed by the agency of the reader in the moment of consumption.
literature’s creation, the moment of its composition. The moment of composition itself serves as an even closer analogy of creation as a world founding is taking place in the creation of a fictional account, where the fiction inevitably serves as symbol for the milieu of its origin, both in the mental composition, and its eventual embedding in rhetorical and written forms.

Just as Eliade identifies cosmogony as the basis of all human action, and therefore all ritual, the cosmogonic event then is also the basis of all myth. Myth for Eliade, is the paradigmatic form of sacred knowledge. The source of the information contained in religious myth presents itself as apodictic truth, in part because the information contained in myth is not from the realm of the profane but rather from the sacred. Eliade seems to assume both the existence of divine truth and its ability to mediate itself through, though in his research he generally speaks of them in general terms. Both of these assumptions play no role in my own research, nor do I believe they would be permitted in the current landscape of the academic study of religion. With regard to the creation event, the temporal scope of the myth is before profane time, but in any case, since myth wishes to relate sacred truth, its scope is always beyond that of the profane. Even when a myth seeks to portray events after creation, it is presenting a notion of absolute reality, an ontology that Eliade characterizes as inseparable from the notion of the sacred because of his notion of founding. The primary concern of man, he says, is to found, or establish center, and that centering occurs first ontologically, and the source of that reality is often if not always given in myth. The ability of myth, to “reveal the real” is the justification Eliade gives for having it stand as the paradigmatic activity of humanity. In many cases
the myths are the schema for ritual actions.\textsuperscript{7} The reenactment is based on mythic narratives and on imitating the actions of the gods therein.\textsuperscript{8} Once again, Eliade’s work seems to assume the validity of these myths, and not just in the cognitions of the believers. The modern practice of bracketing, of separating one’s own reflection from the beliefs of those whom you observe, does not seem well practiced by Eliade.

Just as the “gods” for Eliade have created a cosmos, the fiction writer is a creator of worlds, and the ritual function of literature, in its consumption and the other ways that the created universe is celebrated, is a re-actualization of the act of creation undertaken by the author. Writers from a variety of positions like Alice Walker and J.R.R. Tolkien invoke this power of the writer to make myths—to co-create. Referring to her writing in \textit{The Color Purple}, Walker suggests a visitation by spirits, while Tolkien speaks of the writer as “Sub-creator, the refracted light through whom is splintered from a single White to many hues, and endlessly combined in living shapes that move from mind to mind…We make still by the law in which we are made.”\textsuperscript{9}

A clear analogy can be drawn between the ritual observations in the production and consumption of fiction literature and Eliade’s cosmic creation. It is quite surprising to

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{8} In light of this fact, my discussion will use the terminology of myth and ritual script interchangeably whenever the context permits.

me that Eliade does not deal explicitly with the authors of myth in his work. It seems that he wishes to circumvent the myth writer and attach the ritual more closely to the historical event and the sacred reality contained therein.\textsuperscript{10} If we combine the centrality of the creation event in ritual expression, with the general world founding ability of ritual, and place that framework around fiction literature, the observations that we make reveal the important ritual function that fiction has to those who participate in its production and consumption. With regard to Passover, in all the forms of observance, the identity of the mythic author, and the source of his authority are of great importance, and have significant implications for the meaning imparted by the ritual.

Crucial to Eliade's understanding of time and space, is that the construction of the cosmos, both physically and temporally lead men to an understanding of the gods. In his view, the universe testifies to the existence of the gods, because the conception of time denotes a beginning and his conception of the earth and sky denotes an element of transcendence. Obviously these traits of the universe can be explained by scientific models, but it seems as if Eliade believes those modern models to be lacking, not in their explanation of \textit{how}, but rather in their answering of \textit{why}. More important in this particular conception by Eliade, is his notion of the survival of the sacred, despite the de-sacralizing efforts of the modern man. For Eliade, the modern man cannot escape the search for meaning which typifies the archaic experience. What is remarkable however, is

\textsuperscript{10} It is worth noting that by identifying the myth-maker, the fiction author in this instance, we are proceeding beyond the work of Eliade, but the previous analogies still stand.
that Eliade still believes in the capacity of the sacred to act on the modern man through symbols, despite his lack of understanding, or knowledge of even the most basic religious or ritual context. Eliade states, “a religious symbol conveys its message even if it is no longer consciously understood in every part. For a symbol speaks to the whole human being and not only to the intelligence.”\(^{11}\) If we accept the capacity of a religious symbol, or perhaps a ritual to effect a person, even beyond her intellectual understanding of it, we will have an idea of ritual that identifies it with the sacred, and with the ability to interrupt not only the profane time in which it takes place, but also the ability to interrupt the cognition of the persons involved in it. This aspect of ritual is one of great importance, and is expounded on greatly in the work of other theorists.

Victor Turner, who before Ronald Grimes has done the most work of mapping of the ritual process, proceeds naturally from Eliade's notion of sacred and profane to develop his mapping system, borrowing also from Arnold van Gennep. Both Victor Turner, building on van Gennep, and Eliade construct a three-tier scheme to map rites, particularly rites of passage. This threefold scheme, a fusion of van Gennep and Eliade, is illustrated as separation (dying) \(\rightarrow\) transition (return to origins) \(\rightarrow\) incorporation (being reborn),\(^{12}\) with the parenthetical terminology belonging to Eliade. As we previously discussed, the Eliade model is rooted in his belief that all rites are, at their very core,

\(^{11}\) Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, 129.

\(^{12}\) Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 104-5.
reenacting a creation event and this assertion is determinate of his terminology. Turner's model, building on that of van Gennep, instead focuses on van Gennep's initial use of the term *limen*. He defines *limen* simply as a threshold state; then more broadly as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”\(^{13}\) When an individual is in the liminal state, she possesses nothing, and in some sense, is nothing. The individual endures this status so long as she is within the *limen*, and upon emerging from it, must reassert her membership and regain her status and being in profane or every-day time.

The aspect of Victor Turner’s ritual research that is most useful to a reflection on fiction literature is his notion of *communitas*. The *communitas* for Turner is the communal identity forged in the execution of the ritual. In general, Turner’s characterization of the rite of passage utilizes a narrative progression, and this has obvious benefits for the comparison between ritual and fiction. For Turner, the rite of passage follows the narrative path of separation, to transition, ending in incorporation. The liminal state, which occurs after the separation mode of the ritual and which serves as the context of the participant’s transition, is also the context for the formation of *communitas*. The “anti-structure” community forged in the rite of passage will be preserved in part after the ritual. The *communitas* or state of relation that is forged within the ritual is characterized by juxtaposition, and the erasure of the traditional boundaries

and separation that exist in the profane world. This nothingness results in radical equality, emanating from the removal of the distinctions that previously separated the practitioners. It is this idea, the *communitas*, that is one of the most evident ritual features of fiction literature, that while the reader inhabits the written world, the community of readers then formed is devoid of the distinctions they possessed before they entered into the mythic space of the literature.

The many other ways that literature is celebrated, in fan fiction, public events such as DragonCon, and the production and consumption of film based on literature are a furtherance of the communal experience of fiction and the way that its ritual impact is felt even after its initial liminal impact, simply in the reading of it. Turner’s three different types of *communitas*: spontaneous, normative, and ideological also trace the progression of fiction literature from its initial authorship to its consumption, and finally ideologically in the systems and events that are organized around the communal celebration of the piece in events, film, and even theme parks such as Harry Potter World. The emergence of competitive Quidditch leagues of varying formality, improvised with Frisbees or soccer balls and hula-hoops is further evidence of this. Various forms of the sport have become very popular\(^\text{14}\) and there is even a presence at UGA.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^\text{15}\) http://quidditchonthequad.weebly.com/just-plain-fun.html
Beyond just the idea of *communitas*, Turner’s holistic conception of the rite of passage can be utilized to map the metaphorical journey undertaken by the reader of fiction. His mapping is often utilized to plot the journey of figures within the literature itself, but as readers of fiction follow their characters in a metaphorical journey, just as ritual participants re-enact the actions of the gods, the mapping can be drawn from the text itself, to chart the mental rite of passage of the readers, as they themselves move through the *limen* as they read and experience literature. The idea that literature could have this capacity is not new at all, but the application of these ritual taxonomies to this experience does seem to be rare, and underutilized. Turner’s mapping of ritual is very basic, and has been expanded upon by the work of other writers such as Joseph Campbell.¹⁶ The more detailed mapping found in Campbell’s work is useful as well in evaluating the experience of the reader, and in this way, Turner’s model alone is insufficient to reflect on the diversity of experience within the rite of passage, in the context of ritual and literature.

The application of the concepts of *communitas* and rites of passage to the *Harry Potter* series reveals data that shows the viability of this research. The ritual capacity of these books to serve as a rite of passage and the accompanying *communitas* seem to be some of the many factors contributing to its initial and continuing popularity. Many of the series’ readers grew up with Harry Potter, passing through their adolescent years

along with the characters, and having the text serve as a vehicle for their transition, just as the ritual script would in a rite of passage. As Julie Hinds states, “the impact of Potter lingers on young adults whose own journey to adulthood mirrored that of Harry.” The use of this common text for the rite of passage forms the *communitas* where “the “Harry Potter” saga is both a cultural landmark and common ground.” This unifying power of literature, specifically with *Harry Potter*, is evident in the many ways that its readers have celebrated its landmarks, through movie premieres, book releases, and much more. Even the formation of quidditch leagues discussed above, and at Arizona State a school club called “Dumbledore’s Army” show the desire of readers to continuously celebrate their experiences in the world created by J. K. Rowling.

Eliade’s discussion of myth approaches the effort undertaken here, but he fails to take the work to its logical conclusion. He characterizes myth as the paradigmatic form of sacred knowledge. It is important to draw attention to this, because the ritual script, constitutive of myth, is the example of the importance of text in rites of passage. The analogies that can be drawn generally between religious ritual and fiction are drawn in more stark relief when we incorporate the already-present analogy among the written ritual script, myth, and fiction literature, as they already serve as a written guide through

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18 Ibid.

19 http://www.statepress.com/article/2015/03/clubs-of-asu-dumbledores-army-creates-a-niche-for-harry-potter-fans/ Dumbledore’s Army is a club at Hogwarts within the *Harry Potter* universe.
a created world; the ritual in a religious sense, and the fictional narrative in another. This is especially clear in examples of fiction that have been produced with a specific mythic function in mind, such as the work of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.20 The notion contained in the quotation that in myth “everything is true except for the story itself”21 exposes the capacity of myth to act with ritual agency without a connection to historical reality, whether objectively, or in the cognitions of the ritual participants. The ontological founding of reality for Eliade, will often, if not always, occur in myth, and for this reason, he believes myth-making to be the paradigmatic activity of humanity. Fiction literature can be viewed as the continuation or survival of this human enterprise.

It also important at this juncture to cite some key criticisms of Eliade and Turner’s work, as utilizing their work without acknowledging its faults would be academically irresponsible. The work of Ronald Grimes, a more recent scholar of ritual studies, is quite useful as a corrective. Ronald Grimes begins his work, Beginnings in Ritual Studies, by both echoing the work of Eliade, and then making a very key distinction from it. Like Eliade, Grimes recognizes the extent to which modern society, or perhaps western society has deviated from a more ritually wealthy past, referring to our present condition as “ritually poverty stricken.”22 He quickly deviates from Eliade, however, in eschewing the

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20 This refers specifically the Lewis’ Space trilogy and Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy. For an explicit discussion of myth and re-actualization of the form of fiction see Tolkien, Flieger, and Anderson, Tolkien on Fairy-Stories.

21 Dr. James D. Hardy Jr.

location of ritual in a single location. Eliade locates ritual first in the act of creation; Grimes however will maintain that the field of ritual studies does not provide a base, or starting point. This basic difference encapsulates the plethora of deviations that Grimes makes from the work of Eliade in regard to ritual. One of Eliade's main goals, both in the study of ritual, and religion in total, was to discover a universality of experience. Like others before him, he sought to discover a comparative rubric into which all of religious practice might be accurately designated. While this sort of scholarship succeeded in illuminating countless similarities of the world's religions, it also encouraged the generalization and re-characterization that often results from rigid taxonomies. Or as Catherine Bell succinctly states, “the universal always impoverishes the particular.”23

Another aspect of Eliade's scholarship that deserves criticism is an apparent ethnocentrism in his taxonomy, which seems, in many cases, to lend itself best to his own experiences and cognitions. The particular criticism of ethnocentrism however, should and can be leveled at every product of inquiry, for the scholar cannot help but speak from his or her own location. Certain scholar’s speak much more from a particular location than others, and in the case of Eliade, his totalizing influence must be acknowledged and discarded to maintain the value of his work.

The final aspect of Eliade’s research that resonates with this undertaking is in accord with and will serve as a transition to speaking about Catherine Bell’s work on ritualization. Once again we return to Eliade’s notion of the sacred as interrupting, or

23 Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 70.
intervening into, profane time. However, at this point we will reflect on the capacity of
the ritual to act in such a manner. Eliade’s notion of survivals is relevant here, in his
argument that these ritual elements survive in spite of human effort to de-sacralize. For
Eliade, it is the search for meaning, for the ontological center, that cannot be escaped.
The survivals, interruptions of the sacred into our otherwise profane existence, are a
product of this inescapable reality. This theory approaches an idea of placing within the
realm of the sacred an agency beyond the human beings who experience it. For Eliade,
the modern man can be acted upon by the sacred without a proper ritual understanding,
and outside of his knowledge of even the most basic religious or ritual context. This
agency given to the sacred and expressed in the ritual action is nuanced by Catherine Bell
in her idea of ritualization, and, for her, it is localized in the action itself rather than in the
realm of the sacred. Eliade’s characterization illustrates the importance of narrative to the
human condition, and illustrates how that narrative consideration can assert itself beyond
or even in opposition to the cognitions to the mythic or fictional author, and the ritual
participant or fiction consumer.

The final theorist reviewed in my research is Catherine Bell. Two aspects of her
research have direct parallels in the comparison between fiction and ritual. The first of
these is her pointing out a dichotomy existing in most ritual studies scholarship. She
argues that this dichotomy, characterized as between thought and action, is present in
most ritual scholarship though it is often implicit. In her understanding of this dichotomy,
many scholars have begun the process of ritual study by excluding from their study those
religious aspects characterized by thought rather than action, thereby excluding those
thought exercises from their ritual scope. Bell argues that the dichotomy is externally imposed, and damaging to the study of ritual. She, however, does point to the ability of ritual to transcend these categories, in that ritual is subject to the binaries imposed by scholars, but that it is also “the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are reintegrated.”

Ritual, according to Bell, is necessarily composed of both thought and action, and ritual is the means of integration. This reflection is relevant, because the production and consumption of fiction literature, the more institutional celebrations notwithstanding, would more likely fall under the traditional category of a thought exercise. The ritual importance of the production and consumption of myth, though emphasized by Eliade, is often disregarded in exchange for the more visible activity of ritual practice. If our inquiry has drawn the deepest parallels between fiction and the mythic character of ritual, then Bell’s work is essential to establishing the importance of relating rite of passage and fiction, and the many benefits that this comparison could yield.

The next aspect of Bell’s research to review is the aforementioned concept of ritualization: the idea that the ritual action has an agency to distinguish itself as such. Bell’s theory is a corrective to earlier theory, in that she does not assign the agency to some numinous but rather to the action itself. She also contends that the ritual component of an action is not the result of its neat fit into a taxonomical category of action, but rather truly rests within the action itself, and its surrounding context. What constitutes an action

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24 Ibid., 21.
as ritualized is the way that the particular action is differentiated from other acts within a certain cultural system. In her words, “ritualization is the production of this differentiation…ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast.” The action itself is both a force for and a product of differentiation among other actions.

This theory is important to the study of a ritual function in literature because it explicates something we know implicitly, that all fiction does not fulfill a ritual function to its readers, and even beyond that, that a piece of fiction does not yield the same ritualized response in all readers. This in no way diminishes the ritual quality of fiction, because these same statements are true about actions generally agreed to be ritualized. Bell’s notion of the ritual field, the variety of experience on the part of the practitioner within the ritual context, is a direct analogy to the difference in the production and reception of fiction. Not every piece of fiction asserts a ritual function, and those that do, do not yield the same ritualized response in every reader. Bell argues that in many cases, the ritualized action precipitates a particular response, and this would seem to undermine the concept of the ritual field, without the nuance she provides in the concept of “misrecognition.” This element is the willful blindness that precipitates ritualization. The idea is that what seems like a universal response is actually one that is asserted implicitly from within the ritualized act, and the practitioner’s adhering to the normalized

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25 Ibid., 90.

26 Ibid., 109.
response is dependent upon his or her experience of the action, which occurs in the “ritual field,” within a wide range of experience.

We will see many examples in the fourth chapter of different levels of meaning within a single ritual—that of Passover. There is also a great variety in any particular ritual where the physical location and experiences are consistent, but the meaning drawn from the ritual is widely disparate. This misrecognition, or suspended disbelief, is a necessary component to the consumption of fiction, and it is seen clearly in the example of certain commemorations of Passover. In many ways, the success of a piece of fiction in achieving its ritual purpose, like a ritual, depends upon the dedication of the reader to this idea of misrecognition. The response that a reader has to fiction, determined by that piece’s manipulation of mood and internal narrative circumstance is a direct parallel to the way that ritual actions assert a “natural response” through the positioning of ritual actions and a manipulation of physical mood and personal circumstance.

Each of these theories has its strengths and weaknesses; those faults that are addressed here are those that pertain to the aspects of theory utilized in this enterprise. The most common criticism of both Turner and Eliade come from scholars speaking in the post-structuralist viewpoint. For the scholars of today, such elaborate taxonomical systems as seen in the work of Turner and Eliade cannot help but to impose upon the rituals they study. Both Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimes, current scholars in ritual studies, level this criticism at the work of Turner and Eliade as well as many others. The underlying theme of these criticisms centers on the idea in earlier scholarship that the categories and patterns discovered within the rites of passage constitute some essential
form and definition of ritual. Modern scholars will utilize elaborate taxonomies, but under the substantial caveat that the categories are not inherent within the rituals, but are rather imposed from without, as a useful analytical tool. With the many aspects of older research drawn upon here, we must address this criticism, and respond to it. Much in the same way as Bell and Grimes, this research can utilize the taxonomies of Turner and Eliade, while granting that the categories were brought to the ritual of Passover, rather than discovered in it.

Another aspect that presents difficulty to this comparison is the fact that Eliade and Turner seem to universalize the rite of passage and other ritual phenomena not only with taxonomy, but also by restricting their research to the ideal practitioner/ritual. They do not do this explicitly, but rather seem to imply it in their work, in that the model that they propose is the ideal and sole form of ritual observance. They do not explicitly deal with the variety of experience and belief within the rite of passage, and religious practice in general. The acknowledgement of this diversity is a particular strength of Catherine Bell’s work, and is essential to this enterprise, because it can be argued that the type of Passover celebration in view in the coming chapter is not the “ideal” form of ritual celebration. The variety of practice in the Passover holiday as representative of other rituals challenges this notion of an ideal or normative ritual experience especially as asserted by an outside observer. If we do not permit the ritual theory to apply in the cases of ritual innovation, as Eliade’s work might imply, then the comparison is much less impactful because the many ritual innovations discussed below would be excluded from Eliade’s discussion of the quintessential Passover celebration. For Eliade, the success of
the ritual depends on proper execution of the rite, and Bell’s ritualization is a direct foil to this idea arguing that eternal return can still be achieved in instances of cognitive dissonance or misrecognition on the part of and among ritual participants. Eliade’s work can be interpreted to allow for this type of ritual observance, but more-so in his notion of survivals, the interjection of the sacred, rather than an intentional invocation of the sacred on the part of the practitioner.

In conclusion, in the work of each of these theorists are concepts that draw useful parallels between the experience of the participant in a rite of passage, and the experience of the reader of fiction. The mentions of the *Harry Potter* series show clear examples of how this ritual function is being taken up, and there are many other examples both with respect to *Harry Potter*, as well as many other works of fiction. These ritual theories, along with a review of a particular form of Passover commemoration, will firmly establish the analogy between ritual and fiction, and go on to illustrate the usefulness of this comparison.
CHAPTER 3
OVERVIEW OF PASSOVER

Having laid out what is intended to be a useful framework with which to study the consumption of fiction, I now want to give an example of that framework in proving its efficacy. To this end, I will analyze a particular type of Passover celebration. What follows in this chapter will be a discussion of general information about the Jewish holiday of Passover, or Pesach, for the purpose of locating later discussion on a particular form of Passover celebration within a broader context. Neither space nor time permits a full discussion of the history or development of Passover, an entire lifetime of work might not be sufficient for such an enterprise, as “The Passover ritual, as performed today is part of a process of ritual evolution begun thousands of years ago.” However, I will attempt to introduce some of the more important elements of Passover, as well as discuss some of the interesting developments in the history of its celebration. Some of these developments will be returned to in the following chapter, a case study in a particular form of Passover commemoration, utilizing the ritual studies framework constructed in the first chapter.

In general terms, the Passover holiday commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, and the events immediately surrounding their deliverance, including but not limited to the Plagues and the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt. The

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ritual scripts of Passover, known as Haggadahs or more properly Haggadot include narration of these things drawing both upon biblical sources, primarily the book of Exodus, and rabbinic supplements. The use of plurals in reference to the Haggadot is meant to illustrate the variety of practice in Judaism that will be discussed in more detail below, but it is essential to acknowledge the variety of observance at the outset.28 The Haggadah guides the practitioner through the ritual by providing various steps and actions, asserting appropriate moods and reflections in response to the narrative material, and requiring particular responses on the part of the ritual practitioner including but not limited to body position, consumption of foods and spirits, the singing of songs, and other ritual actions within the context of the Seder. It is important to note that even the function of the Haggadah is fertile ground for innovation, because in many cases it is not a script at all, but rather a touchstone, or common reference point. The designation of it as script, though accurate in a sense, fails to fully demonstrate the role that it plays across the many forms of commemoration. The Seder meal is meant to be a reenactment of the Exodus, but it is also meant to provoke a discussion of the event and its underlying issues. With many Seders today including non-Jewish family members, the conversational and pedagogical aspect has returned in force, where the Haggadah can serve as a template or

28 For a survey of Haggadot symbolizing the concerns of the four major Jewish groups: Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist see Carole B. Balin’s essay in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 189-214.
guide to create a space for the conversation, and in some cases, provide portions of the conversation itself.

The *Seder* is the meal and accompanying observances on the first night, or first two nights of Passover or Pesach. In addition to the *Seder* meal, there are other observances for the 7 or 8 day festival period, including the cleansing of yeast from the home and the abstention from yeast and leavened bread. The unleavened bread consumed instead is the *matzah*. Both the *Haggadah*, the text that guides the ritual, and the *Seder* plate or *k’arah*, which includes various foods symbolic of different experiences, have been artistic platforms in the history of Judaism. Though formulaic in a certain sense, they both permit artistic expression in the way that they are reproduced. In the case of the *Haggadah*, the text itself is often written calligraphically with artwork and depictions of the narrative surrounding the material.\textsuperscript{29} In this sense, the reproduction of *Haggadot*, even if the text itself is consistent often exemplifies the variety of the Passover ritual in its artistic display.\textsuperscript{30}

Every discussion of the Passover rites must also discuss the *Seder* plate, particularly in regard to its variance as David Arnow states, “the *Seder* plate…

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\textsuperscript{29} For an example of artistic expression in *Haggadot* see http://forward.com/articles/195693/the-most-beautiful-haggadah-in-the-room/

\textsuperscript{30} This type of artistic preservation is not universal to all *Haggadot*, nor is it exclusive to the category, for an example of this artistic reproduction of the entire Hebrew Bible, see the Kennicott (or Corunna) Bible.
recapitulates the complexity and long evolution of the festival itself.”

In the next chapter, we will discuss an addition of an orange to the Seder plate, and how the symbolism of the orange is developed, but, first, we must establish a wider discussion of the k’arah. The traditional Seder, organized around the more fixed portions of the Haggadah includes six items: a roasted bone, egg, matzah, bitter herbs, charoset (a fruit and spice dish, most commonly with apples), and karpas (a green vegetable, often celery or parsley). Of these six items the Mishnah mentions only three specifically and an additional “two cooked dishes,” and Exodus 12 orders the eating of the roasted meat with unleavened bread.

Each of the Passover foods has a symbolic function in the Haggadah and some of them have etiologies located in more ancient texts, such as the matzah in Exodus, while others’ symbolism and etiology seem to have developed later. In some cases the symbolism acts on an atomistic level, where even the minute instances of quantity are symbol to a referent either in the Exodus narrative or simply to Jewish history at large. The meal usually includes three matzahs or more correctly matzot, which are sometimes placed on the plate and other times simply near it. The Seder plate remains a focal point

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32 For some images of the Seder plate see Cernea, The Passover Seder : Afikoman in Exile, 15-6.

33 Hoffman and Arnow, My People's Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1, 38.

34 There is a debate over whether two or three matzot should be included. For a more lengthy discussion of this see ibid., 39-40.
for the entire ritual or as Ruth Cernea states, “it is on the Seder plate that the Seder’s quintessential concepts exist in tangible form.”

It is the locus of interesting innovations, some of which have been co-opted in the more traditional commemoration, and others that remain more associated with more modern celebrations. In each case, the meal itself denotes meaning and is a special force in the meaning-making capacity of the ritual.

The Seder meal coincides with a specific order of actions that guides the observant through a metaphorical journey, constructing meaning around the participant by identifying her actions in the Seder with the original historic Hebrews who were slaves in Egypt, and were led into the Exodus. The word Seder can be translated literally to mean “order,” this reinforces the idea that the narrative force of the Haggadah is to carefully guide the participant through the meaning of the ritual in ways that are quite explicit, or in other words “order is… the way through which man may know God as and so participate in God’s work on earth.”

The New American Haggadah exemplifies this explicit effect, saying “in every generation, a person is obligated to view himself [or herself] as if he [or she] were the one who went out from Egypt, as it is said: and on that day tell you son saying, “For this purpose the Lord labored on my behalf, taking me out of Egypt.” It was not our fathers alone who were delivered by the Holy One, blessed is

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36 Ibid., 7.
HE—we were also delivered with them…”  

The Seder and Haggadah are derived from multiple sources beginning with the biblical texts concerning the Exodus, Psalms, Rabbinic elements from the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud, as well as the inclusion of Midrashic components, and elements derived from well-known historical commentaries and commentators. The variety of Haggadot is reflected in its sourcing, but each is grounded primarily in the biblical references to the Exodus, and various commands to commemorate the event.

A logical place to begin a discussion of the history of Passover is by quickly discussing its instances in the Torah, where the etiologies and commands to celebrate Passover and other holidays are found. These texts include but are not limited to Exodus 12:1-20, 40-50 and 23:15-19, Leviticus 23, Numbers 9:1-14, and 28:16-25, and Deuteronomy 16:1-8. Already, at this juncture, we are presented with a few difficulties. Although it is the scholarly consensus that the Torah is a composite source, for many centuries the traditional viewpoint held that the Torah was authored by Moses and was the product of a single author. Many works of Pentateuchal scholarship have firmly supported the idea of multiple authors of the Torah, though the exact nature of its composition is still vociferously debated. All of this is relevant to a discussion of

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37 Jonathan Safran Foer et al., New American Haggadah (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2012), 77. For additional uses of first person language in this Haggadah, which reflects pervasive usage common in Haggadah, see pages 22, 36, 43, 45, 47, 51, 54, 56 and others.

38 There are of course other events in the Hebrew Bible which either relate explicitly to Passover, or have been argued to be connected as proto forms of the ritual. While that discussion is fascinating, it does not fall within the scope of this research.
Passover because the holiday as it is understood today seems to be an amalgamation of two initially separate holidays, the Festival of Unleavened Bread: Matzot, and the ritual slaughter of the paschal lamb: Pesach. It appears that the combination of these two holidays actually occurred during the composition of the Torah, as they seem to be separate holidays in certain sections and are later combined into a single observance. The scholarly discourse that centers on these passages, their relationship to source critical analysis, and other debates about the history of Passover are incredibly complex, as the rabbinic discussions surrounding them. Here, however, it is important to point to a common perspective in Pentateuchal scholarship, one advanced famously by Julius Wellhausen,\(^{39}\) that at some point in the history of ancient Israel two distinct holidays were combined to form what we now know as Passover,\(^{40}\) a holiday that retained both the element of unleavened bread and the element of the paschal lamb. Proceeding from this already muddled history, Passover will continuously adapt and evolve, absorbing new traditions while leaving others behind, and even becoming entangled with the Christian holiday of Easter. What is most noteworthy about this muddled history is that it occurs in

\(^{39}\) Julius Wellhausen, J. Sutherland Black, and Allan R. Menzies, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008). Chapter III: Sacred Feasts. Other iterations of the “dual origins theory” can also be found in the work of Roland De Vaux, Bernard Levinson, and several others.

\(^{40}\) For a recent argument pushing back against this assertion see: T. Prosic, "The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70 Ce," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, no. 414 (2004). While this work does refute many of the arguments establishing the two rituals as originally distinct, Prosic’s model asserts a singular holiday characterized by a complex history of development in the pre-70 observance. The presence of development, differences in degree notwithstanding, still stands as a foundational justification for the continued practice of ritual innovation for many modern observers.
the context of a religious holiday that can be said to have a preoccupation with history, with its own history and etiology, and with the history of the Jewish people.

Following the biblical text, we can begin to see a recognizable form of the Passover ritual in the text of the Mishnah. At this stage of development the ritual has elements that are established, and others which are open to improvisation. David Arnow describes the Mishnaic Passover ritual as both “fixed and free.”\textsuperscript{41} Arnow and others have found recognizable “sketches” of both the Seder and the Haggadah in the Mishnah and even further elaborations in the Talmud. These details are essential to a thorough look at Passover and are relevant to our discussion because they establish an element of improvisation, or to invoke Bell’s term, a ritualization of new actions into the existing schema as having been done throughout the history of celebration.\textsuperscript{42} According to Arnow, the Seder, without which today Passover would be unrecognizable, is a post-Temple phenomenon.\textsuperscript{43} He and others emphasize the loss of the Temple as a factor in the emphasis placed on ritual observance generally in the post-70 CE Jewish world, and specifically with the development of the rituals of Passover.\textsuperscript{44} One crucial point in the

\textsuperscript{41} Hoffman and Arnow, My People’s Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1, 15.

\textsuperscript{42} The more traditional observances understand this aspect of the history of the Seder and Haggadah, but their reflections on this are very different from the more modern positions on the historicity of the Torah, and all of the traditions that follow.

\textsuperscript{43} Hoffman and Arnow, My People’s Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1, 15.

\textsuperscript{44} The impact of the loss of the Temple and the position the Mishnah takes in response to this in arguing for a renewed but already present importance in at-home rituals like Passover can be found in Baruch M.
development of the ritual for Arnow, is the inclusion of the telling of the Passover story, another element that, when removed, would render the commemoration of Passover completely foreign to most Jews, religious or otherwise. Arnow discusses the instances of the *Seder* in the Mishnah and Tosefta, and also in Philo’s *Special Laws* (II: 148), as well as Josephus’ *The Wars of the Jews* (6:9:3). However he notes that only in the Mishnah, which still does not contain a complete *Haggadah*, or ritual script, is there a requirement to tell the story of Passover.\(^{45}\) The story of Passover, which serves as the foundation of nearly every version of the *Haggadah* is an immensely important development in the history of Passover celebration, and as we will see later, it is the story itself that becomes the focus in the most recent debates on the celebration of Passover.

What began as both fixed and free in the Mishnah and other early Rabbinic sources over time became a fixed formula whose creativity and improvisation is acknowledged, but was no longer practiced. It is not known when the *Haggadah* was first composed in a complete form, or if it has simply evolved from the Mishnah material with slow and gradual change, but at some point a portion of the material or some of its components became somewhat fixed, and this fixed nature of the text was carried over...
into the ritual itself. The reference to the *Haggadah* as a singular text is problematic because there is not a decisive first version. Additionally, the *Haggadah* even in its most fixed forms has left small spaces for elaboration or *midrash*. Because of the wealth of historical material to be drawn upon, and new notions of the *Haggadah*, which permit even greater improvisation, the number of *Haggadot* seems almost infinite.\(^{46}\) The textual tradition that has yet been adequately explored, includes both *Haggadot* and commentaries from as early as the 10\(^{\text{th}}\) century in Saadia Gaon’s prayer book\(^{F}\), Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* in the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) century and Rashi’s works in the 13\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Rabbi Ben Asher’s *Tur* in the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) century and Rabbi Joseph Caro’s *Shulkan Aruch*, and many more, including various smaller texts from the Cairo Genizah. These *Haggadot* are usually understood as having predecessors in the centuries between the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud, but much is still uncertain.\(^{47}\) It does seem evident, however, that it was in this intervening period that much of the *Haggadah* and the accompanying ritual became fixed, and the notion of a proper observance as one which held most closely to the tradition became entrenched.

\(^{46}\) In its forward, the *New American Haggadah* discusses the importance of “engaging everyone at the table” as justification for the constant and infinite innovation of *Haggadot*. The liturgy must reflect the participants in order to maintain relevance, in their words, “the *Haggadah* is our book of living memory.” Foer et al., *New American Haggadah*, v.

\(^{47}\) Heinrich Guggenheimer argues that the *Haggadah* was a fixed text during the time of the Second Temple, and claims that the rabbinic texts do not reproduce it in full because they presuppose it, or assume its existence. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Oriental Versions* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1995), 183. While I do not find this argument convincing, Guggenheimer is far more acquainted with the primary sources, so his opinion should be noted.
The variety of practice of Passover even after the preservation of the *Haggadah* is still remarkable and should under no circumstances be underestimated. However, in many cases, the differences that arise in the Middle Ages and continue up until the current moment in communities that view themselves as faithfully maintaining tradition are of a different sort than some of the innovations that we will discuss. There is certainly a difference of degree in many Passover commemorations spanning the spectrums of Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox, but there are also seems to be a difference in kind with regard to some of the most recent innovations, specifically those which ritualize social causes not directly related to Jewish suffering throughout history such as civil rights, feminism, and LGBTQ issues, and the challenge to the historicity of the biblical text upon which the ritual is built. The endless differences in observance that we see in Passover celebrations all over the world are often the result of geography, as we see differences in palette and culture influence the *Seder* plate. This type of variety seems permissible in traditional communities, while the shifts in understanding about historicity and inclusion of more broad social contexts are often shouted down as heretical and attacked viscously. These new and radical shifts in the commemoration of Passover still maintain, for those who willingly participate in them, a meaning-making capacity equal to that experienced by traditional celebrants in their own commemorations, and both

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48 Jews are obviously victims of racism, sexism, and other discrimination from having membership in these other communities as well, it is important however to note that these groups include members who are not Jewish, which is the point of departure from the more traditional narrative which focuses more on the Jewish experience, and less on wider social justice causes which include Jews and non-Jews alike.
groups experience meaning to a higher capacity in their own observances, while they find little or no meaning if forced to participate in the other.

Another development in Passover observance that places a sharp contrast between the modern and traditional observances is the inclusion of feminist and other social concerns into the ritual. In addition to Seder organized and attended by well-known feminists, conducted around an explicitly feminist Haggadah, more mainstream observances have begun to include elements which draw attention to feminist concerns, as well as other social issues. The inclusion of Miriam’s Cup, to honor Miriam’s contribution to the Exodus is but one example of a ritual innovation began by feminist activists that have made a diaspora into many Conservative and Reform Seders. For these observants, the plight of women is easily included into the ritual framework under the aegis of oppression and liberation, though not in a traditional sense. This widening allegory of oppression and liberation is also taken by LGBTQ activists, and in many

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49 For an example of such a Seder, see the 1976 meal held in New York’s Upper West Side, referenced in Hoffman and Arnow, My People’s Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1, 71. A version of the Haggadah of this Seder was later published, see E. M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod, The Women’s Haggadah ([San Francisco, Calif.]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

50 An observation also made by Wendy Zierler in her essay “Where Have All the Women Gone” located in Hoffman and Arnow, My People’s Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1, 71-7. She even goes on to note some notable advances in Orthodox circles, acknowledging the role of Jewish women past and present, and attempting to increase their participation in the ritual.

51 Ibid., 72.
cases, similar ritual innovations have been undertaken, such as an inclusion of an orange on the *Seder* plate\textsuperscript{52} to symbolize their experience of oppression and hope of liberation.\textsuperscript{53}

In comparison to these however we must discuss the addition of the fourth *matzah*, an innovation that did make its way into more traditional observances, and perhaps discuss some differences. The addition of the fourth *matzah* occurred in the 1970’s and 80’s, contemporary with some of the other *k’arah* innovations, and it was meant to raise awareness of the experience of Jews in the Soviet Union during this time. The “*matzah* of hope” drew attention to the oppression and promised liberation with respect to Jews in the former Soviet Union, many of whom subsequently fled. Some commemorations maintain this practice, with the fourth *matzah* symbolizing the global struggle against slavery.\textsuperscript{54} While the continued general symbolism that is continued is indicative of the more modern form, the spread of the practice into some more traditional observances is due to the fact that the traditional paradigm allows for the greater application to issues affecting the entire Jewish community, and their particular communities as well. Other examples are the inclusion of the Holocaust and the struggle

\textsuperscript{52} This ritual feature is also often given in the context of feminist solidarity, and will discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{53} For an example of a feminist *Haggadah* that also includes LGBTQ concerns see Tamara Cohen and Ma’yan, *The Journey Continues : The Ma’yan Passover Haggadah = Hagadat Pesah Shel Ma’yan* ([New York]: Ma’yan, the Jewish Women’s Project, 2002).

\textsuperscript{54} Hoffman and Arnow, *My People’s Passover Haggadah. Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries Volume 1 Volume 1*. 
to maintain the State of Israel, both of which are commonly invoked in the traditional paradigm.

The examples of modern innovations or ritualizations in the *Seder* and *Haggadot* stand within the tradition of temporal relativity inherent in all forms of Passover; however, since the ritual has become more frozen in traditional observances, they stand outside of what many Jews would consider permissible, even within a framework that seemed to encourage improvisation. Beneath these examples, and possibly as a cause for them, is the belief or rather hermeneutic of many modern groups and individuals that the Biblical text is a human production, influenced by factors such as homophobia and patriarchal interest. This hermeneutic permits these innovations as the text is viewed both as flawed and correctible while also still being valuable and worth correcting in these ways. This hermeneutic is often a result of the scholarship that shows the historical context and composition of the Torah and Hebrew Bible, and this scholarship will also serve as a foundational piece in the final innovation introduced here, that of David Wolpe.

During his Passover service in 2001, Rabbi David Wolpe of the Sinai Temple in Los Angeles announced to his congregation that there was no reliable evidence that the Exodus, as described in the Hebrew Bible, had taken place.\(^{55}\) Over the past half-century, many Reform and Conservative Jews have begun to acknowledge publicly that they do not believe the Exodus event to be historical. Critical biblical traditions have looked with

skepticism on the events of the Torah generally for several centuries as a result of critical biblical scholarship and following the birth of the Reform movement. Yet, the Reform and Conservative communities—comprising the vast majority of North American Jews—continue to celebrate the holiday of Passover. This type of Passover observance is characterized in this research as having a “fictional” opinion of the Haggadah and sources contained within it. That skepticism could, and has for many Jews, have the effect of completely eroding the ritual, as if the foundation was suddenly rendered as sand and subsequently washed away. However, in light of this view of the text, promulgated for several centuries before Wolpe’s pronouncement, the ritual survives and so does its meaning for many of those who participate in it.

Neil Gilman describes the possible impact of modern scholarship: “For many of us, the traditional set of images that characterized Judaism from antiquity on has been irreparably shattered. The new individualism, our historical awareness, and the critical temper of our time have done their work. The belief system that our ancestors carried with them—and that carried them through to modernity—doesn’t work for us.”

Confronted with the same facts as Wolpe and countless other Jews, Gilman recognizes that a change must take place, in response to historical criticism, “it is tempting to conclude that the entire fabric of religion is a human fiction—a useful fiction perhaps, but

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a fiction nonetheless, and thus to be rejected by sophisticated modern Jews.”57 But like Wolpe, Gilman does not advocate the abandonment of tradition, but rather a new practice built on the old—or rather that “we must refashion our new tablets precisely out of the fragments of the old.”58 A few examples of this refashioning, and the way in which the meaning of Passover is both maintained and refashioned will be discussed in the following chapter, a case study of commemorations of Passover characterized by radical innovation.

57 Ibid., 227.

58 Ibid., xxv.
CHAPTER 4
PASSOVER: A CASE STUDY

Having discussed several modes of commemoration of Passover which have at their foundation the view that the text is not historically reliable, we can examine how a "fictional" event or an event with a debatable history can be constitutive of communal, historical identity by returning to the ritual framework of theorists like Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and Catherine Bell. The holiday of Passover serves as a useful analytical tool for this research because it incorporates many of the ritual elements discussed in the theoretical portion of this research. Beyond that, the more modern metaphorical understandings of Passover provide a nuanced ritual fiction, and serve as a case study for a fictional ritual script guiding practitioners through a rite of passage. What I refer to in my designation of the script as fictional refers to the belief by some Jews that, on some level, the Exodus as narrated in the bible is not apodictic and therefore the script utilized in the ritual is "fictional." This research neither takes a position on the historicity of the Exodus nor is it concerned with arguing for or against a more metaphorical understanding. The celebration of the holiday in this manner simply illustrates the efficacy of ritual structure around a script some of the participants believe to be fictional, or at least not entirely accurate, and the persistence of ritual force and structure in the absence of a historical belief on the part of the participants.

This more recent phase of ritual celebration of Pesach, or Passover, in North American Judaism is proclaimed by the public statement of Rabbi David Wolpe. He proclaimed that there was no reliable evidence to support the biblical account of the
Exodus. Wolpe’s pronouncement was followed by several articles, published in print and on various electronic platforms, and an article in Reform Judaism magazine in which he laid out his case for being skeptical towards the biblical Exodus account.\textsuperscript{59} What is more surprising than Wolpe's initial statement, is his very next claim, that it does not matter whether or not the Exodus happened in the way that the Bible says it does.\textsuperscript{60} The Sinai Temple in Los Angeles is said to be both the oldest and largest Conservative synagogue in the city, and is attended by members of each of the largest groups of Judaism. Rabbi David Wolpe himself has been named by \textit{Newsweek} as the most influential pulpit rabbi in America multiple times. These facts converge to illustrate the gravity of his proclamation on the historicity of the Exodus event, and the influence that it has had, and will continue to have on American Judaism. The shocking effect seems to be by his own design—he gave the comments in a Passover service—though he may have created something he could not control. There are two key caveats to the invocation of Wolpe’s statement in

\textsuperscript{59} Dr. R. E. Friedman wrote an article some years later in response to Wolpe (http://www.reformjudaism.org/exodus-not-fiction) and his argument against an historical Exodus. Friedman has a response to the evidence cited, and also an alternative explanation for the Exodus, that the tribe of the Levites were slaves in Egypt and their narrative was later adopted by the entire nation. What is most interesting is that both scholars are in agreement that the biblical narrative as it stands, is not a factual representation of the historical reality. So in either case, the fictional or less than historical aspect of the script remains.

\textsuperscript{60} It is immediately difficult for someone from a Protestant Christian background to understand this notion. First because of iconoclasm of Protestantism that devalued and continues to devalue ritual in toto, and the equally foreign notion that a ritual already perceived as superfluous would not suffer further loss of utility by the loss of a strong tie to history. The modern position of Wolpe and others that values ritual over belief is fundamentally different from members both within their faith group, and to other religious parties’ approach to the dichotomy of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
this discussion. First, that while Wolpe is one of the most influential rabbis in Conservative Judaism, he by no means speaks for all Conservative Jews, many of whom responded with outrage to his claim. Second, it is important to remember that Reform Judaism has been critical of the historical accuracy of the Hebrew Bible for centuries, along with other prominent Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews well before 2001. These two facts are necessary to an accurate perspective on the practice of Judaism, but do not diminish the importance and impact of Rabbi Wolpe's statement. That a Jewish person would have this perspective on Passover in 2001 is not surprising at all; that a Conservative rabbi would proclaim such a perspective in the midst of Passover celebration was quite shocking, and was likely intended to be so.

With respect to different forms of Passover celebration, the specifics of the ritual have a differing level of importance, but celebration of Passover particularly through the *Seder* is on the most unifying elements of Judaism. According to the National Jewish Population Study 2000-01, conducted in the United States in the year prior to Wolpe’s proclamation, 67% of respondents hold or attend a *Seder*.\(^{61}\) Compare this to the fact that only 46% belong to a synagogue and 27% attest to attending a religious service monthly or more and you will begin to grasp the centrality of Passover.\(^{62}\) In the case of the


\(^{62}\) In this respect Passover attendance is similar to what are referred to as ACME Christians in Christianity: Always Christmas Maybe Easter.
traditional celebration, only the most absolute adherence to the minutest details constitutes a proper ritual observance.\textsuperscript{63} This reflection is important because in the traditional sense and to the traditional practitioners, a fictional, or less than inerrant view of the text would absolutely invalidate the ritual, even more egregiously than the presence of leavened bread within the festival period. According to their view, only the most precise observance is pleasing to God, and adheres to his commandments to celebrate and remember. This means that this type of exacting celebration would suffer a loss of meaning in light of Wolpe’s assertion, because the precise fulfillment of the ritual would be emptied of meaning by a metaphorical interpretation.\textsuperscript{64} We should not be surprised by the alarm raised in response to Wolpe’s comment, because of the effect that they would have on an adherent whose entire system of beliefs would be in danger of erosion. The traditional celebrants meaning from the ritual would be lost in this sense. A Jewish person seeking to commemorate the ritual in a metaphorical fashion, or perhaps simply out of a nostalgic impulse, which is also true for many Jews today, would not find

\textsuperscript{63} I want to take an opportunity to reiterate what I stated in the introduction that the dichotomy utilized here of a “traditional” versus “modern” celebration is false, but is used hermeneutically, and to allow for a more detailed discussion. In reality, few celebrations of Passover would fit neatly into the categories presented here, but would rather possess elements of both. The Hasidim in particular defy categorization, because while they are traditionally pictured on the more traditional end of the spectrum, the mysticism of their practices would gladly embrace the subversion that is characteristic of the modern celebrations, though perhaps in different ways.

\textsuperscript{64} This in no way removes deviation from the scope of traditional observances, but rather creates a separate criteria by which they are permitted. Examples of Seder’s celebrated in concentration camps and on battlefields, as well as the fourth matzah stand as examples of deviations embraced and accepted at all points of the spectrum of practice.
meaning in a type of celebration that adhered to the most strict degree of celebration. The need for being exact is illustrated by Rabbi Soloveitchik. He claims that the Torah both generally and in regard to the Seder “is concerned with the single ‘trivial’ act; everything is quantified and exactly determined.” It is exactness, precision, that connotes meaning in the traditional experience, and metaphor in the modern experience. This shows that while meaning is retained in a fictional ritual script that meaning can be of a different type than the meaning experienced by more literal adherents. We can see more evidence of this in the example given by Ruth Fredman Cernea: “The learned Orthodox Jew, who reads the Torah through each year and studies the Talmud, will draw on a wealth of associations denied the secularized Jew. Although these rich, multivocal allusions will be lost to the less formally educated Jew, their replaced by referents from contemporary life that somehow seem to ‘fit’ the mood of the Seder.” What exactly is brought in from outside to “fit” in the Seder will vary, and some examples will be given below.

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66 Many of the same constructs of meaning are available to the reader of fiction literature as they are to the religious adherent, but there are different modes and experiences of meaning for each. The analogy is intended to draw our focus to what be gained from the comparison, not to obscure distinction that may lie between them. For some scholars, religious myth already functions as a metaphor or parable in the same sense as fiction. Such scholars will already have available to them much of what this research hopes to accomplish: which is to elevate the status of fiction literature in the discipline of religious studies for those who have previously excluded it from the scope of their scholarship.

Of particular interest to this paper, is how the rituals surrounding the celebration of Passover are preserved in light of stated disbelief in the historical event. According to Rabbi Wolpe, the loss or revision of the historical event is no loss at all, because the spirit and essence of the ritual are preserved in its celebration. For Wolpe and many other Jews, the essence of the ritual is identifying injustice, and the existence of injustice is certainly not in doubt. The most important element in the survival of the Passover rituals is the element that Victor Turner termed *communitas*. The *communitas* is the state of the individual in relationship to his or her community upon entrance into the ritual, or the *limen*. We can see the importance of *communitas* in all Passover celebrations in the statement that “the *Seder* celebrates the creation of culture itself.”\(^6^8\) Generally, the state of *communitas* is marked by the suspension of the structures of society that exist outside the *limen*. In this heightened state of experience and relationship, each individual identity present in the liminal state converges with every other identity. We can see this in a description of the *Seder* as “celebrated by a community within which one shares not only one’s material goods, but also one’s selfhood, spiritual treasures, knowledge, experiences, aspirations, and hopes.”\(^6^9\) That which distinguishes the practitioners of the ritual from each other is removed. This effect is evident in the Passover *Seder* with the clear and explicit statement “WE were slaves to the Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD

\(^{6^8}\) Ibid., 75.

brought US out Egypt with a mighty hand.” The ritual intends to present the table community itself as having been delivered from slavery in Egypt.

There are several examples of aspects that place the observant in the original historical context other than the verbal attestations that “WE were slaves in Egypt.” These include but are not limited to the consumption of unleavened bread and abstaining from any leavened bread throughout the duration of the Passover period,70 and the consumption of other symbolic foods, both sweet and bitter, to symbolize the joy and bitterness of the Hebrews who experience slavery and deliverance. The food, text, posture, and songs are all meant to establish a connection between the practitioner and the historical event, recreating, or returning in an Eliaden sense to the original moment of slavery and deliverance narrated in the Torah and elaborated on in rabbinic sources. Like other Jewish festivals, Passover has a close connection with the cultic and civil history of the Jewish people, so the idea that the meaning of the ritual can be retained once the grip on that history is loosened is remarkable indeed. The Passover ritual is characterized by multiple experiences that intend to recreate the conditions of the historical bondage and deliverance.

In the modern celebrations of Passover we not only have an example of *communitas*, but also of Mircea Eliade’s eternal return. The *communitas* forged in the traditional re-experiencing of the Exodus event is obvious. What is more difficult to see

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70 The etiology provided for this is that Hebrews did not have time to wait for their bread to rise when they fled Egypt.
is how this remains in the form of celebration characterized by the sentiments of David Wolpe. He asserts that the message, or essence, of the ritual remains, whether “3 or 3 million individuals left [Egypt].” He is acknowledging the accessibility of the *communitas* to individuals and groups of celebrants, and the re-experiencing of an event independent of a historical reality. Wolpe does not go into theoretical detail as to how these aspects of the ritual are still successful independent of a factual history, but we can draw on some examples from modern Passover celebrations to illustrate this.

A fascinating example of this deviation from orthodox in the ritual is the inclusion of an orange on the *Seder* plate. The *Seder* meal is a carefully prescribed meal, involving specific elements prepared specifically for the occasion and consumed in a particular order, and the “traditional” *Seder* does not include an orange. There has of course been an evolution of the “traditional” *Seder* as well, and to act as if the ritual as observed by the most orthodox Jews is untouched by history would be to accept their position uncritically. However, the evolution of the traditional *Seder* plate illustrates differences both of degree and of kind to the more radical shifts at the other end of the spectrum. The inclusion of oranges on the *Seder* plate by many modern Jews Reform and otherwise is generally seen

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as a show of support for feminism, particularly its advancement in Judaism.\footnote{Quite interestingly, some trace the orange on the Seder plate as originating in Odessa, and as a development simply of climate and palette and not ideology. If this is the case, then once again a historical tie is lost in a ritual practice as many contend that the aphorisms mentioned later never occurred, but the intentions of the practitioners in placing the orange on their plate are ritualizing the action into an entirely different framework.} Another display of feminist concerns is the placing of Miriam’s Cup on the Seder plate.\footnote{Judith Lewin analyzes instances of women actualizing Jewish ritual with their feminist concerns in ""Diving into the Wreck": Binding Oneself to Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Women’s Fiction," Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies 26, no. 3 (2009): 52.}

According to some sources, the original placing of an orange on the Seder plate is also in the context of greater inclusion of the gay and lesbian community. In both cases, the tradition is said to emanate from an anecdote about a pronouncement by a very traditional Jewish rabbi (read Orthodox). In the first instance, this person is said to have proclaimed that a woman belongs in the pulpit like an orange belongs on the Seder plate, meaning it has no place. Many Jews include an orange on their Seder plate to show their support for women in the rabbinate. A similar etiology is that someone proclaimed that lesbians in Judaism are like a bread crust on the Seder plate, and rather than include the bread crust, and invalidate the cleansing of the chametz, someone chose to include the orange. This practice that may have originated with respect to a comment on lesbians in Judaism grew to symbolize both feminist and LGBTQ issues in Judaism, and in general. This example illustrates the capacity of modern Jews not only to expand the metaphorical application of the ritual, but actually to reshape and change the ritual to reflect their
personal concerns and to address issues not necessarily invoked in the original ritual script. To these observers, such issues are in view due to their own interpretation of oppression in their current age. They retain the effect and establishment of forging *communitas*, but are not returning to the same historical reality as their more traditional counterparts, but rather are placing themselves in solidarity with sufferers of injustice both contemporary and historical. This *communitas* is quite similar to that which is formed around pieces of fiction, where the reader is locating him or herself in a metaphorical rite of passage with other readers through the collective consumption of a text.

Another aspect of ritual explored here is Catherine Bell’s concept of *ritualization*. For Bell, the term ritualization is developed along with other terminology to define what characteristics define an action as ritualized, presuming that there are actions, religious or otherwise, that are not. As we stated in Chapter 2, Bell believes it is the context of the ritual and the action itself that assert its ritual status rather than adherence to external formulae. Ritual action is signified as such in the ways that the particular action differentiates itself from other acts within the culture. This power of signification that Bell assigns to the ritual act and the cultural context are not jeopardized by the suspension of belief in the historical event of the Exodus. The intentional entrance into the ritual space, and execution of the ritual action is sufficient for the individual to *ritualize* his or her observance in spite of their departure from the traditional narrative concerning the historical circumstances. Participants in the ritual determine their own placement in the ritual field and have the agency to remove relevance from particular
aspects of the ritual, such as strict adherence to the *Haggadah*; they may emphasize meaning in other areas of the ritual beyond that which is experienced by more traditional practitioners. They exert a ritualizing force over what others might characterize as an otherwise meaningless ritual, once the common connection to the history of the community has been lost. The power of the individual to ritualize action is clearly present in these modern celebrations of Passover, just as it is in the consumption of fiction literature.

Bell's ritualization affords an agency to the individual to ritualize nearly any action, so long as the individual undertakes the process of ritualization with the proper intention and in the proper context. While this theory of Bell enlarges the category of ritual beyond logical use, we can observe ritualization with respect to Passover, in that the religious context is preserved, and the notion of bondage or slavery is either relativized or abstracted. This is a sharp departure from other celebrations where the victimhood of slavery is the identity the community is being driven toward, followed by the feeling of freedom and deliverance and also in some cases vengeance. The potential for variety in meaning making within the Passover ritual is astounding. It is quite

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74 The abstraction would certainly stand as an obstacle to many Jews, in fact, in response to Wolpe's Passover sermon, a Jewish radio personality proclaimed that “If the Exodus did not occur, there is no Judaism.

75 In many cases, recent editions omit the mention of vengeance in the *Sh'fokh Hamatkha*. For further discussion of this prayer given with the third cup see David Arnow, "Shfokh Hamatkha in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael and the Passover Haggadah: A Search for Origins and Meaning," *coj Conservative Judaism* 65, no. 1 (2013): 32-54.
common in Reform celebrations of Passover to incorporate many aspects of social justice and to dwell and to reflect on those as metaphorically present in the slavery in Egypt. Many Orthodox commemorations honor a metaphorical observance in that they will also actualize events of injustice and subjugation from Jewish history, particularly the Holocaust and subsequent struggles of the State of Israel. While modern celebrants may not retain the historical understanding of the Exodus, they acknowledge the temporality present in the ritual as Cernea notes, “The Seder works with time on many levels, presenting the Exodus from Egypt as a historical event as well as a paradigmatic sequence explaining the experience of the Jew for all times… The Exodus is both history and myth.”76 The return of every Jew to the experience of slavery of Egypt is an opportunity to reflect on oppression throughout time. This type of a conceptualization can be seen in the Tikkun Passover supplement which states that Passover along with other spring religious holidays contain the insight that “rebirth, renewal, and transformation are possible, and that we are not stuck in the dark, cold, and deadly energies of winter. Judaism builds on that universal experience and adds another dimension; it suggests that the class structure (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, or neoliberal imperialism) can be overcome, and that we as human beings, created in the image of the Transformative Power of the Universe (God), can create a world based on love, generosity, and nonviolence.”77

76 Cernea, The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile, 95.

It is quite interesting that in both forms of celebration a metaphorical condition is taken up, though it is utilized differently. Orthodox Jews and other more traditional celebrants often do not extend the oppression beyond the experience of Jews throughout history. The application of Passover to general causes of social justice, such as civil rights, or even LGBTQ issues is a phenomenon not likely to occur in more traditional observances. Among other things, this could be a product of the fact, that while an allegorical interpretation is sometimes permitted to the Orthodox, as in the example of the fourth matzah,\(^{78}\) is has a more limited scope, as a result of a more limited allegory.\(^{79}\)

The holiday of Passover is one that carefully and painstakingly guides the participant through the rite of passage and the formation of meaning both generally and specifically. Though there is great variety in the celebration of Passover, both throughout history and across the spectrum of Judaism, the essential meaning to which the participant is guided is remarkably consistent. Even the more modern metaphorical or “fictional” commemorations of the holiday still focus in on the ideas of injustice and oppression juxtaposed with liberation and freedom. The centrality and importance of the holiday of Passover means that it is commemorated in spite of a wide range of perspectives on the historicity of the Torah, and specifically the Exodus. The concepts of

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\(^{78}\) This is referring to the inclusion of the fourth matzah, honoring the struggle of Soviet Jews, discussed on page 34.

\(^{79}\) As stated above, this traditional allegory permits the inclusion of modern developments in Jewish history such as the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel, in fact “permit” may leave a false impression as nearly every Haggadah regardless of sect addresses these two issues. Bradshaw and Hoffman, *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, 197.
communitas and ritualization are two ritual aspects that survive in the celebration of Passover, despite historical criticism of the Exodus. The success of these concepts in modern ritual observance illustrates the power of ritual to assert itself, and the presence of that signifying power beyond the traditional definitions or ritual and ritualized action.
CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

This research was intended to achieve the result of firmly ensconcing the study of fiction literature within the realm of religious studies. I have attempted to show that a framework constructed from ritual studies scholarship can be applied to fiction by invoking examples from the *Harry Potter* series and also through the use of mid-point in the case of a religious ritual which has taken on a fictional element in modern commemorations. If this research were to continue, the first step would be to begin utilizing the framework constructed here to closely analyze the ritual elements of communities around a particular piece of fiction literature, probably *Harry Potter*, and also to collect evidence showing its efficacy to the works of other authors. Future research might also include a more thorough exploration of innovations in Passover celebration to continue to develop the comparison between ritual observance of fiction literature and ritual survival in light of historical skepticism of religious texts.

This research does not contain a full look at these ritual elements in the case of fiction literature or Passover celebrations, but rather hopes to justify the validity of future research by establishing the practice as having potential, or presenting the field as ripe for the harvest. This thesis also does not purport to give a full history of Passover and its origins, which has been attempted but to date no work has succeeded in summarizing both the ancient, medieval, and modern elements of Passover. I hope to have contributed to the exploration of more recent developments, while scholars of the ancient will no doubt find my work lacking with respect to the earliest phases of development. Further
exploration of the history of Passover could continue to entrench it as the ideal religious ritual for this research, as it seems to be especially situated in the realm of both tradition and innovation, and carry a particular concern for history. This concern of the holiday, juxtaposed against the recent re-imaginings of the Exodus story yields fascinating data on the notion of ritual survivals and the cognitive dissonance, or misrecognition present in the religious ritual. I believe that my research, in highlighting the holiday of Passover has shed light on both ritual studies and religion and literature by questioning the boundaries that have been drawn around these disciplines, and questioning what constitutes myth and how we define fiction or even literature. By encountering these issues the distinctions that I had placed between the categories of texts has become blurred, but I remain convinced that differences still exist. Comparisons can accentuate commonalties and obscure differences, and while I hope to have accomplished both in some regard, the categories of texts remain useful, and the differences remain evident but at least in my mind the barriers that had prevented me from reflecting on these issues have been lowered.
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