Engaging the characters of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 2, Angeline M.G. Song describes her book as a “tapestry” in which “the various ‘threads’ are interwoven together into a new pattern” (p. 5). Those distinct threads consist of her autobiography (Chapter One), empathy as a hermeneutical lens (Chapter Two), postcolonialism as a theoretical framework (Chapter Three), and focalization as a methodology (Chapter Four). Song ultimately brings these conceptual and theoretical tools together in the actual interpretation of the text (Chapters Five and Six). Her book is a process of reading, or better, a performance of interpretation.

Chapter One contains the author's autobiography, which not only parallels the Exodus 2 narrative, but is also the source of her twofold hermeneutical lens of empathy and postcolonialism. Song grew up as a Malay-Chinese (“Peranakan”) female adoptee in post-independent Singapore and has lived as a member of a minoritized race in New Zealand and France. As “one's sense of empathy is shaped by one's own personality, social location, and life experiences” (p. 59), it is this postcolonial context that leads her to find a strong empathic connection with both Moses as an adoptee and Miriam as a female subject living in the shadow of empire.

Chapter Two explores a hermeneutic of empathy by bringing insight from the recent discovery of neuroscience that an empathic consciousness is not only innate in every person but also can be nurtured. Song argues that such empathy, particularly with literary characters, is involved in the reading process. Thus, her empathy-driven reading helps her perceive unspoken feelings and intentions of the biblical characters; doing so also deepens her engagement with her Self.

Chapter Three examines postcolonial studies in general (including figures such as Memmi, Fanon, Said, and Bhabha) and postcolonial biblical criticism in particular (Segovia and Sugirtharajah). Song's empathic reading not only applies to the text but also transforms her framework for interpretation. Her empathy enfleshes postcolonial theories and this in turn inspires her practice of interpretation. More specifically, through Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence, she comes to identify herself as a postcolonial “mimic” woman. She experiences this process of acknowledgment as decolonizing her own heart of darkness (p. 105). Further, she formulates her own postcolonial optic of Sang Kancil, the little mouse deer in Malay and Indonesian folktales. This trickster character utilizes her wits and thereby survives and thrives in the wild

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jungle. Just like the mouse deer, Song creates in her book the *Sang Kancil* post-colonial interpretive space in which significant issues such as identity, race, culture, belonging, and displacement are raised and explored.

In Chapter Four, Song adopts Mieke Bal’s focalization methodology, arguing that this method reinforces both her empathic reading and postcolonial criticism. As focalization involves the viewpoint of a narrator or a character (the “focalizer”), focalization draws the reader toward empathy with the focalizer, especially with the narrator who holds the most reliable point of view in the narrative. However, since focalization power is not evenly distributed, postcolonial criticism is useful to illuminate power relations in the text and in the act of reading.

Appropriating the focalization theory in her verse-by-verse analysis of Exodus 2 in Chapter Five, Song is consistently concerned with several questions in each narrative instance: Who acts? Who sees? Who is seen? And how various levels of focalization affect her reading? While Song is explicit that her empathy is being manipulated through focalization strategies inherent within the text, it seems to me that she is actually the one who determines who focalizes, how the narrator or character focalizes, and more importantly, how her empathy affects focalization strategies. Her empathy already operates in her meticulous textual analysis of the text in this chapter. In other words, her empathy does not operate after her textual analysis as only a second-step interpretive procedure.

In Chapter Six, Song integrates her empathic reading with a postcolonial optic, as well as her autobiography, into the focalization interpretation of the text. She reflects upon her empathic engagement with Moses and Miriam. Just like Song herself, Moses starts his life as an adoptee, grows as an Egyptian “mimic” man, and crosses borders multiple times. Although Miriam looks to adopt a subservient demeanor, this slave girl is ingenious enough to utilize the “pragmatic prowess of the powerless” in the colonial game and save her brother (p. 203). Such an empathic reading is possible through not only analyzing focalization techniques but also filling the narrative gaps and silences by attending to inner thoughts and feelings of the characters.

Some readers may feel that her use of theories is overdone, especially when she develops a new “toolkit” of focalization in the fourth chapter. My empathic reading of Song’s book, however, leads me to observe the motivation and quality of performance in her interpretation as a postcolonial woman’s mimicry. When a female critic uses empathy as a hermeneutical lens to read biblical characters, it is sometimes assumed that such a reading lacks theoretical and methodological rigor. This assumption is based on the false presumption that the postcolonial woman is emotionally attached, weak, and irrational.