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Review Essay **THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE**

The Literary Guide to the Bible, ROBERT ALTER and FRANK KERMODE, eds. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987).

One of the dominant trends in biblical scholarship of recent years has been the so-called “literary” approach, the attempt to deal with the works included in the Bible in a manner and with a methodology similar to those which are applied to other works of literature.¹ Unlike most earlier and a good deal of contemporary biblical research, which begins with the text as fragmented into its hypothetical sources, or whose goal is the discovery of those sources, the starting point of this approach is generally the biblical text as it appears.² Questions are directed at the text which never concerned scholars of an earlier generation: what are the esthetic principles which inform the text? How does the text cohere as a literary entity? What are the devices which the author employs in the production of his work which make it successful or unsuccessful from a literary perspective? The earliest studies focused primarily on small units of biblical poetry, like individual Psalms, where the esthetic dimension is more obvious, and later turned their attention to biblical prose narrative as well.³

In this process, the trends in general literary theory and criticism have also had their effect on the formerly insular area of biblical scholarship. Literary theory is far from monolithic in methodology, and the Bible, like other “great” works of literature, has been subjected to the readings of structuralists, post-structuralists, and deconstructionists, not to mention the no longer novel New Critics. Marxists and feminists, operating under the rubric of literary criticism, have also applied their critical templates to the method and message of the Bible. The diverse bibliography on “The Bible as Literature,” however that is to be defined, is vast and growing rapidly.

Traditional biblical scholars, both those who view the Bible only through the eyes of a religious tradition as well as those who have sub-

stituted for that tradition an inflexible academic dogma, have had to deal with the "new" data and methodology presented by proponents of the literary approaches. Many conservative critics dislike the new-fangled jargon of, for example, a Meir Sternberg⁴ or a Shimon Bar Efrat,⁵ longing instead for the good old days of Wellhausenian text dissection.⁶ Traditionally committed Jewish scholars are often automatically skeptical of any innovation in biblical study, assuming, like the Arabs in the probably apocryphal story of the incineration of the Alexandrian library, that if scholarship repeats that which already exists within Jewish tradition, we do not need it, while if its insights differ from those in received tradition, we do not want it.

While I can offer no sympathy or succor to the classical Bible critic confronted with alternate ways of reading a text which he or she has determined to be unreadable because of its fundamental fragmentation, I shall attempt to clarify in this essay some of the basic misconceptions which often generate the "Orthodox" response to biblical scholarship of all kinds, and to suggest that an appropriate re-evaluation of our position might be in order. To employ R. Meir's metaphor, there is a good deal of excellent fruit which should not be thrown out because of its peel.⁷

The most serious and general issue in our response to ways of reading *Tanakh* other than the traditional ones derives from the tension between our viewing *Tanakh* as *devar Hashem*, on the one hand, and on the other hand, our sense that, to use *Hazal's* expression, *dibbera Torah bi-lshon benei adam*. How can a work which we believe is unique be evaluated, understood, criticized,⁸ read, and analyzed by means of tools which have been created for, and may therefore be suited only to, language and literature which are humanly composed? Why should God's communication with man, in all its manifold forms in *Tanakh*, conform to the "rules" of human discourse and communication?⁹ Specific literary genres and treatments raise their own problems. When dealing with a narrative text, might not the search for literary and linguistic structures which create its artistry verge on the impugning of its accuracy, particularly when dialogue is involved?¹⁰ In poetry, does the emphasis on the formal nature of the parallelism which is the dominant feature of biblical poetry somehow vitiate the meaning of the text by suggesting that the two line-halves may be saying the same thing?¹¹

The simple answer, as often, is probably the correct one, "that the Torah speaks in the language of men, because it was written for men and speaks to them. . . . It is enough for us to understand the Torah as it was understood by the generation to whom it was first given, and

this, in our opinion, is *peshuto shel mikra*.”¹² The more questions we ask about the nature of this divine communication to man, about the ways in which it communicates, the better we will come to understand it.

Having dispensed with these necessary background data, let us turn to the volume at hand. (The definite article at the beginning of the title is a bit arrogant, and the more modest “A” would have been more appropriate.) The authors of the essays are Jewish and non-Jewish; American, Israeli, and European; the editors are American and British. The approaches taken by the various authors are rather diverse, although the common adjective “literary” can probably be used to unite them. The “Bible” in the title of the work under review includes Christian Scripture as well (although not the so-called Apocrypha). My comments will be limited to the *Tanakh* material.

In the General Introduction, the editors note correctly that this work is an attempt to offer the general reader, *i.e.*, the non-specialist in biblical studies, “a new view of the Bible as a work of great literary force and authority, a work of which it is entirely credible that it should have shaped the minds and lives of intelligent men and women for two millennia and more (p. 2).” In addition to being primarily unconcerned with the goals of traditional historical scholarship, the editors assert that it should not be “supposed that we are careless of the religious character of the material under discussion simply because our aims are not theological. . . . Indeed we believe that readers who regard the Bible primarily in the light of religious faith may find instruction here along with those who wish to understand its place in a secularized culture (*ibid.*).”

The Orthodox Jewish reader, of course, may have very different reasons for reading his or her *Tanakh*, and has little need for the positivistic comments on their approach which Alter and Kermode set forth subsequently. But we should be sensitized to the motivations which lead others, who do not see the Bible as *devar Hashem* (in the way which we do), to spend time reading it, re-reading it, and reflecting upon it. We may ourselves gain from the reactions of others, if only because our own “reactions” are not so much responses, but more often externally- and traditionally-imposed reflexes. Furthermore, having been sensitized to the methods of contemporary literary readings, we may find them easy to borrow and to integrate with a traditional Jewish approach.

The non-uniform nature of the collection is stressed by the editors, who demanded only “a broad consensus of purpose as literary critics” (p. 5). Many of the schools of contemporary literary criticism are

represented, although feminist, psychoanalytical, and Marxist ideological criticism, as well as the proponents of deconstruction, a hypermodern approach which divides the text against itself, are omitted. Such omissions would be grounds for harsh criticism if the goal of the volume were to paint a comprehensive portrait of contemporary approaches to the Bible, but this selectivity probably does not create significant bias in a guide for the general reader. In fact, the apparent prejudice of the editors against overtly ideological readings makes the contents of the book much more adaptable to a traditional Jewish reader.

The amount of space allotted to, or taken up by, each biblical book is instructive of the editors' judgment and/or the state of biblical research. Works which are more "interesting" from a literary perspective were allowed more space than their relative length would otherwise have demanded.¹³ It appears that, in addition to issues of length, there was a good deal of latitude offered to each author in terms of the scope and approach of his essay, and a certain unevenness of treatment seems to have resulted. But we must admit that the "literary" treatment of any substantial biblical work cannot possibly be done within the confines of the pages allotted to it in this volume. Something will always appear to be sketchily accomplished or, worse still, omitted. Finally, we must stress that doing literary analysis or description without being able to refer to the texts under consideration except in translation or in occasional transliteration often vitiates detailed treatment or makes it completely impracticable.

Alter, who edited the Hebrew Bible section of the volume, had the unenviable task of attempting to introduce it in 25 pages, and is not thoroughly successful in doing so. In dealing with such issues as the names which the collection of books we know as *Tanakh* has borne, the time span over which it ranges, and the question of what makes the disparate works a unity, his approach cannot possibly satisfy all readers, the Orthodox Jew among them. There is so much to discuss, and so little room for detailed argumentation, that every reader, and certainly the Orthodox Jewish one, will have questions to direct at the presentation which Alter has neither the place nor the opportunity to answer. Whether the process of canonization "has created a unity among the disparate texts," as Alter would have it (p. 13), or whether a unity was present *ab initio*, Alter is correct in his reference to the allusive (I should almost say "self-referential") nature of the biblical books. When we read a text from *Tanakh*, other texts, other books, lurk beneath the surface of our memory, waiting to be summoned in analogy or contrast. This phenomenon, which has in modern criticism taken on the impressive

nomenclature “intertextuality,” has always been one of the characteristics of traditional Jewish biblical study, whether simple-sense or midrashic.

Defending the “literary” approach, Alter sets up an opposing view which claims that reading “‘the Bible as literature’ must turn it around to an odd angle from its own original emphases, which are theological, legislative, historiographic and moral,” and replies that “this opposition between literature and the really serious things collapses the moment we realize that it is the exception in any culture for literary invention to be a purely aesthetic activity” (pp. 14-15). It has been claimed that we should not strive to understand didactic works aesthetically, and, if *Tanakh* is didactic, we therefore should not treat it as literature. Alter stresses that the gravest and most earnest ideas and beliefs of the *Tanakh* are told with “a shapeliness whose subtleties we are only beginning to understand, . . . by writers with the most brilliant gifts for intimating character, defining scenes, . . . balancing near and distant episodes, just as the God-intoxicated poems of the psalmists and prophets evince a dazzling virtuosity in their arabesques of soundplay and syntax, wordplay and image” (p. 15). Once a serious reader of *Tanakh* realizes that the didactic and the aesthetic operate on different levels, that they are two of the *shiv'im panim*, that the way in which the authors of the works in *Tanakh* convey their most serious messages happens to be one which is aesthetically satisfying, challenging and even entertaining, he or she should have no difficulty in including literary methodology in his or her analytical arsenal.

But the proof of the literary approach is in its application. In any form of literary criticism, it is in the treatment of specific texts that the choice of methodology or reading strategy is most visible, and the portions of particular biblical books which are stressed by the various authors serve as implicit evidence of their approaches. Thus, Jan Fokkelman's preoccupation with the interaction between structure and close reading, evidenced in his books on *Genesis* and *Samuel*,¹⁴ typifies his discussion of *Genesis* in this volume. But his analysis of *Exodus* is of a very different sort, emphasizing broad structural issues much more than close readings and, furthermore, failing to take consideration of the legal material which is interwoven with the narrative. Similarly, the reading of *Numbers* by James Ackerman and of *Deuteronomy* by Robert Polzin focus on “literary” aspects of those texts, once again largely omitting references to the legal material contained therein.

These omissions are unsurprising, for legal material is generally not understood to be “literary” in nature, and David Damrosch actually begins his discussion of *Leviticus* with the words, “Perhaps the greatest

problem facing students of the Bible as literature is the fact that so much of the Bible is not literature at all" (p. 66). This prejudice according to 20th century literary sensibility may itself overly limit a proper reading of the biblical text "as literature." Banishing legal texts from consideration as "literature" creates an artificial distinction, since the legal material remains an integral part of the books which are considered worthy of "literary" analysis.

Damrosch's reading of *Leviticus* faces up to this, but seems based on his view that the historical (*i.e.*, source-critical) reading of the text must precede, and integrate with, the literary.¹⁵ His analysis is thus concerned simultaneously with the time at which he presumes the text to have been written and the text's symbolism. He is not concerned with the text as it stands in the *Pentateuch* between *Genesis-Exodus* on one side and *Numbers-Deuteronomy* on the other, and thus omits an essential aspect of "literary" perspective. For, whatever else the interpreter of *Leviticus* ought to do, as a "literary" reader, he or she must read it as part of the complex of texts which we call the Torah.

The best of the essays on *Nevi'im Rishonim* is that of Joel Rosenberg, whose 24 pages on *Samuel* lay out many of the major literary issues inherent in the book (a single entity for Jewish tradition, according to the *baraita* in *Bava Batra* 14b and the *ba'alei mesora*). Matters of both theme and structure are addressed, as the varied literary forms and extended stories are viewed within a single focus. The author may have striven too hard to create a theological-conceptual-literary framework to unite the disparate portions of the work, and one can certainly debate the conclusion in his final section, "The Argument of *Samuel*" (p. 141), that "*Samuel* is a work of national self-criticism," although many would agree with his verdict that "structurally and artistically, *Samuel* is the centerpiece of the Hebrew Bible's continuous historical account" (*ibid.*).

David Gunn's reading of *Joshua-Judges* attempts to establish thematic connections within and between these two books. I am not convinced, but one scholar's "literary connection" is sometimes another's "forced reading." George Savran's chapter on *Kings* deals with the book as a whole in a very sketchy fashion (as indeed the nature of *Kings* almost forces him to do), and his discussion conveys little impression of the work as a whole *qua* literature. The unevenness of these sections on *Nevi'im Rishonim* points up once again the difficulty in presenting a uniform "Literary Guide" if portions of the texts which are bound together intimately, like the Torah, or even closely, like *Nevi'im Rishonim*, are parceled out to several scholars.

Prophetic material is perhaps even more difficult than narrative to discuss “literarily,” quite apart from the problem of translation, and the treatments of *Nevi'im Aharonim* demonstrate that problem. Their prophetic dimension and their larger literary structures make them even more difficult to analyze than other, shorter, poetic texts such as individual Psalms. The best of the essays is once again Rosenberg’s, on both *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*. He gives a good sense of the contents and contexts and concentrates on the major problems of prose vs. poetry and oracles vs. biography in *Jeremiah* without losing sight of the structure of the work and its larger message. Rosenberg’s remarks on the relationship between history and symbolism in *Ezekiel* can be of real value to the student of the text. On the other hand, Luis Alonso Schkel’s treatment of *Isaiah* is interesting when dealing with the poetry of the work, but disappointing when dealing with its larger structures. Even though Rosenberg does not enlighten our readings of specific passages through analysis of their poetics, as does Schkel, we know more about *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* when we are done than we do about *Isaiah*.

The chapter devoted to “The Twelve Prophets” illustrates most clearly the difficulties in composing a “Guide” of this sort. By nature, it had to be completely discursive, unable to apply sufficient treatment to any of its individual units without detracting from the space to be allotted to the others. Thus the attempt to treat them all in a chapter was doomed to failure even under the best of circumstances. Herbert Marks’ unsystematic observations are occasionally interesting, but give no impression of an overall unity to the work (since perhaps it does not have one). That *Jonah* receives a comparatively lengthy independent treatment may be explained by its narrative nature, its “literary” accessibility, and by Ackerman’s earlier study of the book. His essay on *Jonah* is one of the better pieces in the *Guide*.

Alter wrote the chapter on Psalms, and he makes a variety of literary observations about the book, but one must remember that it is impossible to focus on very many of the 150 units in Psalms in the allotted space. Furthermore, to perform any kind of decent literary analysis on poetry without access to the original text borders on the futile. One of the most significant contributions of the literary approaches to biblical poetry is that they enable us to appreciate its aesthetic component, but such appreciation can hardly be accomplished without seeing and hearing the sounds of the original.

The single chapter on *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* by James Williams gives fine literary insight into the way in which proverbs are composed, and Williams draws on his own previously published research for the

choice of topics with which he deals. His reading of *Ecclesiastes* is sound and careful, reflecting much of the intelligent recent work on this fascinating text, but he supplies very little treatment of the book of *Proverbs* as a unit.

Moshe Greenberg's literary treatment of *Job* is, unsurprisingly, a highly literate piece. He rejects the fragmentation of *Job* into the prose-frame and the poetic dialogue, as well as the various attempts of many to reconstitute the original text by rewriting and rearranging, choosing instead to discuss the book "as we have it." Focusing on the literary problem, he guides the reader carefully through the complex argument of *Job* (at least through his reading of it) and stresses the links between the poetry and prose sections, even when, on the surface, they seem to be sending different messages. Greenberg's remarks on the poetry of *Job* are all too brief. Because they are so well thought out and formulated, I should have liked to have had more of them.

The sections on the *megillot* other than *Ecclesiastes* are not particularly strong, and, in most cases, there exist better "literary" treatments of them. Talmon's description of *Daniel* contains literary observations, but does not treat this fascinating composition in sufficient detail for the reader to get any sense for the work, either the whole or its parts. His treatments of *Ezra-Nehemiah* and of *Divrei HaYamim* can, at best, be said to describe those works without any real attempt to develop a literary approach to or portrait of the books. Indeed, the narrative aspects of these works have received much less attention than the more sophisticated narratives of *Nevi'im Rishonim* in earlier scholarship. It may be that the nature of *Ezra-Nehemiah* and *Divrei HaYamim* precludes the kind of treatment which the earlier narratives received, but that contrast could have underlined the distinction among the different types of prose narrative which the Bible contains, and could then have been employed in order to furnish valuable literary insight into all of them.

In addition to the material on each biblical book, or group of books, there are several supplemental essays appended to the volume which deal with related topics such as "The Hebrew Bible and Canaanite Literature" by Jonas Greenfield, ²l, and "Midrash and Allegory" by Gerald L. Burns. Alter himself has contributed an essay on the features of biblical Hebrew poetry. It would have been easy to produce a "literary guide to the Bible" which consisted only of this sort of essay, covering a broad range of topics in biblical studies without focusing on the individual books of the Bible. The absence, however, of any discussion on the nature of biblical Hebrew prose or narrative to balance the one

on poetry, for example, makes the principle of selection which governed this category unclear. The essay by Greenfield is an excellent piece of scholarship and quite enlightening for an understanding of one aspect of the Bible's connection to its ancient Near Eastern environment, but its limitation to Canaanite literature begs the question of why this material alone, out of the literary and historical remains of the whole Ancient Near East, was selected for treatment. Other phenomena related to literature, such as prophecy (or even law codes), could also have received individual treatment. Again, it is perhaps because poetry is "literary" that these essays were included, but not pieces on other genres and their Near Eastern parallels.¹⁶

The religious and theological neutrality of this volume, probably the result of its editors' and authors' bending over backwards to allow no dogmatic or doctrinal preconceptions to influence the various analyses, is a virtue in the view of the editorial comments cited above (p. 4), but may very well be considered a flaw by religiously committed readers of the Hebrew Bible, Orthodox Jews among them. The absence of dogma or doctrine becomes dogma and doctrine in a "New Critical" approach; some of the analysis, therefore, appears rather *pareve*. But that "fault" may itself be revealed to be a virtue. The very neutrality of some of the treatments, the absence of theological presuppositions, allows them to be borrowed, where appropriate, by the Jewishly traditional reader. The absence of controlling theological assumptions in most of the essays allows us to supply our own.

On balance, then, the volume under review is a somewhat better than fair introduction to the treatment of *Tanakh* from literary perspectives. Its main advantage lies in its comprehensiveness, although that feature also is a major deficiency in the attempt to be *tofes merubbe*. There are better introductions to this aspect of biblical study, some of which have been mentioned in the notes to this point and others which will be listed in the bibliography at the end of this review. The appended essays contribute something to the volume, but it is not always clear what their connection to "literary" is.

Of what value, then, is the collection of essays under review here to the readers of *Tradition*? It can serve as a sketch of what has been going on in biblical studies in the world outside in recent years, with a particular de-emphasis of what is usually described as "Biblical Criticism." It can show the too-frequently unsophisticated Orthodox Jewish reader of Bible that there is a side to the appreciation and understanding of *devar Hashem* which can best be comprehended when our inves-

tigation is aided by sources which, although composed outside the pale of our own tradition, are not hostile to that tradition.

But more than one reader may very well be asking whether the very presuppositions of this review do not concede too much to the volume under scrutiny and others like it. Continuing the line of questioning which we initiated above (p. 69), one may reasonably ask how the modern "literary" approach can be acceptable to Orthodoxy. Ought we to confront God's word untrammelled by centuries of Jewish biblical interpretation? Can we read *Tanakh* with our own eyes, or worse, through the eyes of non-believers, rather than through the eyes of *Hazal*, *rishonim*, and *aharonim*? Is the nexus of *Torah she-bi-khtav* and *Torah she-be-al pe* so strong that we can give no meaning to the former without the latter? Is it valuable if we derive fresh and new insights into the biblical text from approaches which are without precedent in the history of Jewish exegesis?

Or should we turn our backs on all the insights which have been gained through extra-rabbinic analysis of literary texts over the last couple of thousand years and assert that, since *Tanakh* is *sui generis*, we are exempt from subjecting it to the same scrutiny, utilizing the same tools, as, *le-havdil*, an ordinary humanly-produced literary work? What then becomes of *Hazal's dibbera Torah bi-lshon benei adam*? What of Rashbam's *peshatot ha-mit-haddeshim be-khol yom* (Torah Commentary to *Genesis* 37:2)? What of R. David Zevi Hoffmann's remarks on the nature of *peshat* cited above?

Some Orthodox biblical scholars have attempted to defend themselves against the sort of criticism we have just described by making a fetish of showing how everything which they do in scholarship was already done by the *rishonim* or *aharonim*.¹⁷ This sort of search for the *illan gadol le-bi-ttalot bo* may be valuable up to a point, and it might even be sociologically demanded at times, but it nevertheless cannot answer the real question: is *hadash asur baTorah*, is novelty forbidden in biblical interpretation? It is my strongly-held opinion that it is the intrinsic value of any approach, whether it can illuminate *devar Hashem* for us, which must govern our willingness to employ it. The fact that a famous or obscure *rishon* did what we are trying to do, or something very much like it, should not become the touchstone on which our method stands or falls. In addition, it is appropriate for us to employ the vocabulary of modern scholarship in order to analyze and clarify more precisely the comments of *Hazal*, *rishonim* and *aharonim*.

Furthermore, to claim that "literary" analysis is to be justified on

the grounds of its purported appearance in classical Jewish exegesis can be limiting in unexpected ways. For example, in discussing a talmudic statement (*Nedarim* 38) pertaining to *Deut.* 31:19, “*Kitvu lakhem et ha-shira hazot*,” equating the whole Torah with *shira*, Netsiv points out that, although the whole Torah is not written *be-lashon shel shira*, it has the nature (*teva*) and external qualities (*segula*) of poetry, consisting of rhetorical language (*dibbur bi-lshon melitsa*). He writes, “For it is known . . . that rhetoric differs from prose narrative in two areas: nature and external qualities.” By the former, Netsiv means the allusive and referential nature of poetry, which “requires the making of marginal notes that this stanza refers to one story and that stanza to another.” Netsiv asserts correctly that one who understands the process leading to this rhetorical form has far greater appreciation of poetry than one who merely tries to extrapolate from it its fundamental subject matter, “and, as a result, is liable to fanciful hypotheses which never existed and to which the poet never alluded.” The understanding of the literary form thus aids in our understanding of content.

This seems to be as powerful a recommendation for literary sensitivity in the study of *Tanakh* that we could desire. But what Netsiv offers to the modern reader with one hand, he takes back with the other, as he claims that the proper analysis of the nature and special qualities of the “song” which is Torah must lead to conclusions already documented in rabbinic sources.¹⁸ It may be that for Netsiv, embattled by the intellectual currents of the 19th century, as were R. Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg, R. Meir Leib Malbim, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and others, the importance of the perception of the literary features of *Torah she-bi-khtav* was in its linking with *Torah she-be-al pe* (and *Kabbala*).¹⁹ Those were the *peshatot ha-mit-haddeshim* for his day, but such is not the challenge of the late 20th century.

The questions which are posed to traditional Judaism by practitioners of the “literary” approach to *Tanakh* today are generally less hostile than those of the source critics, and the nature of their challenge is different from that posed by the texts and history of the ancient Near East. Like us, the non-ideological literary critics are searching for *peshat*, and if one of our goals in the study of *Torah she-bi-khtav* (perhaps the paramount one) is the attainment of *peshat*, we should be loath to reject methods which may lead to it. What literary critics can teach goes beyond a few new insights into specific biblical texts. They furnish new *ways* of reading, new categories of *peshat*, new meanings which may never have been perceived throughout the centuries of Jewish biblical

interpretation. Some of these readings may have always been there in the text, just waiting for someone to discover them as *peshat*, while others may be relegated to a significant subcategory of *derash*.

If there is nothing intrinsically objectionable about these literary approaches, then we have an obligation to utilize them when they work. Newness alone cannot disqualify any method, as each generation, standing on the shoulders of its predecessors, contributes to the study of *Torah she-bi-khtav* the *peshatot* which are *mit-haddeshim* in its day by the methods appropriate to the day. The enhancement of our appreciation of the aesthetics of *Tanakh* or a sharper perception of the dynamics of a biblical narrative, poem, or even law code, while they may not be related to *asokei shemateta a-libba de-hilkheta*, must be included in *Torah* in the larger sense.

If *Torah* possesses at least seventy facets, we not only may, but we must, employ all the methodologies and all the strategies necessary to extrapolate maximum meaning from God's word to us. To hide from a method because we are afraid of its results demonstrates weakness in our *emuna* and insecurity about the foundations of our faith. On the other hand, it is not wrong to ask what happens when our "free" reading leads us to conclusions which seem to contradict dogmas of Judaism. And the answer to that question, I believe, lies in the Jewish tradition that questions are rarely fatal. The implications of this position for the study of *Tanakh* by traditional Jews today must, however, await a future essay.²⁰

NOTES

This review was completed before the publication of Shalom Carmy's "A Room with a View, But a Room of Our Own," (*Tradition*, 28:3). Although my remarks here address certain topics with which Rabbi Carmy deals, I have, in the interests of time and space, deferred my response to his comments to another time and venue.

1. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the terms "literary" or "literary-historical" were employed for the source-critical methodologies then prevalent. The terminology was perplexing to students of modern literature for whom "literary" criticism is simply the study of literature, especially from the point of view of what in French is called *explication de textes*: the attempt to read the text in such a way as to bring out its inner coherence, the techniques of style and composition used by the author, all that makes it a piece of literary art." (John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1984), p. 20.

2. This is not to say that modern literary critics of *Tanakh* do not hold many of the same presuppositions which are made by classical source critics, but that they frequently are willing or able to ignore those standard views for the purpose of their literary analysis. As a result, their readings of and attitudes towards biblical texts are much more congenial to a traditional mind-set. At times, modern literary critics note that their analysis, if correct, undermines source-critical views which pay little or no attention to the aesthetics or literary dynamics of the biblical text.
3. A good starting point for the general reader may be found in the two books by one of the editors of this volume, Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981) and *Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985). Both have been subject to criticism, for different reasons, but nevertheless can serve as adequate models. Alter's initial contributions came in a series of articles in *Commentary*, beginning in 1975, and evoked immediate responses from students of Bible and Midrash, to many of which he responded in the book-length version. Also worthy of note is M. Weiss, *The Bible from Within* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), the first two Hebrew editions of which appeared in 1962 and 1967, and which is a valuable application of the guidelines of so-called New Criticism to biblical poetry. A noteworthy ancestor of a good deal of literary analysis of biblical narrative is E. Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," *Mimesis*, tr. W. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953; repr. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1957), pp. 1-20.
4. Sternberg is representative of a group which studies the ways in which a biblical narrative "works." His major English language contribution to the field is *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1985). Its impact on the discipline, together with that of his earlier Hebrew essays, was immediate and considerable.
5. Bar Efrat produced one of the earliest works on the artistry of biblical narrative (1st ed. Tel Aviv, 1979), but has been overlooked by many scholars because the English version did not appear until 1989 (*Narrative Art in the Bible* [JSOT Supplement 70/Bible and Literature Series 17; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989]). When it "surfaced" in the English-reading world, it seemed primitive by 1989 standards. It is, nonetheless, a solid treatment.
6. Our potential predilection for the more contemporary "literary" approaches to the study of *Tanakh* should not allow us to hide from the challenges posed by, or the valuable insights often suggested by, the best of modern biblical scholarship of the "less friendly" sort. It would be intellectually dishonest and cowardly to claim that Orthodox biblical scholars have little to gain from the critical scholarship of the last 150-200 years, but it is generally of less direct significance to the Orthodox *rav* or his *ballebatim* than to professional students of *Tanakh*. Current forms of literary analysis such as those employed in the volume under review can have greater appeal and relevance to the study of *Torah she-bi-khtav* on many levels in the broader Orthodox community.
7. In my essay, "The Orthodox Jewish Scholar and Jewish Scholarship: Duties and Dilemmas," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1991-92), 8-36, particularly "IV. Biblical Studies," pp. 20-25 and nn. 25-40, I have discussed certain aspects of these issues from a rather different perspective.

8. "Criticism" is not an inherently negative term; it is more or less synonymous with "analysis."
9. To a certain degree, this question is merely an extension of the issues regarding *peshuto shel mikra* faced by exegetes from the period of the *rishonim* and onward. Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra all subject the biblical text to analysis based on the notion that *dibbera Torah bi-lshon benei adam*. For a summary of some of the issues regarding *peshat* exegesis in the *rishonim*, see Y. Maori, "The Attitude of Classical Jewish Exegesis to Peshat and Derash and Its Implications for the Teaching of Bible Today," *Tradition* 21:3 (Fall 1984), 40-53, and U. Simon, "The Religious Significance of the *Peshat*," *Tradition* 23 (Winter 1988) 41-63. The problem, if it may be so described, generated by contemporary literary readings is tripartite: 1) it appears to come from "outside," and, as such, is automatically suspect, 2) it is systematic, where *Hazal* and *rishonim* generally are *ad hoc*, and 3) it is untrammelled by the restrictions (such as they are) which were held by even the freest of the *pash-tanim*, and is thus at liberty to reach conclusions which they would have been more than reluctant to adopt. The latter is probably the stickiest issue, as we confront the artificiality of accepting some and rejecting some of the results of an approach which does not have an overtly hostile starting point. This ambivalence has led some to a wholesale rejection of the results of the scholarly agenda on the grounds that picking and choosing in this fashion smacks of intellectual dishonesty. This argument requires careful attention.
10. Dialogue presents us with a unique sort of dilemma. To paraphrase the formulation of my colleague Rabbi Shalom Carmy, "Are we to assume that the dialogue between Moshe Rabbenu and Pharaoh really sounded like that of characters in a biblical play put on by second-grade students, especially when *Hazal* themselves often supplement and flesh out the dialogue?" Alternatively, should we presume that the form and function of dialogue is very different in Torah from what it is in dramatic literature? Furthermore, what are the ramifications of our stance on this issue to those regular expansions of biblical dialogue which we find in rabbinic literature? When we speak of truth or accuracy in the context of the reporting of historical events in *Tanakh*, what standards are we to apply to its evaluation?
11. E.g., Deuteronomy 32:1, "*Ha'azinu ha-shamayim va-adabbera // ve-tishma ha-arets imrei fi*"; Judges 5:25, "*Mayim sha'al halav natana // be-sefel addirim hikriva hem'a*"; Psalms 146:10, "*Yimlokh Hashem le-olam // Elokayikh Tsiyyon le-dor va-dor*." The repetitive nature of biblical poetry was, of course, known to the *rishonim*, and they occasionally refer to it with such phrases as *kefel ha-inyan be-millim shonot*. Whether they would go as far as modern scholars in the emphasis on the formal, as opposed to meaningful nature of parallelism is, of course, unclear. Certainly the position of Malbim, who strains to find the most subtle nuances in meaning between biblical "synonyms" in parallelistic structure and elsewhere, may be undermined seriously by the presence of parallelism as the standard form of non-biblical Near Eastern poetry. For a discussion of the history of interpretation of parallelism in biblical poetry, see the second portion of James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale, 1981), 96-314. Kugel, in the first portion of this significant work, has valu-

- able remarks on how biblical parallelism functions, which, ironically, oppose the views of the *rishonim* referred to above, as he suggests that the second half-line must go beyond the first.
12. R. David Zevi Hoffmann, *Commentary on Genesis*, translated and adapted by A. Wasserteil, (Benei Brak, 1969), p. 31 on *Genesis* 1:8. My thanks to Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot for suggesting the importance of Hoffmann's remarks, and those of Netsiv (cited towards the end of this essay) to my discussion.
 13. Torah, quite naturally, covers 66 of the 337 pages, but the allotment of ten pages to *Jonah*, in addition to the twenty-seven pages granted *Trei Asar*, is striking. And those twenty-seven are four pages more than *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* get in a single essay. Shmaryahu Talmon devotes 14 pages to the 12 chapters of *Daniel*, while *Ezra-Nehemiah* and *Divrei haYamim* receive 8 each; by contrast, the narratives of *Joshua* and *Judges* together are granted 20 pages.
 14. *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981-), three volumes out of a projected four.
 15. Cf. his *Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).
 16. Since I do not sympathize with the approach, I perhaps cannot comment objectively on Edmund Leach's structuralist essay, "Fishing for Men," which represents a very different form of analysis of the biblical material, founded on the principles of structuralist anthropology, from those in the rest of the volume. Some of his comments bear a certain resemblance to what we know as *Midrash*, but in many ways they are even more divorced from the text. Likewise, Kermode's discussion of canon is not sufficiently well-informed of Jewish traditions on the issue; his analysis shows no reference to S.Z. Leiman's important anthology of rabbinic material on the theme, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 47; Hamden: Archon, 1976).
 17. Thus Radak's comments in the Introduction to *Nevi'im Rishonim* "justify" certain aspects of lower criticism, and certain *rishonim* and *aharonim* are freer than others and than the Talmud in their discussion of the authorship and dating of biblical books.
 18. Moreover, as Rabbi Shalom Carmy remarked on an earlier draft of this essay, Netsiv's model for poetry is medieval *piyyut*, and not anything from the same cultural or chronological milieu as *Tanakh*.
 19. Netsiv's approach was certainly more subtle than my brief remarks might suggest. He certainly felt free, at times, even in halakhic material, to deviate from rabbinic midrashic interpretation in his search for *peshat*. The relationship between *peshat* and received tradition in Netsiv's commentaries requires further study.
 20. The reviewer thanks Rabbi Shalom Carmy, Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, Mr. Moshe Simon, Mr. Eitan Mayer and Ms. Judith Bernstein for their constructive comments on various drafts of this review.

APPENDIX

The Bible from literary perspectives: suggestions for further reading.

(This brief list consists only of books not referred to in the body and notes of the review. I have not included books which deal with specific books of *Tanakh* from a literary perspective or any periodical articles; to have done so would have been to make the list far too long.)

Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983).

_____, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1985).

J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

_____, and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

Dana N. Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1988).

Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979).

Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, et al., eds., *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives I & II* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974-82).

David M. Gunn and Dana N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr., eds., "Not in Heaven": *Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Regina Schwartz, ed., *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 26; 2nd edition; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).