A history of literary study of the Bible

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A HISTORY OF LITERARY STUDY
OF THE BIBLE

by

Joseph Patrick Wall

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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in
English

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ABSTRACT

Dogmatic biblical exegesis had a near monopoly until well into the modern era. Similarly, in academic circles, "biblical criticism" has invariably meant historical-critical study of the Bible. Both dogmatic and historical interpreters have read the Bible primarily for information—either about religion or history. The Bible's cognitive content has been primary. But now, in the latter part of the twentieth century, the intrinsic literary worth of the Bible is being widely noted; scholarly articles on the Bible regularly appear in standard literary journals.

The current explosion of interest in this field may lead one to suspect 'faddism.' Nothing could be further from the truth. This dissertation traces the long and distinguished history of the literary approach to the Bible. From the very beginning, literary approaches have existed alongside more dominant ones. We may say that literary study of the Bible has been a discipline-in-waiting, watching for an opportunity to be born. By all appearances, it needs wait no longer.

Given the current critical climate, perhaps literary approaches would be more accurate, for there is as yet no consensus on method. Some observers have commented on the apparently chaotic condition of modern criticism. Yet what many perceive as chaos may
be evidence of the fundamental vigor of a criticism that has for too long been suppressed by nonliterary paradigms.

After circumscribing the limits of a 'literary' approach to the Bible, this historical survey shows how literary study of the Bible is as old as the biblical writings themselves. Later biblical writers freely appropriated and reworked earlier material. During the Middle Ages, rabbinic commentary and Christian allegorical exegesis picked up on literary elements of the biblical text. Based upon the Bible's many rhetorical figures, Renaissance humanism elicited numerous defenses of biblical 'poetry.' The historical 'difficulties' highlighted by Enlightenment criticism were fundamentally literary problems. Nineteenth-century philological advances were a necessary prerequisite for contemporary literary study. Finally, the Romantic revolt inspired the 'Bible as Literature' movement, which has come to maturity in our generation.
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PREFACE

Only in our generation has literary study of the Bible attained widespread acceptance. The flowering of such study at this moment in history calls for some kind of explanation, while the flood of material that has appeared in the last two decades cries out for evaluation. The macroscopic approach of this dissertation seeks to put what is happening at present in long term perspective. As literary study of the Bible matures and gathers its bearings in the 1990's, historical surveys of various kinds will undoubtedly emerge.


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CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS LITERARY STUDY OF THE BIBLE?

The twin pillars of Western civilization rest upon two great cities: Athens and Jerusalem. But rarely have the pillars rested with equal weight. And with regard to their respective literatures, critics have taken a distinctive approach to each.

All of that is now changing. At the end of the twentieth century, the discipline of biblical studies is undergoing a major transformation. In 1974, the editor of Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives wrote in his preface,

This book is a pioneering venture into relatively uncharted territory... We feel strongly that we are opening up a new and very fruitful way of examining Scripture... We realize that this volume represents only a first step and hope that others will be encouraged to make further contributions in this area. (Gros Louis 1974, 8)

We now recognize that this claim overstates the significance of the book. But it does not overstate the significance of the literary movement within biblical scholarship of which it speaks. Only in our generation has literary study of the Bible become a self-conscious discipline, and there are good reasons for this. In the chapters which follow, it will become apparent why modern literary study of the Bible could not have developed in any earlier period.
In one sense, all study of the Bible is 'literary,' for it consists of written language ("letters") and achieves its effects just like any other book. But aesthetics is what primarily concerns us here. This artistic dimension of the Bible has been noted from time to time throughout its long history. But until recently, appreciation of literary art in the Bible has been largely unconscious, and inevitably subordinated to ideology, history, or another of the Bible's many dimensions.

Before taking a closer look at what constitutes "literary" study, the term "Bible" requires some clarification. This term, which comes from the Greek "ta biblia" ("the little books"), is really more a classification than a title. Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews all speak of 'the Bible,' but their Bibles are not the same. Some of the differences are minor, but some are not.

The Jewish or Hebrew Bible is the common denominator. It is often referred to by Jews as "tanakh," an acronym for the traditional tripartite division: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim. The Torah ("Law"—known by Christians as the "Pentateuch") consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Neviim ("Prophets") consists of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets, known by Christians simply as the "Prophets." The Ketuvim ("Writings") are everything else: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the five "Megilloth" ("scrolls"—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther), three late works partially composed in Aramaic (Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah), and, finally, 1 & 2 Chronicles, which conclude the Hebrew canonical sequence.
This Hebrew Bible, under a different arrangement, constitutes the "Old Testament" of the Protestant Bible. The Roman Catholic Bible differs from the Protestant only in that its Old Testament contains the "Apocrypha" (sometimes called the "deuterocanonical" books). These are a handful of works that were denied formal entrance into the Hebrew canon by the Jewish council of Jamnia in 90 C.E. ("Common Era," a religiously neutral term used in biblical scholarship, corresponding to the Christian "A.D."), but that were highly regarded by both Hellenistic Jews and early Christians.

For the purposes of this history, a precise definition of "Bible" will remain unnecessary. Since Israeli and other Jewish scholars have been at the forefront of modern literary study of the Bible, there is sometimes the tendency to restrict usage of the term to the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, within the English-speaking academic tradition, the Protestant Bible is the one generally selected for literary examination. Why is this? The reasons are partially historical, partially religious, and partially literary.

Perhaps the primary reason has to do with the widespread influence of the English Authorized (Kings James) Version of 1611. This has been the single most influential edition of the Bible—or of any book, for that matter—ever compiled. As a result, the Bible has come to be regarded as a masterpiece of English literature as well as a classic of world literature. Moreover, the Protestant Bible includes all the books recognized by Jews and all the books that Christians agree upon as parts of theirs. Finally, although Jews do not ordinarily attach religious significance to the New Testament, it does exhibit a striking literary continuity with the
Hebrew Bible, although by no means its inevitable completion or sole interpretive key.

Among the biblical writings one encounters myth, legend, saga, law, epic, poetry, apocalyptic, epistle, parable, proverb, gospel (a genre unique to the Bible), prophecy, and a narrative style that has only recently been shown to be highly poetic. This generic diversity is a reflection of the robustness of ancient Hebrew culture. It is also what we might expect of a work compiled over several centuries by a variety of editors from countless individual sources. The composition of the biblical material was nearly always a community effort. There was a powerful, enduring, oral tradition among the early Hebrews which was eventually written down. Some of this written tradition became the Hebrew Bible. The same oral process occurred with the New Testament gospels, although the oral stage of the tradition here was much shorter (perhaps 30 to 40 years).

Literary study of the Bible is perhaps best understood in contrast to other more traditional approaches to the Bible, and to literature in general. M.H. Abrams' The Mirror and the Lamp (1953) illustrates how the various schools of literary criticism tend to focus on one of the foregoing elements of the act of communication.

The mimetic school of interpretation believes that a work of art ought to faithfully depict some aspect of the UNIVERSE we live in. The meaning of the text therefore resides in a reality external to the text. Theologians and archaeologists tend to approach the Bible in this manner.

Another school holds that the intent of the AUTHOR determines
such biblical critics will carefully study the literary history and cultural background of any given text.

A third school of criticism maintains that the meaning of a text may be discerned as we examine the effect produced by the text upon the READER. With regard to the Bible, those pietistic traditions which place emphasis upon private devotional reading of the Bible are de-facto promoters of this 'reader-response' school of interpretation. So are many psychological-critical approaches (such as Jungian criticism), political-critical approaches (such as Marxist criticism), and some gender-critical approaches.

Literary approaches, however, will give primacy to careful study of the TEXT. Some would say 'the text alone.' Abrams, for example, claims that such objective criticism "will explain the work by considering it in isolation, as an autonomous whole, whose significance and value are determined without any reference beyond itself" (Abrams 7). The influence of the New Criticism is evident here, and that is probably appropriate, given that modern literary study of the Bible received major encouragement from this (now dated) text-oriented critical approach. But modern literary study
of the Bible need not exclude extrinsic considerations such as author, reader, or universe. A literary ("text-oriented") approach can assume that authors will consciously or unconsciously provide sufficient clues within a text for the reader to determine the meaning within a particular universe of discourse.

It should by now be evident that there are a variety of 'literary' approaches to the Bible—not to mention several hybrid varieties. My definition may therefore be clarified by first exploring what literary study of the Bible is not:¹

A. Dogmatic Bible Exegesis.

Here the Bible is valued as a source of religious doctrine. The task of the exegete is to distill from the sacred text dogma—theological propositions—which can become the basis of a faith-confession. In all of this, the really important thing is the end-product: true religion based upon correct doctrine. The biblical literature which so admirably served to transmit those beliefs across the centuries is deemed to have little value in itself. It is the message of the Bible that is of paramount significance, not the literary medium in which the message appeared. The content is what matters, not the form. The literary art of the Bible may actually be considered a nuisance, making the work of extracting doctrine all the more difficult.

It should be noted that this attitude toward literary form derives from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which treats the form merely as a vehicle for content. The content, once it is separated from its rhetorical medium, may then stand alone. From this point of view, form is simply a means of effectively (persuasively) communicating
content. Literary study of the Bible stands, instead, in the tradition of Aristotle's Poetics. It is by no means uninterested in the Bible's content. But it differs from traditional dogmatic exegesis in two major ways:

First, literary study of the Bible is adamant in opposing any divorce between literary form and content. The enduring power of biblical literature derives from the combination of its sublime message and its carefully crafted poetic style. To separate one from the other is to violate the character of the text as well as to diminish its artistic force, thereby undermining its human impact. Moreover, the literary form provides the key to interpretation. It indicates which set of interpretive conventions we are to make use of. If the form is regarded as (at best) extraneous embellishment or (at worst) an impediment to arriving at textual meaning, one will almost certainly miss the meaning as well.

Second, literary study of the Bible does not presume commitment to the Bible's religious teaching. Both religious and secular biblical scholars are today fruitfully utilizing literary techniques in their analysis of biblical texts. Scholars with a variety of motives for biblical study are in widespread agreement that literary study of the Bible is a useful critical approach. The Israeli scholar Meir Sternberg has described the dominant literary attitude:

As long as we adhere to the text's self-definition as religious literature with such and such singularities, we need not even submit to the dictate of identifying ourselves as religious or secular readers. Those who play by the Bible's rules of communication to the best of their ability can keep their opinions to themselves; only those who make up their own rules may be required to lay their ideological cards on the table. (Sternberg 37)
Throughout biblical history, the Bible has been considered by many to be the Word of God, the very repository of his message to the human race. Moreover, at least up until modern times, the consensus on the mode of divine inspiration has favored plenary (word-for-word) inspiration—the 'dictation method.' Augustine referred to the biblical writers as "pens of the Holy Spirit" (Confessions 7:21). The human writers were regarded as passive recipients, transcribing divine truth for generations not yet come.

One very pleasant by-product of this belief that every word in the Bible is of divine origin is the care with which the Bible has been transmitted across the centuries. The Hebrew Masoretes, for instance, carefully noted every detail of spelling, accentuation, and musical notation. They would count the letters and verses of each book; if their copy did not tally up with the original, their copy was destroyed.

But whatever muse inspired the human writers of the Bible is not at issue when we take a literary approach. Robert Alter maintains that although the complex literary art of the Bible is no argument for divine inspiration, a literary approach is not inconsistent with such belief:

Recently, after a public lecture I delivered on biblical narrative, a young man wearing the small knit skullcap and trimmed beard of modern Jewish Orthodoxy asked me whether the complexities of moral motivation in the story I had discussed were not evidence of the divine inspiration that had produced the story. I was obliged to respond that, unfortunately, no literary analysis could confirm faith in this way... But if it is true that a literary approach to Scripture in no way implies that the biblical text has a uniquely privileged status, my Orthodox questioner was right in one respect. The historical criticism of the Bible is rooted in a view of
truth associated with nineteenth-century positivism that
does not sit well with any sense of the moral or
spiritual authority of Scripture. (Alter 1992, 203)

This leads to the second example of what literary study of the Bible
is not--historical criticism.

B. The Historical-Critical Method.

Virtually all of the biblical criticism published in the last
two hundred years has been historical criticism; hence this approach
is often simply referred to as "biblical criticism." But a
historical-critical approach is distinct from other varieties of
biblical criticism.

The historical-critical method assumes that historical
criteria determine the meaning of a text. The intention of the
author and the historical milieu of the intended audience, once
arrived at, will insure the proper interpretation. The goal of
historical criticism of the Bible has been to reconstruct what
actually happened centuries and millennia ago. Since archaeology has
been a prerequisite for this kind of criticism, literary critics
sometimes call it "excavative" criticism. They point out that
historical criticism tends to regard the biblical texts as "relics,
probably distorted in transmission, of a past one needed to recover
as exactly as possible" (Alter and Kermode 1).

One aspect of this historical criticism has indeed been called
"literary criticism," but this term has carried a specialized
meaning within biblical studies. It invariably refers to source
criticism, or an examination of the literary sources utilized by the
biblical authors in the composition of their final work. The final
biblical text is therefore of little interest except as an aid to uncovering these ancient sources. This process has now been taken a step earlier through 'form criticism,' which seeks the oral form in which the tradition was transmitted until such time as it was written down.

By contrast, literary study of the Bible is generally interested in the finished product—the final text of the Bible—and not in the individual strands of tradition that may be dissected from it. It sees the Bible not as a scrapbook of corruptions, glosses, reductions, insertions, and conflations, but as a collection of unified works, if not a unified work. Michael Wadsworth points out that the New Testament critic is now less likely to treat a gospel "as a set of pericopae of varying trustworthiness, but more as a continuous narrative work with its own logic and momentum" (Wadsworth 1).

A literary approach dissolves the enormous distance between the ancient text and the modern reader. It seeks universal themes rather than historical particulars of fact. In this respect, it has more in common with traditional dogmatic exegesis, which sees an underlying unity in the text, than with historical criticism. Yet both dogmatic and historical interpreters read primarily for information—either about religion or history. The Bible's cognitive content is primary. Such nonliterary textual approaches will serve the interests of theology or history, but not that of literature.

So what is literary study of the Bible?

It is critical analysis which seeks artistic technique and
pattern within the biblical texts. It is the only critical approach which takes seriously the Bible as a work of literature, i.e. verbal art. The questions that concern us, then, have to do with how this aesthetic communication works. The starting point is attentiveness to artistic technique as expressed in such literary considerations as genre, characterization, diction, imagery, metaphor, analysis of discourse, prosody, repetition, contrast, cause and effect, progression, proportion, sound, theme, motif, wordplay, irony, personification, narration, tone, point of view, plot, setting, and style. Only in our century has such an approach to the Bible become critically acceptable, and only in our generation has it been carried out with any regularity. It has introduced a subtlety of perception that was largely overlooked by earlier approaches.

This is by no means an 'art for art's sake' approach to the Bible. Artistic invention is rarely limited to the aesthetic dimension, and this is particularly the case in literature. Robert Alter reminds us:

> 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. Writers put together words in a certain pleasing order partly because the order pleases but also, very often, because the order helps them refine meanings, make meanings more memorable, more satisfyingly complex, so that what is well wrought in language can more powerfully engage the world of events, values, human and divine ends. (Alter 1987, 14-15)

If we reflect upon the book of Job, we will recognize that that the deepest theology and the highest art tend to coincide.

The literary orientation of this dissertation is not intended
to suggest the superiority of a literary approach to the Bible. If at times I sound like a promoter, it is probably because of centuries of comparative neglect. Again, Alter states the case well:

Religious tradition has by and large encouraged us to take the Bible seriously rather than to enjoy it, but the paradoxical truth of the matter may well be that by learning to enjoy the biblical stories more fully as stories, we shall also come to see more clearly what they mean to tell us about God, man, and the perilously momentous realm of history. (Alter 1981, 189)

A literary approach to the Bible is simply one more set of tools to help us make sense of the Bible. Different critical approaches bring different sets of questions to the biblical text. The literary 'toolkit' offers long-overdue critical insights.

Consider, for example, the book of Deuteronomy. The core of this work, the Book of the Covenant, is purportedly a record of the laws received by Moses as revelation from Yahweh on Mt. Sinai. The attention of the historical critic will revolve around this short but historically significant source of the Mosaic legislation. The literary critic, on the other hand, will generally want to demonstrate how and why the final text of the book of Deuteronomy (and not any of its sources) ranks as one of the world's greatest orations.

Or consider how, in the New Testament, we have differing gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. The historical interpreter finds these to be 'problems' in need of resolution, and will want to consider the validity of historical 'evidences' to determine whether or not the tomb of Jesus was really empty. The
literary interpreter, on the other hand, wants to know if the empty tomb is a fitting conclusion to the literary work in which it is situated. The distinctive manner in which the narrative is related by each gospel writer will be examined to see if it is consistent with the thematic emphases of the work. A similar question might be asked with regard to the entire New Testament—to what extent is it a fitting literary conclusion to the Hebrew Bible? Certainly literary and historical approaches are not incompatible, but they are clearly different.

The utility of the literary approach is particularly apparent in the interpretation of passages where other approaches are handicapped. One example: the account of the 'cleansing' of the Jerusalem temple by Jesus. In the three 'synoptic' gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), this event is situated toward the end of the gospel. But in John, it comes at the beginning of Jesus's ministry. The only historical solution is to posit two cleansings—one at the beginning, and one at the end. But if we are able to free ourselves from chronology, we can begin to explore why it makes good sense—in terms of plot, theme, character, and symbolism—for the cleansing to come first in John and later in the other three gospel accounts.

The center of the controversy surrounding the Bible in nineteenth-century England had to do with the biblical account of geological and human origins in the opening chapters of Genesis. The root of the problem was that the empirical evidence did not easily harmonize with a historical-critical reading of the text. What virtually no one proposed at the time was the possibility of a
completely different type of reading, namely a literary one. We now recognize, for example, that Genesis 1 is a masterpiece of Hebrew poetry and Genesis 2 has all the hallmarks of Hebrew myth. Yet such fundamental generic considerations were not even acknowledged during the nineteenth-century debate. From a literary perspective, such Bible-science debates were unnecessary because a literary reading made such questions highly soluble (and to a literary purist, irrelevant).

Up to this point, virtually all literary analysts are agreed. But 'literary study of the Bible' is really a collective description for a variety of related (but theoretically distinct) critical approaches. In particular, there are four issues that distinguish the various literary approaches:

a. Is meaning objective or subjective? Can we seek the meaning of any literary text?

b. With regard to nonliterary approaches to the Bible, can we be eclectic or should we be literary purists?

c. Is the Bible truly literary or are we simply using literary tools on an essentially nonliterary text? The larger question: How valid is literary study of the Bible?

d. Is the Bible a unified literary work or essentially an anthology of loosely-related texts?

a. Does Objective Textual Meaning Exist?

Literary criticism is intended to help the reader make sense of literary texts. But in the present situation, one must first make sense of the chaotic field of criticism. It seems that we have entered what many call the 'postmodern' era. The capacity of the
human mind to rationally analyze data, which is the fundamental assumption of 'modernism,' has now been called into question. Objective truth (even on the limited scale of textual meaning) no longer exists. Rather, it is the reader who creates meaning from any given text.

Most literary study of the Bible is not (yet, at least) postmodernistic. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode were perhaps the leading figures in the field during the 1980's. In the introduction to their *Literary Guide to the Bible* (1987), they discuss their selection of writers chosen to contribute to the volume: "Given our aim to provide illumination, we have not included critics who use the text as a springboard for cultural or metaphysical ruminations, nor those like the Deconstructionists and some feminist critics who seek to demonstrate that the text is necessarily divided against itself" (Alter and Kermode 6).

An example of one who was excluded by definition from such a collection is the deconstructionist biblical critic Peter Miscall, who writes:

> It is my contention that OT narrative is elusive because of, not in spite of, the concrete details. There is, at the same time, too little and too much of the narrative, too few and too many details, and this gives rise to the many, and frequently contradictory, interpretations of and conjectures about OT narrative... Reading is to follow the text, to trace its workings, even if it turns out that it is undecidable. (Miscall 1)

Other reader-oriented studies of the Bible have also become commonplace. 'Liberation theologians' read the Bible through Marxist lenses; Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez are well known
representatives of this predominantly Latin American hermeneutical school. A good introduction to Jungian psychoanalytical literary criticism is to be found in the work of Morris Philipson. Some outstanding feminist criticism of the Bible appears in the writing of Phyllis Trible, Mieke Bal, and Cheryl Exum.

But not all of these approaches are 'postmodern.' In spite of their curt dismissal by Alter and Kermode, many of these reader-oriented critics ground their conclusions firmly in the text. Their approach, therefore, is a bona fide literary one. Even hard core deconstructionists, to the extent that they seek to prove their case from the text, are operating in the spirit of the literary approach even if ideologies and certain philosophical assumptions may differ.

This leads to the second point—that most practitioners of a literary approach to the Bible tend not to be purists but rather eclectic to some degree.

b. Eclectic or Purist?

The purist ("text only") position, technically known as formalism, has been well-stated by Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, who denies the validity of dogmatic and historical approaches:

[The emphases] on the sacredness of the Bible and on the necessity of studying it in its historical context [are] rejected by me, as they must, I believe, be rejected by any student of literature... While we are certainly aware of the findings of biblical scholarship, we do not seek to explain any aspects of the text with the help of extraliterary information... Our approach is essentially ahistorical. (Gros Louis 1982, 13-14)

Most contemporary literary critics of the Bible, however, favor a more eclectic approach, and would admit socio-historical data...
concerning author, text, and reader. Critics who maintain an openness to religious faith may even seek to preserve elements of the dogmatic approach.

Try as they might, formalists such as Gros Louis cannot completely ignore history anyway. The literary approach to the Bible rests upon the fruit of decades of historical-critical study. For example, literary critics now work almost exclusively in the original biblical languages with texts that are as near the original as we can determine. Gabriel Josipovici makes clear the debt we owe traditional historical biblical scholarship for the philological and textual groundwork that underlies all literary study:

Those critics who, fired by enthusiasm for the biblical narratives, felt they could comment on them by reading them in translation and responding to them as they would to a modern novel, were unlikely to produce work more interesting than might be produced by a non-English speaker, wilfully ignorant of the Middle Ages, writing on Chaucer. (Josipovici xiii)

A number of critics, therefore, manage to combine literary and historical approaches. Textual evidence of biographical or historical information is sought. Edgar McKnight points the way to a theoretical merger of the two approaches:

An inclusive system of literary criticism does not limit meanings to those involving the original author and reader, but it does not deny the legitimacy of attention to the original situation. Attention to the original situation of communication does not abolish the work as literature if the total range of meaning and meaning-effects impinging upon the author and reader is considered and if these meanings are not held to apply only in the original situation. (McKnight 65)

One very influential contemporary literary critic of the Bible
maintains that the literary approach cannot be clearly distinguished from the historical, anyway. Meir Sternberg holds that all language is an attempt at communication, and that discourse analysis, which is a linguistic-historical reconstruction of authorial intent, holds the key to interpretation. Sternberg grants the validity of the classic critique of "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) by Wimsatt and Beardsley, for it was directed primarily against external evidence of authorial intention (biography, letters, and so on). But internal (or what Sternberg calls "embodied" or "objectified") evidence of authorial intention is not only fair game—it is actually indispensable to the interpretation of any text. Sternberg concludes:

The text's autonomy is a long-exploded myth: the text has no meaning, or may assume every kind of meaning, outside those coordinates of discourse that we usually bundle into the term 'context'. . . . Unless firmly anchored in the relations between narrator and audience, therefore, formalism degenerates into a new mode of atomism.

(Sternberg 2,11)

Another major contemporary critic argues that no one critical approach can possibly be the correct one:

...[M]uch harm has been done in biblical studies by insisting that there is, somewhere, a 'correct' method which, if only we could find it, would unlock the mysteries of the text... I believe that the quest for a correct method is, not just in practice but inherently, incapable of succeeding. The pursuit of method assimilates reading a text to the procedures of technology: it tries to process the text, rather than to read it. Instead, I propose that we should see each of our 'methods' as a codification of intuitions about the text which may occur to intelligent readers. (Barton 5)

Even if no claim for superiority of the literary approach to
the Bible is made, most practitioners would nevertheless argue that a literary approach at least deserves temporal priority. Robert Polzin calls for "an operational priority to literary analysis at the preliminary stages of research" (Polzin 2). Robert Alter unpacks Polzin's formula: "Before you can decide whether a text is defective, composite, or redundant, you have to determine to the best of your ability the formal principles on which the text is organized" (Alter 1987, 26).

c. Is a literary approach to the Bible a valid one? Is the Bible 'literature,' where the aesthetic dimension is central? Or are we guilty of importing a critical model that is foreign to the nature of the Bible?

Here, of course, is the heart of the traditional objection to reading the Bible as literature. One might wonder, for example, how the biblical authors would react to seeing their works discussed as 'literature.' Throughout most of history, to speak of the Bible as a work of 'literature' was considered outrageous, for the Bible has been generally regarded as sacred history. Alter sums up the objection (1981, 23) by pointing out that if the text is 'sacred,' how can we hope to explain it through categories developed for the understanding of Western literature? And if it is 'history,' how presumptuous of us to analyze it with tools developed for the explication of prose fiction!

Literary analysts (including Alter) have answers to such an objection. But their answers vary widely. There is a general consensus that the Bible is (or at least contains) verbal art of the highest order. Umberto Cassuto speaks for virtually everyone when
he observes that the Hebrew Bible "presents us with finished and perfected writings that bear witness to a well-established artistic tradition" (Cassuto 17-18).

Yet some scholars, right up to the present, are hesitant to call the Bible a work of 'literature.' "What is literary about the Bible at all?" asks James Kugel (303). "Certainly it does not identify itself as literature." He points out that most of the Bible consists of laws, prophecies, wisdom sayings, and other 'nonliterary' genres. Similarly, Northrop Frye sees the Bible as a mosaic: a pattern of commandments, aphorisms, epigrams, proverbs, parables, riddles, pericopes, parallel couplets, formulaic phrases, folktales, oracles, epiphanies,Gattungen, Logia, bits of occasional verse, marginal glosses, legends, snippets from historical documents, laws, letters, sermons, hymns, ecstatic visions, rituals, fables, genealogical lists, and so on almost indefinitely. (Frye 206)

Frye maintains that the Bible, as the mythological framework of Western culture, deserves to be studied as literature. But he cautions: "The Bible is just as obviously 'more' than a work of literature, whatever 'more' means... and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being literature" (Frye xvi, 29).

Of course, much depends here upon one's estimation of art and literature. For Thomas Carlyle, art is powerful; it is a key measure of societal greatness. "What built St. Paul's Cathedral? Look at the heart of the matter, it was that divine Hebrew BOOK..." (On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, Ch. 5). To Matthew Arnold, art was destined to become the religion of the future; the granting of the status of literature was nothing less
than acknowledgment of a work's timeless ability to inspire and to transform human existence. Kafka, Proust and Beckett all saw their writing as the only way to satisfy their desperate need to speak of what is meaningful.

But to many others, the phrase 'Bible as Literature' connotes a certain emasculation of the Bible. In the foreward to Kathleen Innes's The Bible as Literature (1930), we read: "Mrs. Innes has kept strictly to her chosen path, and has avoided theological or critical entanglements" (Innes iv). This is a good example of what Dorothy Krook has in mind when she speaks of that "vulgar modern notion" where the Bible is read "exclusively for its fine images and plangent rhythms, and the emotional luxury of a small safe quantity of uplift that in no way commits me to the Bible's embarrassing doctrinal content" (Krook 208). "To put it perhaps hyperbolically," writes Amos Wilder, there have been "those who swooned at the cadences of the Authorized Version but often had no understanding of or even concern with the meaning of the writings" (Wilder ix).

Almost everyone agrees that not all of the Bible is highly literary. "The literary parts of the Bible appear side by side with history, theological exposition, legal writing, and letters" (Ryken 14). Ryken's criterion for distinguishing the literary from the nonliterary derives from his definition of literature, i.e. "an interpretive presentation of experience in an artistic form" (Ryken 13).

Much of the Mosaic law and many New Testament epistles are informational material, hardly intended to be literary. James Barr gives a helpful rule of thumb: If the writer could have easily
restated the meaning in another manner, the work is essentially nonliterary. He concludes that the letters of St. Paul are "occasional" rather than literary, whereas the gospel writers might well have taken the viewpoint, "what I have written, I have written" (Barr 70-71).

Yet even nonliterary and semiliterary passages may be subjected to literary analysis. David Robertson, in *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (1977), calls these parts of the Bible "applied literature," and claims that there is historical precedent for including them together with "pure literature" in literary study:

> Works originally written as or commonly taken as pure literature (e.g., Shakespeare's plays, Keats's poems, Faulkner's novels) are, as it were, literary criticism's natural children. But other works (e.g., Donne's sermons, Gibbon's historical writings, Charles Wesley's hymns, and, of course, the Bible) may at some point in history come up for adoption. If adopted, they are treated (that is, analyzed) like natural children.

(Robertson 3)

We might well observe that the reverse also holds. Historians sometimes take a work of imaginative literature and study it as history, that is, as documentary evidence of the life and thought of a particular historical era.

Robertson points out that on some occasions this literary 'adoption' will go well (as indeed it has with Donne's sermons and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*); sometimes it goes poorly. But from a literary standpoint, there is nothing preventing a critic from analyzing the Bible like any other book: "The assumption that the Bible is imaginative literature is arbitrary. No one forces us to
make it, nor does the Bible itself demand that we make it. We make it because we want to, because literary criticism can yield exciting and meaningful results" (Robertson 4).

This statement, and indeed Robertson's entire approach, is anathema to Sternberg, who is quick to point out that the reason certain literary 'adoptions' do not go well is that they are not works of literature! And if the Bible is not a work of literature, we ought not to treat it as such. He explains his rationale for titling his book The Poetics of Biblical Narrative:

To many, Poetics and Bible do not easily make a common household even as words. But I have deliberately joined them together, avoiding more harmonious terms like Structure or Shape or Art in order to leave no doubt about my argument. Poetics is the systematic working or study of literature as such. Hence, to offer a poetics of biblical narrative is to claim that biblical narrative is a work of literature. Not just an artful work; not a work marked by some aesthetic property; not a work resorting to so-called literary devices; not a work that the interpreter may choose (or refuse) to consider from a literary viewpoint or, in that unlovely piece of jargon, as literature; but a literary work. The difference is radical. (Sternberg 2)

Sternberg supports the notion of a literary approach, but only for those portions of the Bible which qualify as literature.

Yet other critics will demonstrate how even nonliterary portions of the Bible can serve a literary function. In Narrative Art in Genesis (1975), J.P. Fokkelman proposes that the genealogies of Genesis are an attempt to enact that book's theme of propogation. Similarly, David Gunn suggests that the lists of tribal boundaries in Joshua are a way of imaginatively mapping out and making real the as yet unconquered Land (Gunn 102-121). Robert Alter concludes,
"The coldest catalogue and the driest etiology may be an effective subsidiary instrument of literary expression" (Alter 1987, 16).

Some critics (such as Robertson), then, maintain that the question of the validity of literary study of the Bible is really a non-issue. Alter's essential justification of a literary approach is to be found in the numerous insightful examples he provides. Sternberg gives not only examples but a thorough poetics of biblical narrative. Another critic, Joel Rosenberg, offers a more rationalistic line of defense.

According to Rosenberg, the challenge we face when it comes to interpreting a sacred text such as the Bible is this. Every community which holds a text to be sacred founds its very existence on the premise that the language of the text means what it says. There is what he calls an "earnest intentionality" or seriousness inherent in the text. Yet any writer of even the most mundane history knows that when it comes time to weave together various strands of tradition into a single unified text, there is ample room for both interpretation and artistic creativity. As Rosenberg expresses it:

A sacred text is still written. Even where it represents the deposits of centuries of oral tradition, the text is still a product of conscious human activity. It cannot escape the mediation of artistic design... [The biblical writer] could not avoid seeing his work--even if only to a slight degree--as a fiction... [He] precisely did not present the Torah as the word of God, but as the memory of the word of God. (Rosenberg 69,86, emphasis his)

What is more, the Bible does not preserve all of the written interpretations of the history of Israel--only some of them have
become sacred. Rosenberg suggests that, among competing texts, the criterion for survival was art:

Did it [the sacred text] not become sacred primarily because it was an especially good interpretation of its own time and place? The 'sacredness' of a sacred text is perhaps simply the shadow of a memory of a time when that text captured people's imaginations by its artistic subtlety, its incisive, trenchant interpretation of its society, its moment in history. Perhaps every sacred text was once good art. (Rosenberg 70, emphasis his)

This suggestion that art had something to do with canonicity is all the more remarkable when we recall that one of the principal motivations for coming to consensus on the biblical canon was the need to know which biblical books one would be willing to die for. Even today, most of those who regard the Bible as sacred think that its authority derives from the canonicity of its contents. In other words, the authority of the Bible is extrinsic, and not intrinsic. However, it would be much more accurate to say that the councils of the early rabbis and church fathers merely acknowledged the public authority which these books, on their own, had already earned. One of the tremendously exciting things about the literary study of sacred texts is that we can potentially recognize some of the art that contributed to their rise to greatness.

Perhaps the most convincing argument for the validity of literary study of the Bible is the topic of Chapter Two. It will be seen that the biblical writers practiced some highly imaginative recasting of older scriptures. Literary study of the Bible, therefore, dates back to the biblical period, and may be observed within the pages of the Bible itself!
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


Reid, Mary Esson, ed. The Bible Read as Literature. Cleveland: Howard Allen, 1959.

WORKS CITED


Innes, Kathleen E. The Bible as Literature. London: Jonathan Cape, 1930.


Muslims regard their sacred book to be a facsimile of the eternal Koran, which is preserved in heaven. Mormons maintain that the Book of Mormon, which they consider to be a third testament, was revealed as a set of golden plates buried in the earth. In contrast to sacred books such as these, the Bible has a very human face. It comes to us like any other ancient book. It makes no claim for itself as direct divine revelation. What it does claim to be is the inspired memory of divine revelation, along with the record of Israel's response to that revelation. As such, there is ample room for the human artistic dimension.

The question of the validity of literary study of the Bible was taken up in Chapter One. But this chapter is the clincher. It will become clear that literary study of the Bible begins within the pages of the Bible itself. To be sure, it is not the analytical criticism which is so prevalent in our modern era, but something much more organic. There is a fascination among later biblical writers with the art of earlier material. In fact, they freely appropriate it, reworking specific themes, motifs, genres, and even characters. This is precisely what the earlier writers had done with the literatures of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors.
Literary Borrowing from Pre-Biblical Literature

The Bible has not only given birth to a literary tradition; it is itself situated within a very specific literary milieu. Consider, for example, how the biblical creation accounts are indebted to similar earlier accounts in neighboring cultures (such as the Enuma Elish, an Akkadian epic). In the same way, the biblical legal codes (such as the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21-23 and the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-28), have many resemblances to Babylonian, Sumerian, and other legal formulations.

In Numbers, Joshua, and Samuel, there is explicit reference made to the "Book of Jasher" and to the "Book of the Battles of Yahweh." The book of Kings refers to the "Book of the Chronicle of the Kings of Israel." These pre-biblical Hebrew writings were source materials for our Bible, and have not otherwise been preserved.

There is evidence of the use of allegory, a rhetorical device which is related to biblical typology, in pre-biblical Babylonian and Egyptian texts. The formal conventions of Hebrew poetry also appear to derive from an antecedent Syro-Palestinian verse tradition.

For reasons such as these, it appears that, among the early Hebrews, there was a willingness to adapt whatever literary raw material they had at hand to create an entirely new myth which could accommodate the insights of monotheism. "The values other religions possess are taken into, reconstituted, and superceded by the Yahwism of ancient Israel. Its own religion made clear to the Israelites what other religions 'really' meant" (Kort 57).
In these acts of literary borrowing, the Hebrews sought to preserve the pagan literary forms minus their offensive doctrinal content. Of course, such borrowing carries inherent risks. It is possible that, on occasion, aspects of the original material that the borrower does not intend to adopt slip unnoticed into the refashioned material. Or perhaps the borrower misinterprets some aspect of the source material.

Northrop Frye raises the possibility that an example of this may have occurred in the Bible. In the book of Joshua, there is an account of the sun standing still in the sky until the nation of Israel was able to vanquish its enemies that day. The author of Joshua defends this account with the words, "Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" (Joshua 10:13). Frye comments: "Our first reaction to this would be to say that the fine bold metaphor of the poet of the Book of Jasher has been vulgarized by an overcredulous and unimaginative prose commentator into a pointless miracle" (Frye 44). In order to fully appreciate this remark of Frye, and in preparation for the upcoming discussion of allegory, mention must be made of Vico's theory of the evolution of language.1

According to Giovanni Battista Vico (1668-1744), a leading pioneer of modern historical studies, history is cyclical. Each cycle consists of three ages: an age of gods (a mythical age), an age of heroes (an aristocratic age), and a popular age which celebrates the common man. Each of these ages manifests a distinctive use of language.

The first stage of language is inherently poetic. Words in this phase of linguistic development are always concrete. There are
no true verbal abstractions. Communication inevitably takes the form of story. Words have power. The vitality of language here is almost magical, and arises from an underlying identity with nature. As Frye puts it, "subject and object are linked by a common power or energy" (Frye 6). To those of us who live outside this period, this mode of language is called "metaphorical."

In the second stage of language, words become the means of communicating concepts. They are an outward expression of inner thoughts or ideas. Mind and emotion are separated; so are subject and object. Abstraction becomes possible, and is frequently achieved by means of allegory. In allegory, concrete stories become the vehicle of communicating an abstract argument.

The third stage treats language as primarily descriptive of an objective natural order. It is what we call "ordinary speech," for it has been the accepted mode of discourse in our modern era. Its 'realism' starts out as a reaction against the transcendental perspective of the earlier stages, but eventually ignores it altogether.

Vico's theory has come under heavy fire in recent years. Nevertheless, his general outline of linguistic evolution does a good job of explaining the development we observe within the biblical canon. The primeval history recorded in Genesis 1-11 is a highly poetic form of myth. The heavens and the earth are brought into being by the word of Yahweh. The material is not subject to any external criterion of truth or falsity, as historical writing would be. These passages express the universal in the event, which is characteristic of poetry. The Hebrew language itself could well
be a product of this first stage; Biblical Hebrew is an obsessively concrete language where abstract terms are almost entirely absent. For example, the term for "anger" is the same as the word meaning "nose." One can almost envision the flaring nostrils suggested by this metonymy.

Most of the Bible would be a second-stage linguistic production, according to Vico's categories. Here abstract arguments are communicated or illustrated by means of story. The Book of Jonah, for instance, may be read as a highly contrived attack against racial and religious bigotry. Similarly, the genealogies and birth accounts of Christ may be taken as theological rather than historical statements. The image of the magi worshiping the infant Jesus, who is lying in a manger because there was no room in the inn, is a powerful illustration of the notion that in Christ the value systems of the world have been turned on their head.

We in the Western world are now living in the third stage of Vico's linguistic cycle, which, in its present manifestation, began during the Renaissance era when descriptive realism became an increasingly acceptable mode of discourse. This attitude is rare in the Bible, although we do encounter it in some of Paul's more rationalistic arguments in the Epistles. It does seem that the New Testament writers found the Greek language more conducive to abstraction than was classical Hebrew.

Those portions of the Bible which are most problematic for third-stage readers are the early, first-stage (mythic) accounts. It is no accident that the Genesis creation stories have been at the center of modern Bible-science controversies. Second-stage
material, which constitutes most of the Bible, becomes an unending allegorical mine for rationalistic interpreters of all stripes.

The early biblical writers, then, freely appropriated the linguistic building blocks available to them within the literary milieu of the ancient Near East, in order to create distinctive works of art within their own cultural-linguistic mythical universe. Most of what remains of their efforts is preserved within the pages of the Bible, which, as will be seen momentarily, is a remarkably self-contained literary work.

The grand exception to all of this is biblical narrative, which has no real parallel in the ancient Near East, although the Greek historical tradition (beginning with Herodotus) has some resemblances. This kind of large-scale prose writing seems to have originated with the Hebrews, and may reflect a radically new understanding of the nature of history. This is the thesis of Herbert Schneidau, who believes that the Bible rebels against the pagan world view, whose natural mode of expression is epic verse, and that what we have is "the birth of a new kind of historicized fiction, moving steadily away from the motives and habits of the world of legend and myth" (Schneidau 1977, 215). Harold Bloom likewise argues in *The Book of J* (1990) that the narratives ascribed to the 'J' (Jahwist) source are unique and cannot be assimilated to any previously known literary form.

The New Testament writers felt a similar freedom to utilize the literary conventions of their day. The Gospels are in many ways reminiscent of the Greek biographical tradition, even though they alter it to serve their purpose. The Acts of the Apostles resembles
Hellenistic Greek history writing, along with features of Greek romances. The structure of the New Testament epistles places them among the letters of the Hellenistic period. Moreover, they frequently replicate certain Greek rhetorical features (such as the diatribe).

**Literary Development Within the Hebrew Bible**

All literature 'feeds upon itself,' and this is particularly true of the Bible. Almost before it has begun, the Bible starts quoting and referring back to itself. The repetitions and allusions to earlier texts are the result of an oral tradition whereby the ancient Hebrew scribes sought to elucidate existing scriptures by means of commentary. The documents of the Hebrew Bible are thus highly sophisticated literary texts which provide their own commentary through internal rhetorical techniques. On the assumption that their significance was not limited to the original context, and in an effort to adapt biblical truth to changing circumstances, the later biblical writers amplify, expand, and build on earlier texts. They do this in a variety of ways:

---ALLUSION. All literature is necessarily allusive. But Robert Alter points out that in the Bible there is an "abundance of authoritative national traditions, fixed in particular verbal formulations, to which later writers respond through incorporation, elaboration, debate, or parody" (Alter 13).

We can detect this in the book of Ruth. When Boaz first meets Ruth in the barley field, he greets her with the following words of praise: "It hath fully been told me, all that thou hast done unto
thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people that thou knewest not heretofore" (Ruth 2:11). Here is a strong echo of God's original words to Abram, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee" (Genesis 12:1). What is new in Ruth is the inclusion of "mother." This symmetrical correspondence sets up Ruth, the ancestress of King David, to be the founding mother of Israel, as Abraham was the founding father (Alter 14).

--REPETITION. Any reader of Deuteronomy (lit. "second law") will recognize that much of it duplicates material found in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-23:19) and in Leviticus. Again, the differences ought to be noted. Consider the commandment to observe the sabbath:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

(Exodus 20:11)

You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

(Deuteronomy 5:15)

Here the commands are the same, but the rationale is different, and demands exegesis.

There are sound socio-historical explanations for such differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy. Jacob Milgrom points out how Deuteronomy, with its emphasis upon the centralization of
national worship, "concedes to the individual Israelite the right to profane slaughter (overruling Leviticus 17:3-5)" (Milgrom 5). It can also be seen how the Deuteronomic laws expand upon the Levitical material to include women and foreigners.

But the setting and occasion of Deuteronomy are what make it unique. The work is arranged as a series of three farewell sermons delivered by Moses in the land of Moab shortly before Israel's entrance into the promised land. As such, it is a work intended to move and persuade. The ten commandments reappear because Moses now expounds their significance for the future of the life of the nation. A key verse is 30:19: "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life..."

A similar repetition of material occurs in Chronicles, which covers much the same ground as the Former Prophets, yet consistently alters the emphasis of these earlier narratives in order to stress the value of Torah study. Many of the psalms rehearse the mighty acts of Yahweh with the intent to individualize and personalize them. The prophets, too, will frequently transform earlier laws or stories, giving them a more spiritual, nationalistic, or ethical flavor.

In many later works, there is clarification of earlier material. For example, the account of Moses's punishment after his striking of the rock in the Numbers narrative is clarified in the Psalms, where we read, "for they [the people of Israel] embittered his spirit, and he spoke rashly with his lips" (Psalms 106:33). Jeremiah's prediction that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years does not provide starting and ending dates, but
several centuries later the author of Daniel 9 does.

—SYMBOLISM. Places, names, and numbers are often symbolic in the Bible. In his prayer of dedication of the newly constructed temple in Jerusalem, Solomon observes how God has brought the nation of Israel forth "out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron" (1 Kings 8:51). Northrop Frye surmises that this "furnace of iron" is the symbolic Egypt, "the hell-prison destroyed by a miracle," and not the literal one (Frye 49).

Names are symbolic in a double sense. Often the meaning of a particular name explains a great deal about the character or destiny of the person who bears the name. In the creation myth, "Adam" means "mankind," and the meaning of "Eve" is supplied by the writer as "the mother of all living" (3:20). The names of the two dead husbands of Ruth and Orpah, "Mahlon" and "Chilion," mean "sick" and "failure," respectively. Names of patriarchs are also frequently applied eponymously to all their descendants, as happened to Jacob ("Israel").

Numbers are frequently symbolic in the Bible. The numbers seven and three, which are among the most common, originate in the story of creation, where days 1-3 are symmetrical in content with days 4-6, with the narrator stepping back on day 7 to observe the finished whole.

—TYPOLOGY. Moses predicts that, once Israel begins to dwell in the promised land, God will raise up "a prophet like unto me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Jewish commentators have traditionally understood this text as an endorsement of the prophetic office in Israel. Moses becomes the prototype or 'type' of all future
prophets, who then become 'antitypes' of Moses and of one another. Similarly, the Exodus event becomes the type of all future deliverances, whether from exile in Babylon or from bondage of a more personal nature.

Assuming that God is actively at work in human history, typology assumes a basic continuity across time:

What took place in Israel was a series of reinterpretations of an original revelation in which it was not necessary to distinguish sharply between past and present, since the God who dealt with Israel in the past was the God who was dealing with Israel in the present... Therefore, the record of God's past dealings with Israel was highly significant for understanding his purposes and intentions in the present... (Smart 100)

Typology also assumes a theory of history. It assumes "that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is" (Frye 81).

Sometimes typology helps explain the present. To the author of Deutero-Isaiah, the miracle of the Exodus was being re-enacted in the restoration of Judah after exile in Babylon. Aaron's making of a golden calf at the time of the Exodus is a type of the later schismatic cult set up in the kingdom of Northern Israel, which also featured golden calves (1 Kings 12:28). The patriarchal narratives of Genesis are an example of another kind of typology, aetiology, which seeks historical explanations for present-day situations.

It is apparent, for example, that the history of the nation of Israel closely parallels that of its eponymous ancestor, Jacob, whose life follows a three-part movement. First, he is at home in
Canaan, where he experiences sibling conflict and is something of a rascal. He then goes into exile, which brings about personal and spiritual maturity. Finally, he makes a risky return to his former homeland, where possible danger awaits him. The rivalry between Esau and Jacob is really an account of the rivalry between two nations (Edom and Israel). The Genesis writer even tips us off as to what s/he is doing: "And Esau dwelt in the mountain-land of Seir--Esau is Edom" (Genesis 36:8). The student of literature, upon noting this symmetry between Israel-the-man and Israel-the-nation, will suspect that something more than the mere facts of history is being recorded here.

Typology can also be future-oriented. To the author of Hosea, the Exodus event pointed toward a future dispensation of judgment and mercy when the wilderness sojourn would be re-enacted. In post-exilic Judaism, the chief antitype of prophecy was the coming of the Messiah, who was to be a type of the great King David (Isaiah 11). The pattern of promise and fulfillment, which relies heavily upon typology, is thus an integral feature of the Hebrew prophetic writings.

**Literary Study of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament**

All of the examples given thus far occur within the pages of the Hebrew Bible. It comes as no surprise, then, that when the early Christians, who were almost exclusively Jewish, tried to express their new understanding of Yahweh, they would do so using the imagery, symbolism, types, and even the spare, laconic style of the Hebrew Bible. In Mark's Passion narrative alone, there are 57
quotations from and 160 allusions to the Hebrew scriptures. The New Testament writers were simply carrying further a process of interpretation which had been in place for centuries.

Consider, for example, the original Torah ("Law"). It was revealed by Yahweh to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as recorded in Exodus. It spells out a moral vision for the people of Yahweh. As time passed and the nation faced new circumstances and new challenges, this original vision was expanded upon, reinterpreted, and reapplied. Jeremiah thus writes:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; forasmuch as they broke My covenant, although I was a lord over them, saith the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD;' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34, emphasis mine)

Jeremiah is indicating how the original 'torah,' written in stone, must ultimately be internalized if it is to be effective. Jesus does a similar thing in Matthew, where we find him calling attention to himself as a second Moses by delivering his Sermon on the Mount. Both Jeremiah and Jesus thus become literary antitypes of Moses.

Just as Hebrew writers borrowed from pre-biblical literature, so New Testament writers borrowed freely from outside sources. Sometimes there was "deformation" of language (Beardslee 11). The
writer of the Gospel of John appropriates the Greek word "logos," but with a new semantic twist. He even coins religious vocabulary from purely secular terms. For example, our English word "church" comes from the Greek "ekklesia," which simply meant "those called apart."

New Testament typology is also numeric. Jesus's appointment of twelve apostles is a deliberate statement that a new Israel is in the making. His temptation in the wilderness for forty days prior to passing through the waters of the Jordan in baptism is a re-enactment of Israel's forty years in the wilderness before entering the promised land.

Whereas modern day Bible quoters often tend toward literalism, this was not the case with Jesus and the early Christians. According to Paul, God "hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6, AV). This adoption of typology and symbolism moved Jesus and the early Christians away from the letter of orthodox Jewish faith, and toward what they perceived to be the spirit of the original faith as it was revealed to Abraham and Moses.

The Bible abounds with typology. Northrop Frye can only conclude that the basic organization of the Bible is a typological one (Frye 80). This should not be surprising when one reflects upon how typological experiences are able to unlock existential meaning. To be a Jew at hard labor in Egypt was to be like Adam toiling outside Eden. To be a Jew in exile by the waters of Babylon was to be back in Egypt, waiting in hope for another exodus. To be a Christian,
banned from the synagogues, was to re-live the experience of exile. These are the analogies that make history significant, and their power derives from their literary connectedness. This is one of the reasons the early Christians preferred the codex to the scroll, for it allowed them to move rapidly back and forth between the older and newer writings, thus savoring the literary development.

The New Testament, then, finds meaning in the Hebrew Bible that could not have been foreseen by the original writers. Gabriel Josipovici explains:

This seeing the New Testament in the Old should not be too difficult for the student of literature to grasp. After Eliot and Borges we are perhaps more aware than nineteenth century scholars were that what comes after has the power of altering our apprehension of what came before; that knowing Kafka's work, for example, we do not simply read Kafka into older authors but actually uncover him there. (Josipovici 512)

In short, the New Testament writers were persuaded that 'the New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.' The original meaning of the Hebrew scriptures remained valid, but was being caught up into something more comprehensive and far reaching.

Sometimes readers of the New Testament fail to appreciate the typological nature of the text. Roman Catholic theology, for example, has traditionally maintained that when Christ proclaimed the bread and wine at the Passover meal to be his body and blood, some kind of miraculous conversion of the substance took place (and continues to take place every time the Mass is celebrated). Similarly, fundamentalist Protestants tend not to typologize the promise of the land to the nation of Israel, and for this reason are considered political allies by the leaders of the modern secular
state of Israel.

Whereas typology deals with characters, places, and events that are rooted in history and grounded in the text, allegory lies one step beyond. According to the classical notion, allegory is a fictional story with an inner meaning—as, for instance, Aesop's fables. Allegory brings extra-textual knowledge to the interpretation of the text, and tends to be more interested in philosophical universals than in historical particulars. It may be defined as "a story-myth that finds its 'true' meaning in a conceptual or argumentative translation" (Frye 85). In this way, the reader finds 'hidden' meaning that is not strictly conveyed by the text in isolation.

Allegory was a familiar rhetorical device in ancient Israel, as is evident from Nathan's confrontation of David with his sin in 2 Samuel 12:1-14. In his parables, Jesus also makes use of allegory. But the biblical writers themselves preferred the historical analogies made possible by typology to the philosophical analogies created by allegory, although the New Testament writers do occasionally resort to allegorical interpretation to make a point. An example may be found in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, and the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an **allegory**: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem...

(Galatians 4:21-25, emphasis mine)

One might also cite the analogy in the Epistle to the Hebrews
between Melchizedek—a shadowy mythical figure who appears in the early chapters of Genesis—and Christ, where there is absolutely no historical comparison drawn between the two. The beginning of New Testament allegorization of the Mosaic law appears in passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:9, where Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4 ("You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain") to support his argument in favor of the compensation of Christian ministers of the gospel.

The New Testament, then, resulted from a highly literary reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. "The interpretation of texts was thus not an incidental activity of the new religion, but an essential part of its foundation and subsequent development. In this sense at least, critical theory was what Christianity was concerned with" (Prickett and Barnes 3).

But literary creativity and art are not always one and the same, for the New Testament's literary art is highly uneven. Unlike the classical Hebrew works, which underwent a lengthy period of oral and written polishing, most of the New Testament was in circulation within one generation of the events it records. It is probably no accident that the most highly stylized New Testament piece, the Book of Revelation, was apparently also the latest. The Jesus story is among the most sublime ever recorded, and the four gospels exhibit a narrative subtlety second to none. Yet, the Gospel of Mark is written in what can only be described as eighth-grade level Koiné (nonliterary) Greek. Paul, who authored the majority of the New Testament epistles, is notorious for the way he could change thoughts in mid-sentence. None of the New Testament books is
deliberately poetic in the sense that Psalms or Job are.

One of the explanations for this seeming lack of artistic consideration in the composition of the New Testament is the urgency which was felt. Virtually all of the New Testament was a highly pragmatic response to specific historical circumstances. This is immediately apparent in the fact that twenty-one of the twenty-seven New Testament 'books' are epistles, and most of these are addressed to specific individuals or churches. Luke's two large works, the gospel which bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles, are addressed "to Theophilus," who probably symbolized a certain Greek-speaking audience. Even the Book of Revelation was originally a circular letter to "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelation 1:4).

Other reasons for the relative lack of artistic concern in the New Testament may be explored. It must be remembered that the New Testament was written by people who were probably unfamiliar with Hebrew. Even though all of the writers (except Luke) were Jewish, their first language was Aramaic and their second Greek. The Bible with which they were acquainted would not have been the Hebrew Bible, but the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures completed during the second century B.C.E.), which was a product of Hellenistic Judaism. Much of the original Hebrew metaphor ("first-stage" language) did not survive in the Septuagint; it was translated into more realistic "third-stage" language. One example: In the Hebrew text, Enoch "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22), whereas in the Septuagint we learn that Enoch "pleased God." The Septuagint's literary art also suffered in that it was created by
parceling out the biblical books to a host of scholars (traditionally "seventy") for translation purposes, a fact which accounts for its unevenness.

**Literary Development Within the New Testament**

The same kind of literary development noted within the Hebrew Bible, and carried over into the New Testament, continues inside the New Testament. In Paul's early letters, which were penned even before the gospels, the coming of the 'Kingdom of God' suggests the imminent end of history; in his later letters, the term reflects a much greater awareness of the long sweep of history.

The Gospel of Mark, almost certainly the earliest of the four gospels, is probably our most accurate record of the content of apostolic preaching. It became the model for the gospel genre. Matthew and Luke borrowed heavily from Mark, but added conventional literary features, such as birth narratives, genealogies, and formal conclusions. For this reason, David Aune refers to the "literaturization" of the gospel tradition (Aune 65). These later gospel writers also adapted the genre to specific life situations. Matthew created something resembling a training manual. The Gospel of Luke portrays Christ in elegant Greek terms as the Platonic ideal man. John's gospel shares the essential characteristics of the genre, but has been shaped into what might be considered a sacred drama.

In every tradition, there comes a point where interpretation by the invention of new narrative is halted. It then continues in the form of commentary. In the present instance, that point was
reached with the establishment of a canon of four gospels and selected epistles of Peter, Paul, and one or two other significant individuals. (John's Apocalypse was only admitted after lengthy discussion.) There is a revealing passage in the second epistle of Peter:

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15b-16, emphasis mine)

Here the letters of Paul are held to be on the same level as the Hebrew scriptures. With the passing of Paul (and his generation), the New Testament canon came to a close. But Peter has no doubt that there will continue to be a need for interpretation; indeed, by the time of Peter's writing, Paul's letters were already ripe for commentary.

This process of interpretation is endless; there is never any such thing as the 'definitive interpretation.' Herbert Schneidau has remarked that in this entire process of biblical reinterpretation, a "revisionist dynamic inheres in the whole project, in accord with the uncapturability of Yahweh" (Schneidau 1986, 149).

The foregoing demonstration that literary study of the Bible is as old as the Bible is probably the best argument for the validity of literary study of the Bible. It seems appropriate now to briefly take up the last of the four points of divergence among literary critics of the Bible which were discussed in Chapter One: Is the Bible a unified literary work or essentially an anthology of
loosely-related texts?

The onus of proof here will be on those who would assert literary unity. Given the tremendous diversity of material within the Bible, such a defense will not be attempted. I would agree with Northrop Frye that the unity of the Bible is not so much literary as it is a mythological unity. Those who do find the Bible (whether it be the Hebrew or Christian version) to be a literary unity differ among themselves with regard to the nature of this unity—what the unifying theme(s) are, and so on. My aim is simply to argue that the Bible possesses sufficient literary unity to justify a literary approach.

The Unity of the Bible

Up until about two hundred years ago, virtually everyone in the Western world regarded the Bible as a direct message to us from our Creator. As such, its unity was unquestionable. But today, even among those who retain some form of orthodox biblical belief, this notion of the univocality of the Bible is rapidly expiring. Modern critical study has, if nothing else, conclusively shown that the Bible is very much a human creation.

We now know, for example, that the Bible was in the making for most of a millennium; it represents a wide variety of cultural traditions on three continents. Even works which purport to have been penned by one author (such as Isaiah) have apparently been spliced together, sometimes from a number of sources. We are told by the specialists in genre studies that the Bible contains commandments, aphorisms, epigrams, proverbs, parables, riddles,
pericopes, couplets, formulaic phrases, folktales, oracles, epiphanies, marginal glosses, legends, snippets from historical record books, laws, letters, sermons, hymns, visions, rituals, fables, genealogies, fictional narrative, prophecy, etiologies, laments, and much more.

There are also ideological differences of opinion among the authors with regard to politics, history, ethics, psychology, the relative place of law and cult (ritual), of priesthood and laity, Israel and the nations, and even God. Robert Alter observes,

Indeed, when one contemplates the radical challenge in Job not only to the doctrine of retribution but to the very notion of a man-centered creation, or Ecclesiastes' insistence on cycles of futility in place of the linear, progressive time familiar from Genesis, or the exuberant eroticism of the Song of Songs, one begins to suspect that the selection was at least sometimes impelled by a desire to preserve the best of ancient Hebrew literature rather than to gather the consistent normative statements of a monotheistic party line. In fact, the texts that have been passed down to us exhibit not only extraordinary diversity but also a substantial amount of debate with one another. (Alter 13)

Yet it would be premature to discard the notion of the unity of the Bible, and particularly so if we choose to take a literary approach to the work. In spite of the ideological diversity within the Bible, no truly pagan or syncretistic works have been admitted to this uniformly monotheistic canon. And as mentioned in Chapter One, even the most mundane, nonliterary biblical texts frequently serve a literary function within the larger corpus. It may be that the Bible fails to measure up to our modern standards of what constitutes a literary unity. But this may be a commentary on us and our standards as much as it is of the Bible.
The Bible's heterogeneity may not be entirely accidental, either. Recall how the writer of Genesis glories in the diversity of land and life forms which nevertheless share a common source. Collective works of art do exist, some having been constructed over a span of several centuries. So what kind of unity are we able to discern in this admittedly heterogeneous collection of writings?

A key unifying characteristic of the Bible is, as discussed above, its powerfully allusive character. The full force of this becomes evident the moment one examines the marginal cross-references in any modern critical edition of the Bible. Does any other anthology possess this kind of unified texture? There is a symbolic cohesiveness, an intertextuality, to the biblical material that sets it apart from any other similar collection.

Though he recognizes the Bible's tremendous diversity, Robert Alter concludes: "[T]he Hebrew Bible, because it so frequently articulates its meanings by recasting texts within its own corpus, is already moving toward being an integrated work" (Alter 13). At the book level, Alter reminds us that the findings of historical criticism which lead us to question textual unity are not irrefutable:

Before you can decide whether a text is defective, composite, or redundant, you have to determine to the best of your ability the formal principles on which the text is organized. These are by no means the same for all times and places, as the nineteenth-century German founders of modern biblical scholarship often imagined. One has only to scan the history of a recent literary genre, the novel, to see how rapidly formal conventions shift, and to realize that elements like disjunction, interpolation, repetition, contrastive styles, which in biblical scholarship were long deemed sure signs of a defective text, may be perfectly deliberate components of the literary artwork. (Alter 26-27)
If such is true at the book level, might it not be true on a higher level?

There is a rough chronological ordering that unifies the biblical books. The story begins in the beginning and proceeds rapidly through primeval history, until it settles upon God's dealings with Israel, which will be the basic plot of the entire collection. Key events become denouements: Israel's story begins in Chaldea and ends in flight from the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25:26); the Israelites eject the Canaanites from the land, but eventually find themselves ejected.

There are also patterns of progression. The Noahic covenant promised the stability of the cosmos. The Abrahamic covenant promised land and descendants. The Davidic covenant promised sovereignty. The 'new' covenant of Jeremiah looks forward to a day when Torah will be internally motivated.

For modern readers, the historical act of canonization has, whether we approve or not, created a further sense of textual unity.

A more detailed examination would have to examine the Hebrew and Christian Bibles separately. Each exhibits a degree of literary unity, yet these are two very different unities, for although the Bibles share much in common, the arrangement and ordering of the biblical texts make an interpretive statement before the reading is even begun.

—HEBREW BIBLE. According to Harold Bloom, "The Hebrew Bible, from its origins onward, is anything but a theological library; it is the product of aesthetic choices" (Bloom 1988, 23). Each of the three sections (Torah, Prophets, Writings) follows the same basic
pattern. Each section opens (Genesis, Joshua, Psalms) on a note of freshness and vitality. Each section ends (Deuteronomy, Malachi, Chronicles) on a note of 'hopeful incompletion.' To those of us raised in a culture that has been shaped by the Christian version of the story, this may seem terribly anticlimactic. We yearn for a sense of closure. But could it be that the Hebrews considered and rejected such an option?

In his book *Torah and Canon*, James S. Sanders argues that the experience of the Babylonian exile was decisive in this regard. He maintains that this experience led to a recognition that the essential history of Israel was one of perpetual exile. Israel's sense of chosenness ended up having less to do with the triumphal conquest of land than with becoming a people who reflected the character of Yahweh to the watching world. This may be what enabled Israel to bequeath to posterity a sacred book rather than a crumbled empire for the archaeologist's spade.

Within the Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings), there was the option of arranging the order of the books in any number of ways. It is commonly believed that the ending to Malachi, which recognizes the cessation of prophecy in Israel and expresses the hope of its renewal, was intended to be an epilogue to the entire prophetic book collection.

The final book of the Writings is Chronicles, which ends with the Israelites in exile and with only the promise of restoration. From a chronological point of view, this is rather odd, for the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which detail this restoration, appear earlier in the collection. Yet Chronicles mirrors Genesis in that
they both begin with the origin of the human race and end with the promise of redemption and return to the promised land.

In the Hebrew Bible, there is the reverse progression of Yahweh's presence. The angels, miracles, and revelations which are commonplace early in the Torah are absent by the end of the historical books. What does remain in books such as Ezra and Nehemiah is the Torah itself. As Richard Elliott Friedman puts it, "In the absence of the apparent acts of God, there is the Word of God. The Hebrew Bible becomes a book about itself" (Friedman 221).

—CHRISTIAN BIBLE. The Christians adopted the books of the Hebrew Bible in their entirety—and the Hebrew Bible has never been the same since! Harold Bloom summarizes the situation as "the Christian triumph over the Hebrew Bible, a triumph which produced that captive work, the Old Testament" (Bloom 1984, 3). The irony here is that Jesus seems to have envisioned nothing of the sort:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

(Matthew 5:17-19a)

The Christians split up the Prophets. The Former Prophets were lumped together with the Torah (now called the "Pentateuch") and with Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job. They became known as the 'Historical Books.' The Latter Prophets became 'the Prophets,' and were moved to the end of the Hebrew canon.

What did this accomplish? It highlighted the forward-looking
aspect of the Prophets, which ends with Malachi's promise of the coming of Elijah, who will prepare the way for Messiah. The New Testament then follows immediately.

The Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, opens in Chapter 1 with a genealogy of Jesus going all the way back to Genesis. Chapter 2 is the nativity myth, which parallels the Genesis creation myth. In Chapter 3, John the Baptist, a prophet clothed in the garb of Elijah, introduces us to Christ. Early in Matthew, Jesus's 'kingdom manifesto,' the Sermon on the Mount, incorporates and transcends the Mosaic legislation.

The four sections of the New Testament parallel the four sections of the Christian Old Testament (Josipovici 1988, 42). The gospels, in that they portray Jesus as a second Moses, hark back to the Torah. Luke's sequel to his gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, recounts the early history of this 'new Israel,' and parallels the Former Prophets. The Epistles, which deal with the practical application of the new faith, parallel the Psalms, Proverbs, and similar devotional portions of the Writings. The New Testament, like the Old Testament, ends with prophecy. The Book of Revelation looks both backward to Genesis ("there shall be no more death") and forward to the end of time.

By any standard, the Christian Bible is a magnificent literary achievement. It is a single archetypal structure which "begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse, and it surveys human history in between, under the symbolic names of Adam and Israel" (Frye xiii). It both continues and transforms the Hebrew scriptures, creating an
entirely new 'unity' in the end. This pattern of the reinterpretive ending has now become one of the standard forms of European literature.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


2 Other examples of New Testament typology:
   --The new covenant predicted by Jeremiah (quoted above) is fulfilled when a person responds to the gospel of Christ (Hebrews 8).
   --Jesus's Hebrew name was the same as Joshua's. Like Joshua, he comes after Moses and leads his people into the Promised Land that could not have been obtained by the law of Moses alone.
   --Jesus's title, "son" of God, was originally given to the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:22).
   --The Gospel of John opens, "In the beginning..." This 'new Genesis' suggests that in Christ the effects of the fall can be reversed.
   --"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).
   --Christ becomes the antitype of the slain Passover lamb: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).
   --Jesus is the antitype of the temple (John 2:21), "for in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19).
   --As the hero of the Christian Bible, Jesus unites in himself all authority. He is portrayed as the ultimate prophet, priest, and king. He is the supreme prophet in Mark 9:4, where he is flanked by Moses and Elijah on a mountain peak. He is the supreme high priest in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 8:1), and in the words of the psalmist, "Thou art a priest forever, after the manner of Melchizedek" (Psalms 110:4). He is the supreme king in his birth story. The pilgrimage of the magi to meet Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12) is an antitype of the pilgrimage of the Queen of Sheba to visit the wise king Solomon.
In Romans 5:14, Paul writes that Adam is a 'typos' of Christ.

In Romans 9, Paul seizes upon the Hebrew notion of the 'remnant' to argue that the true children of Abraham are not his biological, but rather his spiritual descendants.

In a reference to the rock from which Moses obtained water in Exodus, Paul writes, "I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers... all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

"Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:12-14).

Christian baptism is the "antitypos" [Greek text] or "figura" [Latin Vulgate] of the salvation of Noah's family in the ark during the flood (1 Peter 3:21).

The confusion of tongues witnessed at Babel (Genesis 11) is reversed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the apostles received the ability to understand foreign tongues.

The Ethiopian eunuch returning home from Jerusalem in Acts 8 is reading aloud concerning the 'suffering servant' of Isaiah 53, whereupon "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

The Book of Hebrews is a dense mass of typological allusions to the Hebrew Bible, the most profound and sustained exploration in the Bible of the relation of Jesus to the Hebrew scriptures. Gabriel Josipovici sums up its argument: "God, in times past, spoke to us in shadows and enigmas, but the sacrifice of Jesus, his Son, has now made his meaning plain" (Josipovici 1987, 507). It is a thorough examination of the relation between the two covenants, and a good example of Christian allegorizing of the Hebrew ritual law.

The Book of Revelation, sometimes called the "Apocalypse" (Greek for "Revelation"), is the last book of the New Testament. It is a mosaic of allusions to the Hebrew Bible, a steady progression of antitypes. It is also a deliberate attempt to bring closure to the Christian biblical canon by mirroring the book of Genesis. The first Adam's exile because of a serpent requires that the second Adam (Christ) slay the serpent, thus making it possible for mankind to re-enter Paradise, now portrayed as the New Jerusalem where grows the tree of life. The judgment of the serpent and of "Babylon" (a symbol of Rome and all subsequent anti-Christ regimes) occurs in three cycles of sevens. Northrop Frye concludes: "At the end of the Book of Revelation, with such phrases as 'I make all things new' (21:5) and the promise of a new heaven and earth, we reach the antitype of all antitypes" (Frye 138).
WORKS CITED


CHAPTER THREE

LATE ANTIQUITY

The Bible arose within a specific historical context, and was originally intended to speak to believers within that context. But, as Edgar McKnight points out,

[T]he moment after the text was received by the first readers, the limited original use was exhausted. The text began to be read differently almost immediately after its initial reception, even by the first readers. And readers who were not original recipients of the text made sense in their own contexts with their different needs. Our reconceptualizing of biblical texts as literature follows the pattern implicitly followed by readers from the earliest days. (McKnight 10)

The two main historic 'fulfillments' of the Hebrew Bible are modern Judaism and Christianity. Although these two faiths share the Hebrew Bible in common, each went on to read it in a distinctive manner. They did this by developing additional sacred writings to serve as an interpretive grid for the 'proper' understanding of the Hebrew scriptures. Chapter Two shows how the New Testament served this function for the early Christians. This chapter will examine Jewish rabbinical writings and Christian patristic literature.

Interpretive 'grids' such as these arise out of definite theories of interpretation. James M. Robinson explains how literary theory is born:
The factors that have usually combined to produce the main efforts at theorizing about interpretation in Western civilization have been two. First, theorizing has emerged in the process of interpreting bodies of literature whose authority is in one way or the other binding and whose meaning is therefore crucial. Second, theorizing has been especially required when these classical or canonical literatures are to assert their authority in a situation to which they no longer directly speak. (Robinson 7-8)

A formal method of interpretation is not necessary so long as everyone agrees about meaning. But when communication begins to break down due to linguistic, cultural, or temporal differences, attention is drawn to the method of understanding itself. This happened when enlightened Greek Stoics began to read classical Greek literature. Beginning in Late Antiquity, it also began to happen with the Bible.¹

**Rabbinical Literature**

In Chapter Two, it was noted that a kind of literary study of the Bible takes place whenever biblical characters, themes, symbols, imagery, or even stylistic features are appropriated by later writers. The books of the New Testament, although constituting only a small fraction of the total volume, are the best known of the works continuing in this Hebrew biblical tradition. Indeed, the tradition is so strong within post-biblical Jewish literature that 'secular' Hebrew poetry doesn't appear until the eleventh century.

Given that biblical interpretation (even within the Bible) is ongoing, there is no sharp break between it and subsequent rabbinic commentary. This makes all the more sense when we recall that the Hebrew Bible was compiled in stages:
1. The written Torah (or Pentateuch), which was probably cast in its final form no later than the time of the exile, preserves a very ancient literary tradition.

2. The Neviim (prophets) acquired canonical authority during the post-exilic Restoration period.

3. The boundary of the Ketuvim (writings) was the topic of discussion at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C.E. This was a gathering of leaders, representing the major Jewish traditions, which was convened in an effort to establish consensus with regard to books which had not acquired universal acceptance (e.g. Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs).

Many other Hebrew literary works were never even considered for possible admission to the canon. There was an inherent conservatism about adding on to the Bible, since it was widely held that prophecy had long ceased in Israel: "After the death of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel" (Mishnah Sota 48b). Yet the period from about 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. would go down as one of the most prolific, creative periods of Hebrew literary history.

--HISONIM. This Hebrew word, which means "external" or "outside," refers to those Hebrew literary creations which were not granted canonical status within Judaism. By about 150 C.E., most of these works had been translated into Greek, sometimes by Hellenistic Jewish Christians who felt free to develop the tradition further. A number had for some time been included in the Septuagint, from which they were faithfully translated into Latin by Jerome. They are known within the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions as the
"deuterocanonicals," and within the Protestant tradition as the "apocrypha." But since they never achieved universal acceptance and were rejected from the Jewish canon at Jamnia, Jews and Protestants consider these works to be noncanonical.

Many of the Hisonim were attributed to some ancient biblical worthy. There are the books of Enoch, the Testament of Moses, the Prayer of Manasseh, etc. For this reason, they are sometimes referred to as the "pseudepigrapha" ("false subscriptions," i.e. books written under an assumed name, a common practice of the time). In spite of the name, such works are not to be lightly dismissed, for they show considerable development of the character of the prophets and patriarchs. Some are historical (e.g. the books of the Maccabees), some are religious fiction (Tobit, Judith), some are wisdom literature (Ecclesiasticus, Baruch), and many are of the apocalyptic genre, full of visions and dream imagery much like the books of Daniel and Revelation.

An example of how the Hisonim exhibit literary continuity with the Hebrew Bible may be observed in a work which is titled 2 Esdras in the Authorized (King James) Version of 1611 and 4 Esdras in the Latin Vulgate. Being a fairly representative late apocalyptic work, it is an expansion by Christian writers of an original Jewish core which appears in Ch. 4-14.

The book consists of seven visions. In the first, the seer demands an explanation of the suffering of Zion, whose sin does not exceed that of her oppressor. The second deals with the problem of why God's chosen people have been delivered up to other nations. The third asks why the Jews do not possess the earth. The fourth is of
a mourning woman who recounts her woes, and is thereupon transformed into a glorious city, which is a symbol of Jerusalem. The fifth is of a twelve-winged, three-headed eagle—the symbol of Rome—and is declared by the interpreting angel to be the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 (after Babylon, the Medo-Persians, and Greece); the symbol of Roman rule will be supplanted by the Messiah. The sixth is a continuation of the Son of Man vision of Daniel 7. The final vision details Ezra's restoration of the sacred books of the Hebrews.

There is a vitality to these writings that is unmistakable. D.S. Russell, a leading scholar of this period, writes,

[These are not] the work of over-heated imaginations or the garbled record of wild speculations. On the contrary, these writings are the work of men of faith who saw penetratingly beyond the seen to the unseen and for whom 'the other world' of the spirit impinged on the life of 'this world' in such a way that they could hardly at times distinguish the one from the other.

(Russell 1987, xii)

—TARGUMS. In the book of Nehemiah, we have the record of Ezra the priest leading the nation in a massive renewal of their covenant with Yahweh. On that occasion, Ezra and his scribes "read in the book, in the Torah of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). It is apparent that Ezra's listeners required assistance in making sense of the public reading. Part of the problem was no doubt linguistic; after seventy years in Babylon, classical Hebrew had begun to die out as a spoken tongue. Part of the problem was also cultural; the Jews were now several centuries removed from the culture which had produced the Torah. So, after the time of Ezra, it became common
practice for the Hebrew text to be translated/explicated/paraphrased into Aramaic during the public reading of the scriptures in synagogue. When the text and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible became standardized, around the second century C.E., so did these oral "targums" ("translations"). They were committed to writing beginning around the third century.

The act of translating the Bible presupposes a kind of literary study, for, as Jacob Neusner, Professor of Jewish Studies at Brown University points out, translation is inevitably "a labor of interpretation of a highly creative and original order" (Neusner 23). The Jewish interpreters of the Bible into both Greek (the Septuagint is the earliest literary translation in recorded history) and Aramaic regarded the Hebrew text as divinely inspired. Yet they understood that a literal word-for-word translation would not be helpful. So they usually opted for a 'free' translation, or paraphrase.

The paraphrase of the Targums was exceptionally free: "First, the translators so paraphrase the original Hebrew as to alter its meaning and impute a new and rich sense. Second, in the guise of translation the authors insert quite fresh materials..." (Neusner 26). In other words, the targums included interpretation (midrash) along with the actual translation. This was considered perfectly acceptable, for the authority of the oral tradition was at this time beginning to rival that of the written.

Here is a comparison of the original Hebrew of Genesis 15:1 with its Aramaic 'translation' in the Palestinian Targum:
After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram...' (Hebrew)

After these things, after the kings had gathered together and fallen before Abram [as recounted in Genesis 14]... Abram thought in his heart and said: 'Woe now is me! Perhaps I have received the rewards of my meritorious deeds in this world, and perhaps there shall be no portion for me in the world to come!' And then the word of the Lord was with Abram in a vision, saying: 'Do not fear... although these fall before you in this world, the reward of your good deeds exceeding great is kept and prepared before me for the world to come.' (Aramaic) (cited in McNamara 72-73)

There are three complete targums to the Pentateuch extant: Targum Onkelos, Targum Neofiti, and Targum Jonathan. Onkelos contains the least amount of midrash; Jonathan contains the most. There is only one targum to the Prophets: Jonathan. These finely edited productions date to around the fifth century, and incorporate earlier versions.

The targums have proven extremely valuable in solving some New Testament exegetical difficulties. For example, the notion of a suffering and crucified Messiah was a stumbling block not only to Jews but to Jesus's own disciples, as recorded in the gospel accounts (cf. Mark 8:31-33). This seems odd, given that the 'servant songs' of Isaiah clearly describe a suffering servant, and within first-century Judaism the servant of Isaiah was understood to be Messiah. Targum Jonathan solves the mystery for us. In the targum, all ascriptions of suffering on the part of the servant are transferred either to the Jewish people suffering at the hand of their Gentile oppressors, or to the Gentiles receiving retribution at the hand of Messiah. Yet in this text, unlike in later Judaism, the servant is clearly equated with Messiah: "Behold my servant
Messiah will prosper..." (Isaiah 52:13, Targum Jonathan).

Another marked feature of the targums is their avoidance of anthropomorphisms with regard to the deity. Instead of the direct Hebrew 'YHWH,' the targums will resort to circumlocutions such as "the word of God," "the glory of God," and "the indwelling presence" (Heb. "shekhina") when they wish to refer to God. This sheds light on New Testament passages such as John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." It seems John is insisting that all of the manifestations of Yahweh from the Hebrew Bible—Word, Indwelling Presence, Glory—are summed up in Jesus.

--MIDRASH. This word simply means "exegesis." From the time of Ezra, the production of midrash became more formalized, and became the assigned task of the scribes. The targums had solved the linguistic and cultural obstacles to understanding the Bible, but more help was needed. Since there was no living memory of Israel having seriously followed the laws of Moses, the Israelites needed practical, homiletical guidance in how to build a lifestyle centered around 'Torah.'

This 'Torah' emphasis was something new. Prior to the exile, the temple had been the focus of Israelite religion. But in the aftermath of its destruction and the subsequent transport of Judah to Babylon, a new rallying point became necessary. The teaching of the prophets was taken to heart, namely, that Judah's inattention to the covenant with Yahweh was responsible for her exile. So when Ezra was given the task of reviving Judaism upon the nation's return to Palestine, the temple never resumed its original significance.
Instead, there was a new emphasis on the study and exposition of 'Torah' in local synagogues. These expositions ("midrashim") were preserved and handed down until they were eventually committed to writing, largely after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

R.J. Loewe considers the poetic dimension of rabbinic midrash:
"It is there, expressed in midrashic anecdote and parable-making, and in the themes—and sometimes in the economy of expression" (Loewe 136). Rabbinic midrash is highly sensitive to biblical nuances. Alter points out (11) that whereas historical critics see no rationale for the interpolation of the story of Judah and Tamar into the Joseph saga, the rabbis found several connections:

The Holy One Praised be He said to Judah, 'You deceived your father with a kid. By your life, Tamar will deceive you with a kid... You said to your father 'please take note.' By your life, Tamar will say to you 'please take note.' (Genesis Rabbah 84:11-12)

Many later biblical texts (and translations) are creative 'midrashim' upon earlier ones. To a greater or lesser extent, this is also true of the New Testament gospels, which were written by men steeped in a long tradition of midrash.

A more controversial type of midrash—allegory—arose during the rabbinical period. As mentioned in Chapter Two, there had already been an allegorical tendency among the New Testament writers. Hellenistic Jewish writing was heavily influenced by Stoic Homeric scholarship, which used allegory to derive philosophical truth from the classical Greek writings—without having to accept them as factual historical accounts.

Midrash and allegory both arrive at textual meaning by making
reference to something outside the passage. But whereas allegory seeks universal referents, midrash limited itself to referents located in other parts of the Scripture. The philosophical reason for this is that the text of the Bible was assumed to be, in and of itself, a complete reflection of ultimate spiritual reality (in the Platonic sense). The Bible was fully capable of interpreting itself, and every detail was significant; no words were wasted.

Allegorization came to be valued for three reasons:

1. It eliminated perceived inconsistencies within a text or contradictions between a text and something outside of it (e.g. one's senses, knowledge of history, etc.).
2. It lifted the discourse from the specific to the general, turning historical particulars into universal truths.
3. It altered the straightforward utterances of the Bible into enigmatic ones. The Greeks loved this. To them, the fact that the Bible could speak in riddles was confirmation of its divine character.

The earliest example of allegorical Hellenistic Jewish exegesis is the work of Aristobulus, who wrote at the end of the second century B.C.E. Aristobulus claimed that biblical theology and Greek philosophy are fundamentally the same, and that by the use of Stoic allegorization he could derive Greek philosophy from the Bible. He also seeks to explain the references to God's voice, hands, arm, face, feet, and walking about as figurative anthropomorphisms. Another work, the Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates (c.100 B.C.E.), offers an explanation for the Levitical dietary laws concerning clean and unclean animals. We learn that
since these laws have no bearing on the Greek notion of 'justice,'
the references to weasels, rats, etc. (Leviticus 11:29) are
fundamentally descriptions of various kinds of men who are to be
avoided.

The most prominent Hellenistic Jewish allegorist was Philo of
Alexandria, who wrote in the early part of the first century (C.E.
is assumed hereafter). Philo claimed that Moses learned from the
Egyptians the lore of Greek meter, rhythm, and harmony. He rightly
discerned that the Genesis creation account is an aesthetic one:

Now the creation of the world is related throughout with
exceeding beauty and in a manner admirably suited to the
dignity of God, taking its beginning in the account of the
creation of the heaven, and ending with that of the
formation of man; the first of which things is the most
perfect of all imperishable things, and the other of all
corruptible and perishable things. (Philo 3:466)

Philo maintained that there was often a sharp distinction
between what Moses wrote and what he meant. The literal meaning was
therefore to be rejected if it involved anything unworthy of God, if
it led to historical implausibility, or if the passage was plainly
symbolic. Philo observed that in the Garden of Eden "there are
trees in no ways resembling those with which we are familiar, but
trees of Life, of Immortality, of Knowledge, of Apprehension, of
Understanding, of the conception of good and evil" (De
Plantatione 36, cited in Grant 61). These are therefore symbolic,
and not literal, trees. In his treatise, "The Contemplative Life,"
Philo is the first person on record to have described Hebrew poetry
in the terminology of Greek meter.

This adoption of Greek allegorization and terminology by Philo
(and other Hellenistic Jews) reflects the belief that Greek learning ultimately derived from the Bible. This belief provided a rationale for the acceptance of Greek classical thinking while it served as a bulwark against unlimited Hellenization.

During the first two centuries of the common era, allegorical midrash challenged the monopoly of the more traditional, literal variety of midrash. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, two second-century scholars, represent the two fundamentally different textual approaches.

According to Rabbi Akiva, every jot and tittle in the text was inspired by God, and was therefore sacred, significant, and must have interpretation. This led to some highly elaborate allegories. Yet there was precedent for this even among the earliest scribes, who understood the Song of Songs—on the surface, a secular love poem—as an allegory of the ideal love between Yahweh and Israel (cf. Targum to the Song of Songs). Similarly, much significance was made of the shape of the first letter of the Hebrew Bible: "Just as the letter 'beth' [ב] is closed on all sides and open only in front"—it must be remembered that Hebrew is read from right to left—"so you are not permitted to inquire what is before or what is behind, but only from the actual time of creation" (Chagigah 2:1, Jerusalem Talmud, cited in Josipovici 67).

In one sense, this thorough allegorization simply continues the typological/allegorical trajectory of much of the Bible. These early exegetes recognized that the oracles of Scripture are embodied in various forms: law, history, prophecy, psalms, wisdom sayings. In order to discern the voice of God, the exegete must therefore
penetrate beyond the outward genre (and the literal sense) in order to uncover the concealed spiritual meaning. Here is a welcome recognition of literary genre, but unfortunately it is seen as a barrier to spiritual truth which must be peeled back if the pure Word of God is to shine forth.

Under rabbis like Akiva, allegorical interpretation had its day in Jewish biblical scholarship. But the excesses of this approach were apparent, and given the popularity of allegorization among Christian exegetes, the approach never became very popular in the main Jewish centers of the period.

The opposing school of interpretation is represented by Rabbi Ishmael, a contemporary of Akiva. According to Rabbi Ishmael, the Bible speaks in the language of men. Forms, figures, and other devices are therefore precisely that—aids to communication, and not clues to unlocking a gigantic hermeneutical puzzle. Nothing is to override the straightforward meaning of the text. It is noteworthy that the first midrashic commentaries were produced by the school of Rabbi Ishmael. These are the Mechilta to Exodus and the Sifre to Numbers and Deuteronomy, which date to the early fourth century.

Various mediating positions were proposed. Some accepted the literal meaning as primary, but insisted that it pointed toward a higher meaning. Christian biblical interpreters would soon be confronted with these very same interpretive decisions.

Twentieth-century practitioners of literary study of the Bible have rediscovered the insights that abound in the rabbinic midrashim. Robert Alter claims,
In many cases a literary student of the Bible has more to learn from the traditional commentaries than from modern scholarship. The difference between the two is ultimately the difference between assuming that the text is an intricately interconnected unity, as the midrashic exegetes did, and assuming it is a patchwork of frequently disparate documents, as most modern scholars have supposed. With their assumption of interconnectedness, the makers of the Midrash were often as exquisitely attuned to small verbal signals of continuity and to significant lexical nuances as any 'close reader' of our own age. (Alter 11)

Indeed, the list of seven exegetical rules developed by Rabbi Hillel in the first century still makes good literary sense. His first rule ("light and heavy") is what we today call "a fortiori." It dictates that what is true or applicable in a "light" (less important) instance is all the more true in a "heavy" (important) context.

Despite their affinities, contemporary practitioners of literary study of the Bible are quick to point out the crucial difference between midrash and modern literary study of the Bible. Alter offers this critique of rabbinic midrash:

The Midrash provides exegesis of specific phrases or narrative actions but not continuous readings of the biblical narratives: small pieces of the text become the foundations of elaborate homiletical structures that have only an intermittent relation to the integral story told by the text.

(Alter 11, emphasis his)

Likewise, Adele Berlin, in *The Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983), considers rabbinic midrash to be an early example of literary study of the Bible. But there is a crucial difference between midrashic 'poetics' and our own: "The Midrash never completely frees itself from... semantic explanations of what
we would consider to be poetic phenomena" (Berlin 17).

James Kugel, Starr Professor of Hebrew Literature at Harvard, believes that the allegorical school of midrash so distracted the rabbis that they eventually lost their ability to appreciate Hebrew poetics. Chapter Three of his book, The Idea of Biblical Poetry (1981), is entitled "Rabbinic Exegesis and the Forgetting of Parallelism." Parallelism is a Hebrew poetic device whereby corresponding thoughts are stated in 'parallel' repetition. But to the allegorical mind, any kind of rhetorical repetition or redundancy (which is perhaps the defining characteristic of Hebrew poetry) seemed to indicate sloppiness of composition. With God as author, this was never a serious exegetical option. Hence, every detail required interpretation, and the overarching artistic pattern began to fade.

There is a famous example of the forgetting of parallelism in the Bible:

Rejoice greatly, 0 daughter of Zion,
Shout, 0 daughter of Jerusalem;
Behold, thy king cometh unto thee,
He is triumphant and victorious,
Lowly, and riding upon an ass,
Even upon a colt the foal of an ass.
(Zechariah 9:9)

Here 'daughter of Zion' and 'daughter of Jerusalem' are one and the same. So are the 'ass' and the 'colt.' But somehow the writer of the Gospel of Matthew failed to appreciate this fact:

And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with
her... This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

Tell the daughter of Zion,
Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on an ass,
and on a colt, the foal of an ass.
(Matthew 21:5, emphasis mine)

That this forgetting was not limited to Christian exegetes is clear from Kugel's numerous examples.

It must also be remembered that the motivation for rabbinic midrash was to provide an interpretive framework for the reading of the Scriptures. For this reason, the midrash are sometimes as much eisegesis (a reading into the text) as they are exegesis. Consider these midrashim on Creation:

In the beginning, two thousand years before the heaven and the earth, seven things were created: the Torah..., the Divine Throne..., Paradise on the right side of God, Hell on the left side; the Celestial Sanctuary directly in front of God, having a jewel on its altar graven with the Name of the Messiah, and a Voice that cries aloud, 'Return, children of men.'
(Midrash to Psalms 90:3, cited in Josipovici 298)

And the Lord God took the man and caused him to dwell in the Garden of Eden in order to work in the Torah, and to keep its commandments.
(Targum Neofiti to Genesis 2:15, cited in Neusner 28)

--MISHNAH. The problem with biblical interpretation after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem was that the temple is central in biblical Torah, and now it was not only destroyed but also permanently forbidden by order of the emperor. If Judaism was to survive, it therefore needed a new focus to replace the temple, along with a new basis of authority separate from that of the Bible. This was the intention of the Mishnah.
But if the Mishnah was an attempt to distance Judaism from the Bible, from whence would it derive its religious authority? The solution was ready to be found within Jewish custom of the time. Ever since the days of Ezra, and the subsequent closing of the biblical canon, many Jewish religious traditions had arisen. These were largely efforts to go beyond Torah in order to be sure that the minimum standards of Torah were met. Since many of these later practices lacked direct biblical support, there arose an expanded understanding of Torah. Jacob Neusner explains:

Between the first and the seventh centuries, a Judaism took shape around the conviction that at Sinai God revealed to Moses the Torah, or revelation, not only in writing but also orally. This oral Torah was formulated and transmitted in memory, and it was handed on from prophets to sages, from masters to disciples, down from Sinai until it was written down in the Mishnah and successor documents. (Neusner 43)

The Jerusalem Talmud later confirmed this belief: "Many rulings were transmitted to Moses on Sinai [and]... all of them are embodied in Mishnah" (Pesach 2.6, cited in Evans 545).

The notion of an 'oral Torah' did not arise without opposition:

It was no doubt the formulation of this belief which led to the breach in the Sanhedrin in the time of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.) and the appearance of the two parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were staunch supporters of the authority of the oral tradition and were bitterly opposed by the Sadducees who, although they had their own ordinances relating to sacrificial matters and the like, regarded the written Torah as alone authoritative. (Russell 1965, 66)

Russell (and most religious historians) believe that this doctrine
of the oral Torah rescued Judaism from the moribund state which would have been its fate if the nation had followed the more theologically conservative but socially acculturated Sadducees.

In the Mishnah, then, as compiled under the direction of Judah the Prince around 200, the doctrine of the dual Torah became official. The Mishna even goes so far as to assert: "Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the Scribes than to the observance of the Written Torah" (Sanhedrin 11:3, cited in Casper 23). Thus freed from biblical constraints, the Mishnah was able to build upon the Bible without becoming enslaved to it. Whereas midrash tended to be a verse-by-verse running commentary on the Bible, the Mishnah is a more systematic presentation of the religious obligation of the Jew. It refers to itself as "a fence around the Torah" (Pirke Aboth 1.1, cited in Russell 1965, 65). Although based upon midrashic exegesis, its categories of law are independent of their scriptural bases.

In terms of literary study of the Bible, the Mishnah (as with midrash) gets mixed reviews. On the one hand, the Mishnah advances the Jews beyond a sect whose religious shrine had been confiscated; they would now become 'the people of the book.' Moreover, the creative Mishnaic reinterpretation of Torah was a stroke of hermeneutical genius. And to the extent that the Mishnah is built upon earlier biblical midrash, there is literary continuity as well.

Nevertheless, the Mishnah attempts to create a certain distance, both in content and form, between itself and the Hebrew Bible. In terms of form, the Mishnah's topical, systematic ordering is a departure from the traditional Hebraic narrative genre in favor
of a more conceptually abstract (Greek) didactic arrangement. As for content, the interest of the Mishnah is restricted to regulations—what the Hebrews called the "halakah." It has no interest in the historical or narrative portions of the Bible, the "haggadah." Here is the beginning of a trend with Judaism toward the separation of religion from art.

---TOSEFTA. This developing emphasis upon law at the expense of the biblical literature continues in the Tosefta ("addition"), an appendix to the Mishnah which was completed around 300. It seems that once religion has been divorced from art, one is inevitably more highly valued than the other. During this period, religion prospered at the expense of art. In the Tosefta, there is a remark attributed to Rabbi Akiva: "Anyone who sings the Song of Songs in melodic fashion at a banquet and treats it as an ordinary song forfeits his portion in the world to come" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 12:10).

---TALMUD. The Jerusalem 'Talmud' ("learning"), a fourth-century work, and the Babylonian Talmud, a late fifth or early sixth-century production, are essentially commentaries on the Mishnah, which by this time had become at least as authoritative as Scripture. In these talmuds, we learn that David was punished and Deborah demoted for confusing revelation with art (Pesahim 66b).

Once the midrash and the oral tradition had been committed to writing, rabbinic Judaism gave way to medieval Judaism, where religious discourse would take a turn toward the academic, and some striking literary interpretations would begin to emerge.
Patristic Writings

The apostolic period (roughly the last half of the first century) witnessed the production of the New Testament writings. These were mostly (if not entirely) in circulation by the beginning of the second century, although it would require several more centuries before the identities of the individual books would merge into a joint identity in the canon of the New Testament. The apostolic period was followed by the patristic period, the period of the early church 'fathers,' which extended from the second through sixth century and coincided with late rabbinic Judaism. It was a time of rapid growth for Christianity, including much suffering and persecution, which eventually led to Roman imperial acceptance, consolidation, and institutionalization. Two important factors govern the examination of this period:

1. The progressive Hellenization of the eastern Mediterranean meant that Hebrew culture would cease to exert a controlling influence within both Judaism and Christianity. The Roman destruction of Jerusalem during the first century only hastened this process.

2. Due to the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles, the Bible both influenced and became influenced by the wider Greek culture.

The combination of these two processes resulted in a general decline in literary appreciation of the Bible. This should not be surprising, for (as already noted) the Jews themselves had already lost the interpretive conventions of biblical literature. Without a Hebrew frame of reference, much of the Bible's literary grandeur
went unappreciated. Or, if there was appreciation, it was often skewed by comparison of the Bible with Greek literary classics.

This problem of the relationship between the Bible and the classical writings of Greece and Rome gave birth to modern literary criticism. Perhaps the earliest application of this criticism to the Bible is a short passage near the beginning of Longinus's *On the Sublime*, probably written shortly after the death of Augustus. Longinus was presumably a Jew who revered Moses and Homer alike (Roberts 209). This first-century work praises the author of Genesis, "the lawgiver of the Jews." In describing the simple majesty of the creation account, Longinus recognizes it as a passage "which represents divinity as genuinely unsoiled and great and pure" (9.9).

During the second century, apocryphal New Testament books continued to be written in the biblical tradition. These imitated the New Testament genres (gospel, acts, epistle, apocalyptic) while pretending to be the work of New Testament personages. They often dealt with the early life of Jesus, which goes largely unrecorded in the canonical gospels.

Many of these apocryphal works were products of gnosticism, which taught that Jesus (and the apostles) didn't proclaim truth clearly and openly, but rather only in parabolic riddles. The gnostics maintained that, as with the Jewish concept of 'torah,' a kind of secret gospel was handed down orally by Jesus to the apostles, and from them to others in accordance with the capacity of their hearers to accept the truth. In this way, the gnostic gospel came to a certain Theodas, and thence to the gnostic leader,
Valentinus. The gnostics also believed there were varying levels of inspiration within the biblical canon. They were avid scholars, and were the first to offer detailed exegesis of the 'logos' of the prologue to the Gospel of John. A Valentinian gnostic by the name of Heracleon wrote the earliest known commentary on the New Testament.

In their emphasis upon the communicative function of the Bible, with its varying levels of inspiration, the gnostics departed from the more customary Christian notion of a fixed deposit of revelation, all equally inspired. Such a notion seems to have entered the Judeo-Christian tradition during the Hellenistic period, and became even more rigid within Islam. In their willingness to jettison this notion, the gnostics anticipate the opinions of Coleridge and many modern literary students of the Bible.

Perhaps the most famous gnostic was Marcion (c.80-160), who sought to purge the Christian Bible of all its Jewish elements. Irenaeus (c.130-200) pinpointed the hermeneutical shortcoming of Marcion and the gnostics by emphasizing a central tenet of modern literary study of the Bible. In his treatise, "Against the Heretics" (c.180), Irenaeus argued that interpretations are not to be built on isolated passages and individual words, but rather on the entire literary context. He compares the gnostics with students of Homer, who amused themselves by combining lines from the Iliad and Odyssey in order to tell an entirely new story. Irenaeus sees the Bible as a literary unity by finding it to be a development, not a uniform teaching.

Although Irenaeus's argument has now become the dominant
Christian understanding, it was little understood at the time. Other hermeneutical tactics (such as allegorical reading of the Bible) were more commonly employed against gnosticism. Irenaeus also found hermeneutical confidence in the community of believers, rather than in individual efforts. He was the first to propose the 'rule of faith' as the criterion for proper biblical exegesis, i.e. that the beliefs of the dominant Christian tradition provide safety in interpretation.

Another second-century writer exhibiting literary sensitivity with reference to the Bible is Ignatius. In his letters, Ignatius grapples with some New Testament hermeneutical difficulties, including the star of Bethlehem. Interestingly, it is a literary interpretation that finally solves his difficulty. He understands the star to symbolize Jesus himself, who appears in order to disturb the rulers of the heavenly regions (Letter to the Ephesians 19:2-3).

In a situation where appreciation of the original literary art of the Bible has been lost, there are two options. One is to read the text in a wooden, literal fashion. The other is to allegorize it. Both of these options became commonplace within early Christianity.

The allegorizing school of interpretation was centered in Alexandria, the home of Philo, who had tried to search out a 'middle way' between Judaism and Greek religion by harmonizing their sacred literatures. Clement (c.150-220) and Origen (c.185-254), both of Alexandria, were early church fathers who seized upon Philo's hermeneutic and propagated it within the Christian church, which proved more open to this approach than did Judaism.
The motivation for allegorizing was to make the Bible palatable to Greek minds. Allegorizers recognized that much of the biblical material could not possibly have been intended as literal truth. For example, commenting on Genesis 1, Origen writes:

Could any man of sound judgment suppose that the first, second and third days had an evening and a morning, when there was yet no sun or moon or stars? Could anyone be so unintelligent as to think that God made a Paradise somewhere in the East and planted it with trees like a farmer?... No one, I think, will question that these are only fictions, stories of things that never actually happened, and that figuratively they refer to certain mysteries. (On First Principles 4.3.1)

Origen was a pioneer in several respects. He was the first to systematically apply the method of Philo to the New Testament writings. In defense of his approach, he authored the first technical treatise on Christian hermeneutical theory, On First Principles (c.225). Its central thesis is that there is a fundamental distinction between the letter (literal history) and the spirit (spiritual teaching) of the biblical texts. Finally, Origen compiled his Hexapla, a comparative text of the Old Testament written in six parallel columns, which was admired by Jerome in the fifth century and became a model for future text-critics.

As with earlier allegorists, Origen sought to account for historical difficulties within the Bible. His Commentary on John is an attempt to show how an allegorical (he calls it "anagogical," i.e. "higher") reading of the gospel eliminates the problem of John's historical departures from the three 'synoptic' gospels, not to mention the lesser factual discrepancies among these three. This twofold interpretation of scripture, the 'lower' (literal) and
'higher' (spiritual) were believed to correspond to man's dual nature of body and soul, the latter being more important.

In some respects, Origen goes beyond Philo in his minimization of history. Whereas Philo generally believed that the literal events pointed beyond themselves to a higher spiritual-philosophical truth, Origen was willing to dispense with historicity altogether whenever history got in the way of theology. According to Origen, in such situations "the scripture wove into the historical narrative what did not take place—at some points what cannot take place, and at others what can take place but did not" (On First Principles 4.2.9). Here is an incipient recognition of the place of myth (what cannot take place) and fiction (what did not take place) in the construction of biblical narrative. In his stress upon the symbolic aspect of language, Origen's position is not far removed from twentieth-century linguistic philosophy.

Allegorization has a number of resemblances to modern literary study of the Bible. The historical dimension of the text is minimized. The biblical writers are not regarded as mere compilers of tradition, but inspired creative writers whose works continued to have significance long after they were written. The necessity of allegorical interpretation was seemingly sanctioned by the literary forms of the Bible. It was believed that the voice of God was concealed beneath the outward forms (genre). The exegete therefore had to penetrate beyond the literal sense, which was considered but a husk which contained the inner, deeper spiritual meaning of the text.

Yet allegorizers such as Origen demonstrate an unfamiliarity
with both the figures of Hebrew literary language as well as the Hebrew outlook on life.

With regard to literary language, they interpreted it philosophically rather than artistically. They tended to look through the text rather than at it. Although adept at recognizing metaphors, they were unwilling to allow the metaphor to stand as the primary meaning of the passage. Instead, they would obliterate the metaphor by seeking two meanings, a literal and a spiritual. This type of exegesis is a highly individual exercise, and since the symbolic referents always lie outside the text, there is really no way any particular interpretation can be objectively critiqued.

With regard to the Hebrew outlook on life, there is the classic case of the Song of Songs. This is an epithalamion, purportedly celebrating the marriage of Solomon to the daughter of Pharaoh. It posed two thorny problems to early Bible interpreters, one as a result of what the poem leaves unstated and the other from what it does say. There is no direct mention of God in this song, a notion that seemed odd to interpreters who viewed the Bible as a theological treatise. What is to be found is a graphic depiction of the joys of erotic love. Origen modified the traditional Jewish interpretation by identifying the Bride with the soul or the church and the Groom with God or Christ. This became the generally accepted Christian solution for centuries, even into the present era: "If these words are not to be spiritually understood, are they not mere tales? If they contain no hidden mystery, are they not unworthy of God? (Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs, cited in Astell 2). When Chaucer's lecherous old January in "The
Merchant's Tale" reads the song in a baldly literal way, it is quite possible he is closer to the original Hebrew sense of celebration than many a religious critic.

Once allegorical interpretation had taken hold, some of Origen's successors took it even further than he did. Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-340), the first church historian, expressly denied in his Proof for the Gospel that Moses and the prophets spoke for their own time at all. Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-394) wrote his Life of Moses, a wholly mystical reading of the biblical account. These later writers freely employed the whole arsenal of Hellenistic allegorical technique, including etymology and numerology.

Origen's influence upon later exegetes was incalculable. Yet the Christian church never wholeheartedly endorsed Alexandrian allegorical study of the Bible. In fact, just as in rabbinic Judaism, there arose an opposing school of interpretation. It was to be headquartered in Antioch, Syria.

In Antioch, a more sober, literal handling of the biblical texts was preferred. A restrained, typological exegesis became the norm. The historical reality of the accounts was taken seriously. Textual and philological studies were highly valued. Antiochan exegetes believed in divine inspiration, but they also took seriously the human element in the composition of the Bible. These emphases were a result of several important factors: a closer relationship to Jewish exegesis, the influence of Aristotle (rhetoric) over Plato (philosophy), and an interest in the humanity as well as the divinity of Jesus.

The chief proponent of Antiochan thought was Theodore, who
served as Bishop of Mopsuestia from 392-428. Theodore's friend, John (nicknamed Chrysostom—"golden-mouth"), became the chief popularizer of Antiochan thought by means of his ninety sermons on the Gospel of Matthew and eighty-eight on the Gospel of John. In 425, an Antiochan scholar by the name of Adrian wrote a handbook for biblical interpretation which is still extant, *Introduction to the Divine Scriptures*.

The Antioch school understandably reacted against the extreme allegorizing of the Alexandrians, which so easily become a springboard for uncontrolled speculation. Theodore opposed Origen's allegorical understanding of the Song of Solomon, although Theodore's position lost out at the Council of Constantinople in 553, where the allegorical reading was made official. Rather than spiritualize away the gospel discrepancies, these exegetes either sought to harmonize the accounts or find some kind of satisfactory explanation (e.g. the synoptic writers were not attempting a strict chronology). The Antioch school also rejected trinitarian proofs from the Old Testament, since the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught there. Even those Old Testament passages which the Antioch school accepted as predictive of the new covenant in Christ were allowed to have a meaning quite apart from this.

Because of their hostility to pagan literature, members of the Antioch school were reluctant to call Moses or David 'poets.' Yet their more down-to-earth exegesis, especially their acknowledgment of the Bible as the 'word of man' as well as the 'Word of God,' did advance the cause of literary study of the Bible.

Theodore was among the first to carefully observe the workings
of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. In contrast to the allegorizers, who would seek out subtle differences within parallel thoughts, Theodore remarked: "Now here a single idea is being expressed in common diaeresis ['dividing in two,' a rhetorical figure]" (J.P. Migne, Patrologiae, series graeca 66:156, cited in Kugel 157).

There arose a stalemate between the allegorizing and the literalistic schools of biblical interpretation. It seemed the only way out was the establishment of a neutral authority as arbiter. This is precisely what happened through the labors of Augustine (354-430), a theologian of such immense authority that in him a grand consensus began to emerge which would hold sway over Western Europe for nearly a millennium.

When, in the second century, Irenaeus proposed his notion of the 'rule of faith' in biblical interpretation, he intended it to be a negative criterion of validity. That is to say, it was intended to exclude incorrect interpretations, not endorse any individual one as 'correct.' But Tertullian of Carthage (160-230) developed the idea further, proposing that since the Bible is a product of the Church, the Church is the only agency authorized to interpret it.

Tertullian lived in pre-Constantinian days, and was not thinking in legal, but rather in exegetical, terms. It was Augustine who was finally responsible for the establishment of dogmatic biblical exegesis as the officially approved critical approach to the Bible within Christendom. To his credit, Augustine desired to maintain a distinction between unity and uniformity of belief. But given his eventual sanction of state persecution against the Donatists and other theological deviants, it seems clear
that for him the 'rule of faith' was more than a mere hermeneutical guideline.

Generally credited as the primary architect of medieval Christendom, Augustine (354-430) has been the most influential shaper of Christianity since the apostle Paul. Although subsidiary to doctrinal considerations, Augustine's biblical exegesis contains a clear literary dimension.

Being well educated in the pagan classics, this North African Christian came to the Bible with a keen literary orientation, which initially caused him difficulty. As he expressed it in his Confessions (397-401), "When I first looked into the Scriptures... they seemed quite unworthy of comparison with the stately prose of Cicero" (Confessions 3:5). This was partly due to the artistic inferiority of the early Latin translations. But it is also suggestive of the extent to which the art of the Bible had by this time become invisible to someone shaped within a different literary tradition.

Allegorical exegesis, which Augustine first encountered in the preaching of Ambrose in Rome, satisfied some of his longing for ingenuity and made it possible for him to convert to Christianity. He eventually grew to respect the more ancient, literal-historical traditions, ultimately synthesizing the two. Augustine insisted that allegory should be employed only when the literal sense gave an "absurd meaning" (De Doctrina Christiana 3.29.41) or when texts had nothing to do with right conduct or questions of faith (De Doctrina Christiana 3.10.14)--and even in these situations it should be based on the historic sense (City of God 13:21).
A case in point is Augustine's treatise, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. For Augustine, the 'literal' meaning of a book is the one "set forth by the author" (11.1.2). Unlike some biblical books, whose 'literal' meanings were symbolic, Augustine was convinced that Genesis could be read "as a faithful record of what happened" (1.1.1). Genesis, after all, was essentially a book of history, and could be read "according to the plain meaning of the historical facts" (1.17.34). Such is the 'literal' meaning that must be sought after, even if it is not immediately apparent. For this reason, Augustine resisted his natural preference for allegory, and completed this work near the end of his life—after having abandoned the project at several points out of dissatisfaction.

The early chapters of Genesis posed quite a challenge to him, as they have done for many a commentator before and since. When God says "Let there be light?" Augustine raises the question of what language the deity was using:

> There did not yet exist the variety of tongues, which arose later when the tower was built after the flood. What then was that one and only language by which God said, 'Let there be light?' Who was intended to hear and understand it, and to whom was it directed? But perhaps this is an absurdly material way of thinking and speculating on the matter. (1.2.5)

Augustine's understanding of 'literal' allows him to move beyond historical factuality into what would appear to us as allegory—but which to him was merely an expression of authorial intent. For example, Augustine insists that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in the act of creation:

> For, when Scripture says, 'In the beginning God created
heaven and earth', by the name of 'God' we understand the Father, and by the name of 'Beginning', the son, who is the Beginning...; and when Scripture says, 'And the Spirit of God was stirring above the water', we recognize a complete enumeration of the Trinity. (1.6.12)

When authorial intent is unclear, Augustine sought the meaning which best fit the context of the passage; failing this, he sought what faith required:

When we read the inspired books..., let us choose that one which appears as certainly the meaning intended by the author. But if this is not clear, then at least we should choose an interpretation in keeping with the context of Scripture and in harmony with our faith. But if the meaning cannot be studied and judged by the context of Scripture, at least we should choose only that which our faith demands. (1.21.41)

This would frequently require allegorical interpretation. But even here, for Augustine (and most patristic writers), 'allegory' did not convey the classical sense of a fictional story with an inner meaning. Rather, they understood it in a 'figural' sense. According to Erich Auerbach, "Figura is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical" (Auerbach 29).

De Doctrina Christiana (396/7; finished in 427) stands at the head of Augustine's biblical scholarship. It is a treatise of four books containing "precepts for treating the Scriptures" (Prologue). The most striking feature of the work is its notion of what constitutes "doctrine." Unlike the later equation of 'doctrine' with 'creeds'--lists of propositions requiring intellectual assent--Augustine understands 'doctrine' to be a way of life. This is clear in the final sentence of the treatise:
In these four books, I have discussed with whatever slight ability I could muster, not the kind of man I am, for I have many defects, but the kind of man he ought to be who seeks to labor in sound doctrine, which is Christian doctrine, not only for himself, but also for others. (4.31.64, emphasis mine)

Perhaps the main point of this work is that, although the 'rule of faith' is necessary in biblical interpretation, it is not sufficient. Whereas the Alexandrians stressed the role of 'wisdom,' Augustine emphasized 'charity':

If it seems to anyone that he has understood the divine scripture or any part of them, in such a way that by that understanding he does not build up that double love of God and neighbor, he has not yet understood. (De Doctrina Christiana 1.36.40)

This moral hermeneutic of Augustine led him to suggest that any interpretation which conforms to the 'rule of charity' is valid. After all, the Christian is on a journey, and the only thing that ultimately matters is making progress along the way:

[If someone] is deceived in an interpretation which builds up charity, which is the end of the commandments, he is deceived in the same way as a man who leaves a road by mistake but passes through a field to the same place toward which the road itself leads. (De Doctrina Christiana 1.36.41)

But Augustine makes it clear that it is better for a man not to leave the road in the first place, "lest the habit of deviating force him to take a crossroad or a perverse way" (1.36.41).

The Bible, for Augustine, was thus a signpost—a helpful means of arriving at the proper destination. It was not an end in itself. One must be careful of becoming prideful at one's ability to interpret the signpost (2.13.20), for the sign itself is
dispensable: "A man supported by faith, hope, and charity, with an unshaken hold upon them, does not need the Scriptures except for the instruction of others" (1.39.43).

This close connection between right belief, right understanding, and right living is evident throughout Augustine's approach. In Book Four, which contains rhetorical advice for Christian teachers, Augustine offers a word of caution. More important than eloquence is character—"the life of the speaker" (4.27.59)—and content is more important than style (4.28.61).

Yet Augustine appreciates the value of both literary art and rhetorical training, including education in the classical tropes and figures. "Those who know these tropes recognize them in the Holy Scripture, and the knowledge of them is a considerable aid in understanding the Scripture" (3.29.40). Augustine issues his most fervent defense of biblical aesthetics here as well. Concerning the Bible,

nothing can be more eloquent. And I venture to affirm that all who truly understand what these writers say, perceive at the same time that it could not have been properly said in any other way. For as there is a kind of eloquence that is more becoming in youth, and a kind that is more becoming in old age, and nothing can be called eloquence if it be not suitable to the person of the speaker, so there is a kind of eloquence that is becoming in men who justly claim the highest authority, and who are evidently inspired by God. With this eloquence they spoke... (4.6.9)

Whereas Tertullian had said, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (De prescriptione hereticorum 7, cited in Prickett 1991, 5), Augustine permanently set in motion the trend toward putting secular learning at the service of Scripture. This was valuable
because of the number of similitudes, figurative usages, and ambiguities in biblical language. For Augustine, such hermeneutical questions were not so much 'difficulties' as they were a source of pleasure:

Many and varied obscurities and ambiguities deceive those who read casually... I do not doubt that this situation was provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless. . . . No one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitudes and that what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure. (2.6.7-8)

Books two and three of De Doctrina Christiana concentrate on exegetical method, and most of Augustine's suggestions continue to make good literary sense. He stresses the importance of reading all of the Holy Scriptures before one begins to interpret individual passages (2.8.12). Obscure passages should be understood in the light of clear ones (2.9.14). The value of study in the original languages is acknowledged "if the infinite variety of Latin translations gives rise to any doubts" (2.11.16). Otherwise, the ordinary person can adequately make do by comparing the various Latin versions with one another (2.12.17), consulting particularly those translations which are more literal (2.13.19) and giving added weight to the authority of the Septuagint (2.15.22). In this way, textual emendation of the Latin is possible (2.12.18).

Additional help may be necessary in making sense of figurative language. It is useful, for example, to learn the significance of Hebrew names, which "undoubtedly have considerable importance in clarifying the enigmas of Scripture" (2.16.23). Some knowledge of
the natural world of plants and animals will help with biblical analogies such as "be wise like serpents":

I think it might be possible, if any capable person could be persuaded to undertake the task for the sake of his brethren, to collect in order and write down singly explanations of whatever unfamiliar geographical locations, animals, herbs and trees, stones, and metals are mentioned in the Scripture. (2.39.59)

The significance of biblical numbers (2.16.25), an understanding of history (2.28.42), and training in logic (2.31.48) will unlock additional meaning.

Augustine's doctrine of inspiration is worth noting. In his Confessions, he had referred to the biblical writers as "pens of the Holy Spirit" (7:21). Later interpreters understood this in a literal manner to mean that the Holy Spirit had somehow dictated the very words of the Bible to human transcribers. But from De Doctrina Christiana, it is clear that Augustine harbored no such notion:

The Sacred Scripture, by which so many maladies of the human will are cured, was set forth ... that it might be known for the salvation of peoples who desired to find in it nothing more than the thoughts and desires of those who wrote it and through these the will of God, according to which we believe those writers spoke.

(2.5.6, emphasis mine)

Yet sometimes Augustine's dogmatic/moral hermeneutic gets him into trouble. For example, in the gospel narratives, there is the story of a woman, described as "a sinner," who visited Jesus as he was dining in the home of a Pharisee. She brought an alabaster jar of ointment and "began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed
them with the ointment" (Luke 7:38). Augustine cannot take such a
"shameful" account literally: "No reasonable person would believe
under any circumstances that the feet of the Lord were anointed with
precious ointment by the woman in the manner of the lecherous and
dissolute men whose banquets we despise" (3.12.18). Such a passage
must therefore be read allegorically.

Similarly, although Augustine's 'rule of faith' was intended
to be a yardstick for evaluating the moral acceptability of
interpretive conclusions, it often becomes a means of reading church
dogma into Scripture. For example, in deciding appropriate
punctuation for John 1:1, the determining factor is belief in the
Trinity. The non-trinitarian possibility "is refuted according to
the rule of faith which teaches us the equality of the Trinity, so
that we say: 'And the Word was God. The same was in the beginning
with God'" (3.2.3). Such a deductive procedure is at odds with the
thoroughly inductive modern attitude toward the Bible.

Augustine's dogmatic approach to Scripture received its
definitive exposition in Vincent's Commonitorium (434). Vincent's
now famous dictum declares that since the depth of scripture permits
a variety of interpretations, "the line of the interpretation of the
prophets and apostles must be directed according to the norm of the
ecclesiastical and Catholic sense." Here Catholic means "quod
ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est"--what has been
believed everywhere, always, by everyone (Commonitorium 2.2, cited
in Grant 94).

The progression of biblical study in the Church thus
paralleled the movement among the rabbis from midrash to Mishnah,
from the biblical literature to religious regulation. The similarities between the rabbinical and patristic literatures far outweigh their differences. Certainly they had more in common with one another than either had with modern historical biblical criticism. Neither the rabbis nor the church fathers were overly interested in reconstructing what had happened once upon a time. On the contrary, history was important primarily in that it revealed the unfolding of God's will for the present. Both traditions saw their Scriptures as the record of this ongoing revelation—whereby God had spoken through his prophets and sages.

The provision of an authorized interpretation of Scripture would not have been possible in the early patristic period, for there was nothing close to a consensus on biblical interpretation. But several major church councils occurred in the third and fourth centuries, and doctrinal positions were hammered out.

Augustine (and subsequent medieval interpreters) believed that the true meaning of Scripture was fundamentally a theological one. There is a resemblance here with T.S. Eliot, who insisted, "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint" (Eliot 21). From our more modern literary perspective, this procedure of deriving one's exegetical principles from one's theological views may seem hopelessly subjective. But it ought to be kept in mind that:

1. Extremes of subjectivity were minimized by the 'rule of faith.'

2. Every interpreter, no matter how objective, is prone to subjective bias.
3. On what basis do we conclude that Augustine's approach was wrong, and that some other one (e.g. Enlightenment historical criticism) is the correct one?

In his own way, Augustine made a contribution to literary study of the Bible. The prologue to *De Doctrina Christiana* defends the use of secular learning in biblical study against those who think they can understand Scripture by divine illumination, without any help from man. In his life and thought, Hebraism and Hellenism were permanently fused together, as they have been within most Christian traditions ever since. Augustine's reading of the Bible with Greek eyes may have blinded him to ancient Hebrew literary art. But the workings of Hebrew poetics had long since been forgotten, and at any rate his Hellenistic training opened up new possibilities for literary study of the Bible which are still being followed up in our own era. There may be a lesson here for twentieth-century literary critics. As we seek to recover the poetics of biblical literature, the best hope may lie in the application of literary-critical tools developed from within another cultural tradition.

Motivated by this Hellenistic literary criticism, a brand new type of 'biblical poetics' became fashionable beginning about the fourth century. A number of classically educated religious writers began to demonstrate the Bible's beauty and worth by presenting it as an analogue (according to the Alexandrians, the source) of Greek learning and literature. We know that many of the church fathers were eager to elevate the literary quality of the Bible to match that of the Greek classics. Jerome expresses the prevailing
What is more musical than the Psalter? which, in the manner of our Flaccus or of the Greek Pindar, now flows in iambics, now rings with Alcaics, swells to a Sapphic measure or moves along with a half-foot? What is fairer than the hymns of Deuteronomy or Isaiah? What is more solemn than Solomon, what more polished than Job? All of which books, as Josephus and Origen write, flow in the original in hexameter and pentameter verses.

("Preface to the Chronicle of Eusebius," in Jerome 484)

It turns out that Josephus and Origen were completely wrong about Hebrew meter, but this detail escaped notice for centuries.

If Augustine lay the theoretical foundation for medieval exegesis, Jerome (c.340-420) supplied the West with its Bible for the next millennium. Next to Origen, Jerome was probably the greatest biblical scholar of the early Church. His magnum opus was the Latin Vulgate, completed in 405, to which he devoted twenty-three years of his life.

Having become trilingual, Jerome was perhaps the only biblical scholar of his time capable of such a feat. He was an expert in Latin grammar and rhetoric from his youth—"as regards Latin, my life, almost from the cradle, has been spent in the company of grammarians, rhetoricians, and philosophers" (Preface to Job in Jerome 491). He first studied Greek, and, in 381, Pope Damasus commissioned him to revise the crude Latin translations of the gospels from the Septuagint. This launched Jerome into further biblical translation. He went on to study Hebrew while living in Palestine: "I paid a not inconsiderable sum for the services of a teacher, a native of Lydda, who was amongst the Hebrews reckoned to be in the front rank" (Preface to Job in Jerome 491). Jerome felt
that living in Palestine was also advantageous for obtaining correct information on matters of Hebrew culture, background customs, and (in particular) the significance of names (Preface to Chronicles, in Jerome 494).

Jerome initiated the tradition of introducing each biblical book with a preface. This indicates his ability to take seriously the books as literary wholes, rather than as collections of individual prooftexts, which was the norm of the period. These prefaces are noteworthy, for, along with the Vulgate, they were read, for more than a millennium. Sometimes they convey personal information or the free expression of his feelings, to those he trusted. Often he described the difficulties he faced as a translator, the limits of his own knowledge, or his understanding of the authority of Scripture.

Jerome's primary contribution to literary study of the Bible was his insistence upon study in the original languages. The Greek New Testament did not arouse controversy, even if people had already become attached to their Latin versions, of which "there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies" (Preface to the Four Gospels Addressed to Pope Damasus in 383, in Jerome 488). It was Jerome's reliance upon the Hebrew Massoretic text--the 'Hebrew veritas'--that created difficulties for him.

Augustine's letter to Jerome championing the Septuagint over the Hebrew text of the Old Testament expresses the conventional opinion of the day:

I would be very surprised if anything could still be found in the Hebrew texts which had escaped the notice of all those translators who were such experts in that language.
I say nothing of the Seventy for I would not dare to give any kind of decisive answer to the question of whether they possessed a greater harmony of wisdom or of inspiration than one man could have, but I do think that their work should without doubt be accorded preeminent authority in this field.

(Augustine Epistle 28, in White 66, emphasis mine)

Jerome replies, first, that Augustine is not reading the Septuagint, but rather crude translations of it—some having been done by Jews! There were also many versions of the Septuagint in existence, none with universal authority. But even more importantly, Augustine's logic is flawed:

You say that I ought not to have followed the ancient texts in my translation but you use a strange syllogism to prove this! You write 'What was translated by the Seventy was either obscure or obvious. If it was obscure, it must be possible for you also to have been mistaken, while if it was obvious, it is clear that the Seventy could not have been mistaken.' I shall answer this objection using your own argument.

(Jerome Epistle 112, in White 134)

Jerome goes on to point out that Augustine himself writes commentaries. If the original biblical texts were 'obscure,' then Augustine has little to offer; if the originals were 'obvious,' the same conclusion obtains.

In his letters and prefaces, Jerome elaborates concerning his preference for the Hebrew text. His main contention is that it is more accurate. He mentions how "the Jews generally laugh when they hear our version," and that the Hebrew text more accurately reflects New Testament citations of Scripture (Epistle 57, in Jerome 117). Whereas Jerome was often accused of being too sympathetic to the Jews, he turns the tables on his opponents by pointing out how the
Septuagint, as a product of monotheistic Judaism, studiously avoids any suggestion of the Trinity (Preface to the Hebrew Book of Questions, in Jerome 486). In this same preface, Jerome points out that Origen himself, though he followed the common versions in his homilies, "yet, in his Tomes, that is, in his fuller discussion of Scripture, he yields to the Hebrew as the truth" (Jerome 487).

Jerome never intended to eliminate reliance upon the Septuagint. "The Septuagint has rightly kept its place in the churches, either because it is the first of all the versions in time, made before the coming of Christ, or else because it has been used by the apostles" (Jerome Epistle 57, in Jerome 118). Here, too, Jerome was farsighted; it turns out that the Septuagint preserves readings that are older, and occasionally more accurate, than the Hebrew texts then in circulation. But he is insistent upon returning to the source, wherever it is to be found, and chides those who do not share this concern with textual purity.

A by-product of Jerome's esteem for the Hebrew text was his adoption of the Hebrew canon. In his Preface to the Books of Samuel, he maintains that any books not included in the Hebrew Bible must be accounted apocryphal (non-canonical), and he claims there is a world of difference between the authentic Hebrew record and "apocryphal fables" (Preface to Daniel, in Jerome 493). The early Church, however, did not follow Jerome in this.

The language of the Vulgate has been described as "the beginning of a new era, when eastern poetry penetrated into the speech of the western peoples" (Smalley 21). Jerome wanted to produce a translation of the scriptures in an elegant form (his
diction and style emulated classical Latin)—but not beyond the reach of the ordinary reader. He found elegance in the simplicity of the biblical writers:

How few there are who now read Aristotle. How many are there who know the books, or even read the name of Plato? You may find here and there a few old men, who have nothing else to do, who study them in a corner. But the whole world speaks the language of our Christian peasants and fishermen, the whole world re-echoes their words. And so their simple words must be set forth with simplicity of style; for the word \textit{simple} applies to their \textit{words}, not their meaning.

(Preface to Galatians, in Jerome 498, emphasis his)

Jerome's philosophy of translation was also ahead of its time. He insisted on conveying the sense, and not the precise words of the original. In this he claims to be following the example of Tully, who rendered the speeches of Demosthenes "not as a translator but as an orator, keeping the sense but altering the form by adapting both the metaphors and the words to suit our own idiom" (quoted by Jerome in Epistle 57, in Jerome 114). Jerome maintains that such was the practice of Christ himself, "who made it his care to formulate dogmas rather than to hunt for words and syllables" (Epistle 57, in Jerome 115), and of the biblical writers themselves.

Jerome was very conservative with regard to the use of pagan literature. He preferred to regard the Bible as an alternative literature. "What has Horace to do with the Psalter? Virgil with the gospels? Cicero with the Apostle?" ("Epistle to Eustochium," in Jerome 35). For this reason, he insisted that no reader should seek the same kind of eloquence in the Bible that one might find in pagan writings: "A translation made for the church, although it may indeed have some literary merit, ought to conceal and avoid it, so
as to address itself, not to the private schools of the philosophers with their handful of disciples, but rather to the whole human race" (Epistle 49:4, in Jerome 80). Yet Jerome's doctrine of inspiration was strikingly literary. As J.P. Migne would later express it, Jerome believed that God speaks "not in the ears of the prophet, but in his heart" (Patrologiae, series latina 26:558, in Smalley 22).

There is a point of irony in the life of Jerome. Upon completion of the Vulgate, Jerome devoted much energy to persuading people to give up their old, familiar Latin translations of the Septuagint. He mercilessly exposed the fables surrounding the supposed miraculous composition of the Septuagint—all with little success. He finally responded, "If they do not like the water from the pure fountainhead, let them drink of the muddy streams" (Epistle 28, cited in Smyth 34). Fortunately church leaders of the caliber of Augustine and Pelagius recognized the genius of the translation, and quoted it in their writings. Very gradually, the Vulgate began to acquire universal acceptance. When, after over a millennium, it came time for a revision of the Vulgate itself, the same kind of resistance to tradition that Jerome himself encountered resurfaced.

Within the first four centuries, similar translations of the Bible were made into a host of other languages: Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Gothic. In most of these cases, the translation was not only a literary achievement in itself but also a foundation upon which the succeeding national literature was able to rest. The Goth Wulfila, for example, invented the Gothic alphabet for the purpose of translating the Bible into his native tongue during the fourth century.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:

3 Vol.

2 These works include the Ascetica by Basil the Great (c.330-379), a tragedy entitled "Christ Suffering" by Gregory of Nazianzus (c.330-390), the hymns of Ambrose (339-397) and Prudentius (348-405), and a metrical version of the gospels by Juvencus, a fourth-century Spanish priest.
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At the beginning of the medieval period, the Bible's influence was largely restricted to the rim of the Mediterranean. By the end of the period, it was the most studied book on the continent of Europe. Besides its use as a foundation for theology, the Bible was employed as a text for the teaching of liberal arts.

Whereas rabbinic and patristic exegeses had been very separate endeavors, some interesting dialogue between their respective scholars (and Islamic ones as well) began occurring as the medieval period progressed. This would lead toward a measure of cooperation during the Renaissance, and, in more modern times, growing agreement concerning exegetical method.

Jewish Biblical Study

When Islam swept across Asia and Africa, beginning in the seventh century, it brought a much needed renaissance to Jewish thought. The great burst of literary creativity which had produced the rabbinical writings had spent its force, and the Jewish sages were bogged down in Talmudic debate. But suddenly new energies for the study of science, philosophy, and poetry were released.

Jewish thinkers were not only challenged to define themselves in relation to the emerging Islamic worldview; the efforts of
learned Islamic scholars to effect a bridge between the Koran and contemporary Greek philosophy induced Jewish scholars to do the same. According to the renowned Jewish historian, Isaac Husik, "The Jews were the pupils of the Arabs and followed their lead in adapting Greek thought to their own intellectual and spiritual pursuits" (Husik xx). Most of the works of Aristotle were actually introduced to the West through Latin translations of their Hebrew and Arabic versions.

There was tension, of course, between this rationalistic neo-Platonic thought and the traditional Hebrew worldview. Greek philosophy was based on the acceptance of the human intellect as the supreme judge and arbiter of truth. This always seemed strange to the Jewish mind, where the basic outlook is that God and His will are supreme and often beyond human comprehension. Nevertheless, as happened earlier with Christianity, the interaction with an alien worldview proved productive from a literary vantage point.¹

During this 'Arabic' period, every learned Jew was master of three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. The near relationships between these languages led to comparisons between them, thus establishing the basis for the new science of philology. A pioneer in this was Sa'adya ben Joseph (882-942), who introduced philology as a permanent department of rabbinic scholarship. He was the first to write a Hebrew grammar and dictionary. He also translated the Hebrew Bible into Arabic, thus paving the way for the glorious Spanish Judeo-Arabic period, and was an accomplished poet and philosopher.

Philological studies were taken further by Judah ibn Quraisy,
who, according to the writings of the eleventh-century scholar Isaac Barun, examined Greek, Latin, and even Berber as potential sources of cognates for biblical words. Barun himself applied this same method to problems in grammar and syntax (Greenspahn 246). The Spanish Hebrew grammarian, Jonah ibn Janah, Abul-Walid ibn Merwan (b. end of tenth century) drew upon rhetoric and analogies in Arabic, seeking to explain biblical expressions as metaphors or as tropes familiar to him from Arabic literature (Heschel 359).

Traditional rabbinic midrash was challenged and invigorated by the appearance of the Karaim (Karaites), a Jewish sect which appeared in the second half of the eighth century. This movement took direct aim at the incursions which had been made upon the authority of Scripture by the oral Torah. In this respect, the Karaim resembled the Sadducees of pre-rabbinic Judaism. The ninth-century Karaite, Isma'il of Ukbara, took a bold step in the direction of textual criticism when he proposed that "some things in the Scripture were not [originally] as they are now written" (Greenspahn 248).

Among the most significant literary-biblical achievements of this period was the Massoretic editing of the Hebrew Bible. A group of Jewish scholars called the Massoretes sought to preserve the "massora" ("tradition") of a distinctively Hebrew reading of the Bible. The very pronunciation of Hebrew words was already nearly lost. Their work was carried out from the seventh to about the tenth centuries, and culminated in a standard codex which, under the authority of Aaron ben Asher, became accepted throughout the West.

The Massoretes invented a whole system of vocalization, and
'vowel points' were inserted in the Bible beneath the Hebrew consonantal text. They also added a system of strokes, dots, and other signs (the ta'amim) which determined the grouping of the words in phrases and verses, according to the traditional sense. With commentary and textual notes placed in the margins, the Hebrew Bible became readable to the average Jew. Before long, it was even being sung in synagogue. Such textual groundwork inspired a renewed interest in Bible study during later medievalism.

Frederick E. Greenspahn puts forth the case that medieval Jewish exegetes made biblical discoveries that were not duplicated until the Renaissance (or later). For example, the discovery of Hebrew parallelism is traditionally credited to Robert Lowth in the eighteenth century. But Lowth himself credits the sixteenth-century Jew, Azariah de Rossi. The recognition of parallelism can in fact be traced back to such medievals as Menahem ibn Saruk, Rashi, and Abraham ibn Ezra (Greenspahn 252), who were largely responsible for the revival of classical Hebrew study. The identities of many of these exegetes are still being brought to light.

Several late medieval exegetes deserve specific mention. Rabbi Shlomo bar Isaac (1040-1105), more commonly referred to as Rashi, was the most influential Jewish medieval exegete. He revived rabbinic midrash writing in the darkest part of Europe (France) during a very dark period of Jewish history. His commentaries on practically the whole Bible (not to mention the Talmud) remain to this day perhaps the most valued biblical commentaries in the entire Jewish tradition. So permanent was his work thought to be that when, in 1475, the first Hebrew book ever to be printed appeared in
Italy, it was an edition of Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch. Rashi's book had a profound influence on Nicholas of Lyra, who was to become a mentor of Martin Luther.

Samuel ben Meir, a twelfth-century writer, explored the dynamics of Hebrew parallelism:

'Your right hand, 0 Lord, awesome in strength,
Your right hand, 0 Lord, shatters the enemy'....
This verse is of the type:
'The rivers raise up, 0 Lord,
The rivers raise up their voice'....
Its first half does not consummate its proposition until its latter half comes and completes its proposition; but in its first half it mentions about whom it is speaking. (ben Meir 102)

He was also perhaps the first commentator to question the validity of the traditional translation of Genesis 1:1 (ben Meir 3-5).

The rabbis were famous for their attentiveness to textual detail. Joseph Kara noticed something interesting about Hebrew repetition:

In all the twenty-four books [of the Hebrew Bible,] where the text states something and later repeats it you will find that the text abbreviates its wording, either in the first instance or in the second instance. (Kara 42)

David ben Judah Leon distinguished three speech registers in Scripture:

The Grand Style is practised as follows: if we adopt for it words that are the most elegant possible, whether literal or figurative... Most of Isaiah's discourses and certain of Ezekiel's descriptions illustrate this Style... We practise the Middle Style if we abate somewhat the elegance and sublimity of the Grand Style, yet do not approximate the familiarity of the Simple Style... To practise the Simple Style is to speak in the
fashion of the generality of the populace, in language familiar to them... (Judah Leon 147-153)

He also pointed out different usages of metaphor:

The aim in using the Metaphor is sometimes conciseness, as in: For ye have consumed the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses [Is. 3:14]. Sometimes the aim is decency of language, as in: And the man knew Eve his wife [Gen. 4:1], and in: Then let my wife grind unto another [Job 31:10]; each of these is a euphemistic description of the sexual act. Sometimes the intention is to magnify a matter... (Judah Leon 513)

Perhaps the master linguist in this regard was Moses ibn Ezra (c.1070-1138), who noted the presence of metaphor, hyperbole, wordplay, and even occasional rhyme:

[In the Bible] we have no nonprose texts except for three books: Psalms, Job, and Proverbs. And even these books, as you can see, have neither meter nor rhyme, as in Arabic style. . . . Nevertheless, in a few places there are rhymes... [here he gives three examples]...

Metaphor is found in such abundance in our Holy Scriptures that one cannot count the passages quickly. . . . The essence of metaphor is that you describe an unknown thing with a known one. . . .

[Wordplay] refers to words that resemble one another but whose meanings are different. Logicians call them 'resemblance.' This usage is favored by most linguists because it is a type of rhetorical elegance. . . .

The nature of language may sometimes demand that we rise above the ordinary and speak of things that are impossible, even though we would not authenticate them if we examined them carefully. . . . Our early sages of blessed memory call such things 'overblown language.'

(Moses ibn Ezra laid the foundations for the modern science of textual criticism, although his work was isolated and not followed up (Sarna 344). He was not interested in biblical exegesis as such, but wrote a book intending to prove that the foundations of Hebrew
poetry were to be found in Scripture and not in Arabic poetry. He recognized that certain parts of the Torah appeared to have been written long after Moses, but concluded, "hamaskil yavin" ["a word to the wise is sufficient"] (Rosenberg 75).

Judah Halevi (c.1085-1141), a contemporary of ibn Ezra, also lived in Spain. Halevi noted the generic diversity of the Hebrew scriptures, how biblical wordplay on proper names was untranslatable, and how prophecy seemed to require elevated speech.

When, in the middle of the twelfth century, the Spanish golden years came to an end, Abraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167) preserved for posterity the spiritual treasures that had been garnered. Abraham considered allegorical midrash to be dangerous, for in allegory every interpreter is led by his own ideas rather than those of the text. Instead, Abraham proposed a more literal, grammatical-philological approach. He paid careful attention to language:

[The biblical writers] sometimes speak very explicitly and sometimes convey their intent through elliptical expressions, from which the listener must figure out the sense. Know: Words are like bodies and meanings are like souls, and the body is like a vessel for the soul. (Miqra'ot ot qedolot, Venice: Bomberg, 1524, cited in Preminger and Greenstein 22).

Abraham ibn Ezra qualifies as the first Jewish Bible critic. In addition to questioning Mosaic authorship, he was probably the first to propose that the last twenty-six chapters of Isaiah were written by a later writer (Greenspahn 245-46). An eleventh-century Spaniard named Moses ben Samuel Ha-Kohen Gikatilla is the first person recorded to have noticed that the thematic concerns of these latter chapters of Isaiah are different from those which precede
The writings of the ibn Ezras influenced two young men a century later. David Kimhi (c.1160-1235), together with a classmate by the name of Menahem ben Simeon, demonstrated a remarkable willingness to depart from traditional midrashic exegesis. For example, in the Targum, each "holy" of Isaiah's "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3) bears a particular connotation. The artistic charm is thereby sacrificed for the sake of the theological lesson to be learned. But in his commentary on Ezekiel 7:6, ben Simeon explains that this type of exegesis misses the intended point of the author. "When you observe the words of Ezekiel, you will see that he repeats things two or three times. He did this to make them contrite and frighten them. It is also for emphasis" (cited in Talmage 103).

Similarly, David Kimhi courageously departs from the interpretation of his father, Joseph Kimhi, who taught that Jeremiah's "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord" (Jeremiah 7:4) refers to the three parts of the temple. David notes that "the repetition is for emphasis, for it is usual for Scripture to repeat words two or three times to stress a point" (cited in Talmage 103).

As a Bible commentator, Kimhi ranks second only to Rashi in the Jewish tradition, while for Christian scholars he is possibly of first importance; his Hebrew grammar and dictionary were widely studied by the Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance. In the work of scholars such as ben Simeon and Kimhi, a tradition of critical study of the Bible was born. Theirs was a recognition that the human authors were not passive recipients, but rather active agents
in the creation of the 'Word of God.' Medieval scholars of this caliber were precursors and vital forerunners of Renaissance biblical criticism.

A reaction against this new rationalistic exegesis arose in the early thirteenth century under the leadership of Moses Nachmanides (b.1194). It resulted in the well known Jewish mystical movement known as Kabbala. Kabbala is famed for its secret, esoteric doctrines, which were only accessible to those who had entered into the mysteries of Kabbala. To this period belongs the Zohar, a Kabblistic midrash on the Pentateuch ascribed to Moses de Leon.

**Christian Biblical Study**

Whereas the 'dark ages' of late rabbinic Judaism were followed by fresh developments during the Middle Ages, it was the opposite within Christianity. For the church, the medieval period lacked originality, as compared to a very productive patristic period. During this period, the center of gravity of Christianity shifted west. Eastern expressions of Christianity (such as the Antiochene and Nestorian churches) were now considered suspect. Many of their theologians and scholars were branded as heretics, and their writings condemned and destroyed following the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. Since these originators of Eastern Christianity had little continuing influence, our attention now turns to Western Europe.

In the year 410, five short years after the debut of Jerome's Vulgate, Alaric the Visigoth marched into Rome. Late Antiquity now
gave way to several centuries of relative darkness before the new medieval order would begin to emerge. This era of history bears out the self-evident truth that literary scholarship is dependent upon the existence of institutions to provide a measure of stability and continuity. Without such a base, literary invention is rare, and when it occurs, short-lived. Breakthroughs which took place during the Middle Ages thus tended to be isolated, and their originators completely unaware when they were continuing in the tradition of earlier patristic thinkers.

Fortunately, the decline was gradual. John Cassian's *Conferences* (420), which is very much in the Augustinian tradition, crystalized what would become the standard medieval exegetical approach for nearly a millennium, the 'fourfold sense' of Scripture. This was not to suggest that every passage required all four levels of interpretation. It was simply a convenient summary of patristic rules. These four are the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses of the text. The literal and allegorical were discussed in Chapter Three. The tropological was a moral criticism (or interpretation) of the passage, and the anagogical was the mystical, spiritual reading.

Cassian introduced the standard example of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, "Jerusalem" means the city itself (literal), the Church (allegorical), the human soul (moral), and the heavenly city (anagogical). In the thirteenth century, the Dominican friar Augustine of Denmark expressed the four levels in verse:
Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.
(cited in McGrath 153)

Literal tells what happened; allegorical what you believe;
moral what you should do, anagogical where you are going.

Why this multiplicity of senses? It is partly because no single theory of hermeneutics had yet evolved within the Church. But it also reflects the influence of neo-Platonism. The Bible was understood to be a treatise on heavenly reality. As a true reflection of the infinite God, it must therefore contain all and every kind of truth. It was in this spirit that the twelfth-century mystic Joachim of Flora found the Old Testament to be a book about God the Father, the New Testament a book about God the Son, and the future age (not yet arrived) a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

As the Roman Empire progressively dissolved, scholars considered themselves lucky if they could hold on to whatever learning they already possessed, much less build on previous achievements. "Woe to our days," exclaimed Gregory of Tours, "for the study of letters has perished from us" (cited in Farrar 246). During these centuries, the energies of men were absorbed in the attempt to found a new order upon the ruins of civilization, and the monasteries became the primary repositories and transmitters of knowledge.

This dissolution of empire seems to have inspired, in the fifth and sixth centuries, some noteworthy poets of biblical epic, mainly in Latin hexameter. Claudius Marius Victor, apparently a rhetorician of Marseilles, wrote his Alethia ("Truth"). It is "a description, in Latin hexameters, of the events told in the book of
Genesis from the creation to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah" (Crook 165). Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, bishop of Vienne in southern Gaul, wrote an epic giving a vivid description of the tempting of Eve. The dialogue between Eve and the devil, disguised as serpent, "reminds us of Milton, who may very probably have studied his predecessor's tale" (Crook 166-67). Sedulius of Italy's Paschal Song, a summary of the Bible from Enoch to Christ, was a favorite of the Middle Ages. It is noteworthy for its symbolic interpretation of the gifts of the Wise Men, and of the miracles wrought by Christ (Crook 167). Over in Carthage, Blossius Aemilius Dracontius's De Laudibus Dei tells of the creation of man (Crook 168). Arator (died c. 550), wrote an epic concerning the Acts of the Apostles (McKinlay, Vol. 72).

The Roman Cassiodorus (c.487-580), founder of a monastic house of learning, sought to create an entirely new Christian rhetoric based upon the Scriptures. His assumption was that if 'plagiarism' of the Scriptures formed the basis of Greek education, certainly an authentic system of learning could be constructed by capable biblical scholars. In his major work, De Institutionibus, he asks, "Who is there who will claim that the art of rhetoric does not begin with the Holy Scriptures?" (J.P. Migne, Patrologiae, series latina 70:1118, cited in Kugel 165). In his exposition of the Psalms, he provides an alphabetical itemization of all of the schemes and tropes—about one hundred thirty-five of them, from aenigma tozeugma. Also in the sixth century, the writer Drepanius Florus observed that "Job... has sung his battles in heroic measure" (cited in Lewalski 15).
In his *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, Isidore of Seville (c.570-636) creates an analogy between a string instrument and the language of Scripture. The strings must be anchored to the fixed parts of the instrument, just as the figures of Scripture are anchored to the literal sense. In his *Etymologies*, Isidore attributes the first epithalamion to Solomon (Song of Songs), the first lament to Jeremiah (Lamentations), the earliest rhetorical prose to Isaiah, and the first history to Moses.

This, in turn, influenced the Venerable Bede (672-735), whose treatise *On Figures and Tropes of Holy Writ* catalogues the books of the Bible according to poetic structure, and asserts that the Bible is superior to other books "not only because of its Source, which is divine, or by reason of its use, inasmuch as it leads to eternal life, but also by its antiquity and its manner of expression" (cited in Kugel 167). From the "many kinds of schemes and tropes," Bede selects one, the metaphor, as "the most widespread of all," which he proceeds to illustrate in detail (Evans 107). Bede also identified the book of Job as the biblical counterpart of classical epic, both in form and manner (Lewalski 15-16).

The Greek rhetorical categories within which these scholars read the Bible (viz. "prose" and "poetry") are not exactly suitable for a description of Hebrew poetics. Nevertheless, a literary dimension to the Bible was perceived and described in the only categories available. Bede tells us that the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet Caedmon composed a versified narrative of practically the whole Bible. Sacred literature crossed the line to become profane in the work of Cynewulf, Bede's younger contemporary,
who moved beyond the biblical paraphrase of earlier artists to create original poetry in native verse. An example is Christ and Elene, a fresh literary work based on careful study of the Bible.

A rebirth of classical learning took place during the Carolingian revival. Beginning about 787, Charlemagne began teaching the trivium (grammar, dialectics, rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) in his kingdom. All education became ecclesiastical and based (at least theoretically) upon the Bible. It was believed that these secular disciplines formed a bridge by which the student could gain access to the realms of theology. Prior to Charlemagne, this had been a hotly debated issue. Many had regarded secular learning as useless vanity. Gregory the Great (pope 590-604), upon hearing that a friend was teaching the classical poets, wrote to him admonishing that "the same mouth singeth not the praises of Jove and the praises of Christ" (cited in Robinson 381).

From this period date two noteworthy poems on the life of Christ, the Old Saxon "Heliand" (c.822-840) and the "Evangelienharmonie" (c.867-68). These are "significant illustrations of how, with fidelity to the material content of the Gospels, the Germanic spirit recreated it, surrounded it with its own atmosphere, and thus appropriated it" (Crook 206). "Heliand," produced in the north of Germany, is written in the old Germanic alliterative verse. The "Evangelienharmonie" was written by Otfrid, the first German poet whose name is definitely known. His work "bears the stamp of the scholar who wished to give his countrymen an epic similar to those which others had written for Latin readers"
(Crook 208). It is also the first extensive poetical work to discard alliteration in favor of end-rhyme.

It was during this period that 'glosses' first began to appear. These were written comments, often by anonymous exegetes, in the margins of Bibles. The practice continued until the time that an authoritative edition, called the Glossa Ordinaria (or simply, the Gloss), was compiled by Anselm of Laon c.1100. In the Gloss, each book of the Scriptures was prefaced by a prologue from Jerome and followed by the commentary of various fathers and influential teachers from across the centuries. The Gloss became the standard textbook in schools for the remainder of the Middle Ages. By 1188, Peter Comestor was glossing the Gloss in his lectures (Reeves 18). The resemblance to the Jewish tradition of biblical commentary should be evident; indeed, the Gloss became virtually as authoritative as the Bible itself.

Christian biblical scholarship revived in the twelfth century. The initial motivation for this was the belated recognition of the quality of much Jewish biblical exegesis. Prominent here is the Victorine school, a movement that has only come to light in recent years.

The Abbey of St. Victor in Paris was founded in 1110. As was customary, it provided a grounding in the arts and sciences as prerequisites to biblical study. But the exegetical conclusions of the Victorine abbots were radical for their day. The motto of Hugh of St. Victor (d.1141), 'veritas in radice,' indicates his interest in searching out the literal historical meaning of the text. He believed that any figurative meanings belonged to this literal
The mystical sense is only gathered from what the letter says, in the first place. I wonder how people have the face to boast themselves teachers of allegory, when they do not know the primary meaning of the letter... If, as they say, we ought to leap straight from the letter to its spiritual meaning, then the metaphors and similes, which educate us spiritually, would have been included in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit in vain. (De Scripturis 5:13-15, cited in Smalley 93)

The Victorine tradition was continued by Richard (d.1173), but developed most fully by Andrew of St. Victor (d.1175), who, on account of his use of the Hebrew text, is probably the most important biblical commentator of the twelfth century.

Andrew came to appreciate the value of Jewish literal exegesis, and took the risky stand of proposing that all controversial passages require a twofold exegesis: (1) the Vulgate and its Christian interpretation, and (2) the Hebrew text and its Jewish interpretation. These were often irreconcilable. Unfortunately, Andrew was unacquainted with the work of the Antiochene exegetes, which might have offered a key to harmonizing these opposing viewpoints. Yet Andrew's method makes him a forerunner of the modern notion of multiple textual meaning. He also emphasized the critical importance of context in determining meaning: "The whole context must be carefully considered and expounded, lest we who rebut the errors of others, if it be done more carelessly, be ourselves rebutted" (cited in Smalley 128).

Other Christian scholars also grew in their appreciation of biblical scholarship. Robert Grossteste (c.1175-1253), who mastered both the Septuagint and the New Testament in the original Greek, had
the best understanding of any medieval scholar of the value of Greek in biblical scholarship. Friar Roger Bacon (c. 1214-1292), a passionate admirer of Grossteste, became the greatest Hebraist among the Oxford Franciscans, although his pioneering work in science is better known.

A more widespread movement in biblical studies, which has come to be known as scholasticism, was born during this period. "Scholasticism" refers to a distinctive philosophical methodology which first arose within monasticism, but then spread throughout the 'schools' (embryonic universities) of Europe as they came into existence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The central objective of scholasticism was to reconcile religious faith with reason.

The scholastic movement was headquartered in Paris, and led by the Friars. The era begins with the attempt of Anselm (1033-1109) to raise the truths of faith to scientific certainty. In his De Grammatico, he explores the ways in which a word or expression may be said to mean the thing it stands for. Peter Abelard (1079-1142), in his work, Sic et Non, drew the valuable distinction between important and unimportant elements in Scripture, and between 'Scripture' and the 'word of God.' But the high water mark of scholasticism was attained in the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), who managed to synthesize the allegorical and literalistic approaches while constructing a full-orbed Christian theology within Aristotelian categories.

This new emphasis on reason ultimately derives from Aristotle, who held that knowledge is obtained through the senses, not through
innate ideas, as was taught by Plato. This preference for the tangible over the ideal carried over into religion. Exegesis could be unleashed from theology. The Bible came to be seen less as a mirror of universal truth, and more as a collection of works whose authors had intended to teach particular truths. Exegesis thus gravitated toward scientific examination of the biblical authors.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) had pioneered by synthesizing Judaism with Aristotle. Aquinas followed his lead within Christianity, producing a theological system that would become the standard within Roman Catholicism for centuries. According to Aquinas, Christian theology was based upon divine revelation—knowledge which is beyond the reach of man's senses—and which is contained in the Bible. The responsibility of the biblical scholar, then, is to discern the intention of the biblical writers. Authorial intention was now equated with the 'letter' of the text, which might be expressed in either plain language, symbols, or metaphor. The 'spiritual' meaning would always shine through this literal one. Aquinas thus departs from the early medieval notion that the literal sense is somehow inferior to the spiritual. One writer summarizes Aquinas's position: "God uses the Bible as a basic melody and sings his own descant upon it to those who have ears to hear these celestial notes" (MacGregor 64). Such an emphasis upon the literal sense made possible the modern notion that the Bible can be read with literary profit even by a person deaf to the descant.

Aquinas's method may be observed in his discussion of the text, "Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19). This was felt to have no literal significance among most
medieval commentators; only allegorical or spiritual interpretations were believed to hold any relevance. But Aquinas, following Maimonides, objects:

Although the kid that is slain has no perception of the manner in which its flesh is cooked, yet it would savour of heartlessness if the dam's milk, which was intended for the nourishment of her offspring, were served up on the same dish. (Smalley 305)

Exegesis of the literal sense could sometimes necessitate as much imaginative creativity as the wildest of allegories!

This emphasis upon the significance of the literal sense grew under the Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (d.1349), a scholar deeply indebted to Rashi, and whose work influenced Martin Luther two centuries later. But Nicholas had no immediate followers, and his work marks the culmination of scholasticism.

The orientation of scholasticism was always more philosophical than textual. Consequently, there was little interest in Hebrew and Greek studies. But Aquinas's insistence that Christian theology depends upon the correct understanding of the biblical text prepared the way for later developments in philology and textual criticism, and ultimately for modern literary study of the Bible.

Scholasticism made several lasting contributions to biblical studies:

The Bible was for the first time divided up into chapters (Stephen Langton, c.1225). Verses would come later (Hebrew Bible: Rabbi Nathan, 1448; New Testament: Robert Estienne, 1551). Concordances to the Vulgate and to the Fathers were compiled, and scholars were suddenly expected to quote their sources exactly.
Surprisingly modern standards of scholarship resulted.

Empirical textual evidence to support one's interpretation became the accepted research standard. This created an entirely new interest in the human dimension of Scripture—authorial intent—and encouraged the recognition of varying levels of importance in Scripture.

The growing emphasis upon the literal sense of Scripture hastened the development of the science of hermeneutics and literary criticism in general, for it encouraged an interpretive approach that would be universally applicable, in contrast to fanciful allegorical interpretation, which was more an art than a science.

Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* (c.1320), in powerful terza rima, offers a poetic statement of the results of scholastic exegesis. Dante "reimagined the world of the Bible and turned its sacred figure into his own literary fulfillment" (Hawkins 133). He adopted the fourfold mode of allegorical biblical interpretation as a model for his own religious poetry—"an audacious act of equation, treating what was modern and human as if it were ancient and divine" (Kugel 212). Finally, he helped reunite secular and religious art, which had drifted apart during the early Middle Ages:

"...as the work of Aquinas brought the best of ancient philosophy into the service of Christianity, so the work of Dante affected a transference of theology into artistic equivalents... Just as the Scriptures present the divine truths of incarnation and redemption in narratives, visions, and the like, so classical poetry with its fictions of gods may convey moral truths."

(Blamires 42-43)

At the same time, scholasticism's many literary deficiencies must be recognized:
The subdivision of the text into chapters and verses was an aid to technical scholarship, but its effect upon subsequent readers has been largely negative. In the King James Version, for example, each verse is its own paragraph, fostering the notion of the Bible as a collection of prooftexts.

The highly refined logic of scholasticism frequently proved lethal to any kind of literary sensibility. "They treated theology geometrically, after the fashion of a proposition of Euclid" (Farrar 289).

Scholastic exegesis was not grounded in the original languages. "The method of Thomas Aquinas seems to have been to explain a passage by adducing all the other places where in the Latin version the same prominent word occurs" (Farrar 287, emphasis his).

The scholastics were ignorant, for the most part, of classical literature, which might have instilled a more literary mindset.

In practice, scholasticism did little to restrain fanciful allegorical interpretation. At the end of the fifteenth century, Geiler of Kaiserberg despairingly concluded that the Scripture was a "nose of wax" to be turned in any way one might like (cited in Hall 48).

Finally, the complexity of the scholastic enterprise encouraged popular belief in the 'obscurity' of Scripture, thus ensuring that the church would continue to be the Bible's gatekeeper for generations to come.

In the late Middle Ages, there arose a movement to return the Bible to the common man. John Wycliffe (c.1320-84) was an early
instigator in this regard. Wycliffe maintained that the Bible carried a weight of its own, and did not need the Church's authority to uphold (or even to interpret) it. He and his colleagues went on to translate the entire Bible from Latin into English. This first complete English Bible inspired an early Reformation movement in England that came to be known as Lollardism. Wycliffe's writings made their way into central Europe where they influenced John Hus (1374-1415), who organized a similar movement around the Bohemian translation of the Bible.

In the hands of the populace, these vernacular translations encouraged a literal reading of the Bible, for the average man was not trained in allegorical interpretive procedures. These translations contributed to literary study of the Bible in that biblical art, like all art, resists censorship. Wycliffe also had an ear for literary language. In his preface to the first English Bible, he took note of the "manye figuratife speachis" in the Bible—"moe than grammarians moune gesse" (The true Copye of a Proloq written about two C. yeeres paste, London, 1550 reprint). Wycliffe's 'Later Version' was completed by his followers between 1395-97, after his death. It, too, has received high praise: "The muscular, idiomatic vernacular of the Later Version stands as a monument in the development of English prose" (Rollins and Baker 131). From it we receive such familiar expressions as "Strait is the gate, and narewe is the way" (from the Sermon on the Mount) and "the beame and the mote" (MacGregor 81).

Wycliffe's Bible gradually lost influence--partly because of royal opposition, partly because it was written in Middle English,
but mainly because the day of the printing press had not yet arrived. Nevertheless, the over 150 manuscript copies which are still extant testify to the widespread popularity of this Bible.

The late medieval English mystery plays, of which the best example is the Second Shepherds' Play (c.1385), were biblical dramas intended to highlight the 'mystery' of Christ's incarnation and redemption of mankind. Together with their cousins, the morality plays (e.g. Everyman, c.1485), they were attempts by nonclerics at providing an artistic interpretation of biblical narratives for a wide audience.

The Middle Ages, then, contained a series of isolated bursts of biblical-literary creativity which anticipated many of the concerns and approaches of modern literary study of the Bible, even if they rarely contributed directly. The careful grammatical and philological studies of pre-critical medieval commentators laid the foundation for a human approach to the Bible, where man would one day be recognized as the agent—and not merely the recipient—of the Holy Scriptures.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


WORKS CITED


A new way of thinking arose in southern Europe toward the end of the Middle Ages. It was to bring about a wholly new state of affairs, first throughout Europe, and eventually around the globe. In many respects, it was a rebirth of classicism throughout the wider culture. There was renewed interest in ancient literature. Initially, classical Greek and Latin works received priority. But by the time of the Reformation, the Bible had taken center stage. Whereas literary interest in the Bible was sporadic and discontinuous during the Middle Ages, there now arose a sustained interest which has continued right up to the present moment. The invention of the printing press helped; scholars could begin to build upon one another's work much more easily, and their findings would be widely disseminated.

Medieval allegorical exegesis remained the norm until well into the Renaissance. But it was already beginning to undergo a subtle transformation. By the time of Petrarch (1304-74), the shift was clearly underway. Consider this letter of Petrarch to his brother, who was a cleric:

The fact is, poetry is very far from being opposed to theology. Does that surprise you? One may almost say that theology actually is poetry, poetry concerning God.
To call Christ now a lion, now a lamb, now a worm, what pray is that if not poetical? And you will find thousands of such things in the Scriptures, so very many that I cannot attempt to enumerate them. What indeed are the parables of our Saviour, in the Gospels, but words whose sound is foreign to their sense, or allegories, to use the technical term? Allegory is the warp and woof of all poetry.... Now we can see how Aristotle came to say that the first theologians and the first poets were one and the same.... Why, even the Old Testament fathers made use of poetry, both heroic song and other kinds. Moses, for example, and Job, and David, and Solomon, and Jeremiah.

("Letter to Gherardo," in Petrarch 261)

According to Petrarch, the Bible not only contains poetry; it is poetry at its core. In making this assertion, he claims to be continuing in the tradition of Jerome. Similarly, Giovanni Boccaccio (c.1313-75), in Chapter 22 of his Commento on the works of Dante, concludes that "theology and poetry can be called almost the same thing when they have the same subject... it appears that not merely is poetry theology but that theology is poetry" (Gilbert 211).

The meaning of "allegory" was also beginning to expand. As expressed by Petrarch, it now included all "words whose sound is foreign to their sense." Here is the beginning of what Renaissance scholar Israel Baroway has called a "transformed conception of allegory" (Baroway 450). The term gradually came to embrace all non-literal, figurative, and metaphorical use of language. It had evolved from a term which was without aesthetic intent (in fact frequently anti-aesthetic) into what Petrarch calls "the warp and woof of all poetry." (It must be remembered that during the Renaissance, most poetry was not in verse.)

This same understanding of allegory appears in the writings of early English Renaissance writers. When William Tyndale (1484-1536)
discusses biblical proverbs, similitudes, and riddles, he lumps them together under 'allegory,' or what would today be considered metaphor: "Then hast thou the very use of allegories... to express a text or an open conclusion of the scripture, and as it were to paint it before thine eyes, that thou mayest feel the meaning and the power of the scripture in thine heart" ("The Obedience of a Christian Man," in Tyndale 144). The equivalence of allegory and metaphor is formally stated, perhaps for the first time, in Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560): "An Allegorie is none other thing but a Metaphore, used throughout a whole sentence, or Oration" (Wilson 46).

One of the fruits of the Renaissance return to classicism was a re-emphasis on reason. Human reason acquired a dignity that it had not enjoyed since the Golden Age of Greece. Scholasticism had prepared Europe for this renewed acceptance of reason, but scholasticism itself entered a period of decline after the golden age of Aquinas in the thirteenth century.

The first humanist on record to seriously examine the Bible in the light of reason was Lorenzo Valla (1405-57) of Italy.\(^1\) Valla was a skilled philologist who stressed the necessity of conducting biblical exegesis in the original languages. He wondered aloud how scholastics who were ignorant of Greek should ever have ventured to comment on the epistles of Paul (Farrar 313). Valla convincingly demonstrated that the Donation of Constantine and the Decretals of Isidore, on which the papacy had partially based its claim to existence, were not genuine. This was the first hint that pseudipigraphy was a common phenomenon of Jewish and Christian, as
well as heathen, literature. Against fierce opposition, Valla maintained that errors had crept into the Latin Vulgate over the centuries, and that the only solution lay in a return to the sources. This insistence upon the necessity of philological study as a prerequisite to scholarly study of the Bible is an unquestioned tenet of modern literary study of the Bible.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), a priest and member of the Platonic Academy of Lorenzo de Medici in Florence, was influential in modeling a new style of exegesis. In *De Religione Christiana* (1474), Ficino performed a careful historical examination of the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles in order to ascertain the validity of the Christian faith. The significance of this is twofold: (a) no authority was granted to pronouncements of the Church with regard to this question, and (b) his biblical exegesis sought the 'clear meaning' of the text, which was a radical departure from the philosophically oriented scholastic approach. Critics like Ficino were seeking an alternative to traditional dogmatic biblical exegesis.

In 1494, John Colet (c.1467-1519) left Oxford for a tour of Italy in order to soak up some of this humanism firsthand. He became familiar with the work of Ficino and others. Upon his return to London in 1496, the announcement went out that Colet was beginning a series of lectures in exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Colet rejected verbal inspiration of the Scriptures in favor of regarding them as authoritative records of God's action in history. This freed him from the scholastic need to amplify every word and allowed him to concentrate on the meaning of the text.
in its original setting. This was a revival of the method of Jerome, after a lapse of over a millennium. In his comments on Genesis, Colet pronounces the creation story to be sheer poetic invention. Moses, he believes, wrote "after the manner of a popular poet" (cited in Baroway 462). Here is "poetic truth, a deliberate translation into human terms of a transcendent conception of ideal truth" (cited in Baroway 463).

Jakob Wimpheling (1450-1528) was perhaps the key German thinker with regard to humanism and the Bible. Around 1497, he wrote: "Do we not learn from poets and orators how to speak Latin and how to write an ornate style? Do we not learn [from them] rhetorical florishes, tropes, and schemes which are often used in Holy Scripture?" (Isidoneus Germanicus, cited in Schwarz 104). As noted in Chapter Four, commentators as early as Cassiodorus and Bede had catalogued the tropes and figures of the Psalter. But Wimpheling extended the notion of rhetoric to the point that it included the entire Bible.

If literary study of the Bible is to occur outside of scholarly circles, the Bible must be accessible to the ordinary person. In this respect, the importance of Gutenberg's invention of movable type cannot be overestimated. The celebrated Gutenberg Bible, an edition of the Vulgate, appeared no later than August, 1456, in Mainz, Germany.

Ironically, Gutenberg's invention did more to undermine the authority of this very Vulgate than any other single cause. When books were scarce, literacy was both unnecessary and irrelevant to the average citizen. The clergy were practically the only people
sufficiently educated to read and explain the sense of the Bible. Suddenly, this situation changed. Bibles in the vernacular began being published. Issues of biblical interpretation, which were formerly discussed 'in house' among the clergy, were now becoming matters of public debate.

Such public involvement in biblical exegesis made the church hierarchy uncomfortable, and resulted in various attempts to restrict the publishing of Bibles other than the Vulgate. During the Middle Ages, there had been considerable openness to the questioning of doctrinal positions, and even open criticism of the Vulgate. Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), Papal Secretary under Leo X and Cardinal under Paul III, is said to have disliked reading the Vulgate because of its poor style (Hardison 331). But as theological debate became the order of the day for the ordinary European, there arose a less flexible situation.

The Bible also became, for the first time in ages, accessible in the original languages. In 1494, the Hebrew Bible was made available in print by the Soncino family in Italy, although scarcely a single Gentile in Europe was able to read Hebrew until the publication of Reuchlin's De Rudimentis Hebraicis in 1506. Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), a student of the renowned Pico della Mirandola, was the greatest Christian Hebraist of his generation. He defended his interest in the language and book of the Jews by reminding his questioners that Hebrew was the language in which God himself had spoken to the patriarchs! He had to deal with the popular belief that the Jews had deliberately falsified their texts in order to confute the Christian. Reuchlin's suggestion, then,
that chairs of Hebrew be established at German universities gave rise to a violent controversy between humanists and traditionalists.

Interestingly, Reuchlin's Hebrew grammar was not the first by a non-Jewish scholar. Peter Nigri had prepared a brief glossary in Germany in 1475, and Aldo Manuzio a more extensive one in 1500. In 1504, Konrad Pellikan had published De modo legendi et intelligendi Hebraeum. But Reuchlin's was the most celebrated work, influencing a number of key exegetes and church reformers. His careful labor shows both his independent judgment and his indebtedness to the work of David Kimhi three centuries earlier.

**Erasmus**

Pope Clement V, in his Constitution of 1311, had recommended the study of Hebrew in European universities, although little became of this at the time. Attempts were occasionally made to bring classical philological scholarship to bear upon the Bible. But a trilingual specialist (Greek, Hebrew, Latin) of the calibre of Jerome was nowhere to be found, and there was great resistance to the notion of changing the Bible.

Critical editions of the Hebrew Bible began coming out of Italy in the late fifteenth century. But knowledge of Greek remained almost nonexistent in Europe until the sixteenth century. It remained for Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536) to publish the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament. This he did, and much more.

As a youth, Erasmus lived for a period with the Brethren of the Common Life in their house at Deventer. This house was
dedicated to Jerome, their model of scholarly piety. It was here that Erasmus first realized he could combine the best of literary culture with spirituality.

That Erasmus was a true spiritual reformer is clear from his *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1504). But he never came to terms with the philosophic subtleties of dogmatic theology, much preferring to seek a reform of the Church from within by a return to biblical theology. It is as if Erasmus completely bypassed a millennium of medieval scholarship by returning to the Church fathers of the patristic era.

After a visit to England in 1499, where he became familiar with Colet's sermons on the epistle to the Romans, Erasmus became convinced of the necessity of a historical approach to the biblical texts. At once he set to work on his own commentary on Romans, which was published in 1502. This only convinced him more of the need to embark upon the study of the biblical languages. He saw that the work of the prophetic exegete must be built upon the foundation of philology.

In his classical studies, Erasmus had already acquired a very good command of Latin, although he continually sought to polish his style. In April, 1500 there is a letter to Batt mentioning that he was applying his whole mind to learning Greek, spending what little money he had first on Greek books, with clothing coming in a late second (Epistles 1:233). He also made an effort to learn Hebrew at various points, although as early as 1503 he sadly concedes that he had undertaken too much: "I began also to look into Hebrew, but I was put off by the strangeness of the language, and also because
neither my age nor my ability can handle several things at once, I gave up" (Epistles 1:376). The only exegeses Erasmus ever attempted in the Hebrew Bible were a few commentaries on selected psalms, and even here he had to consult heavily with others who were more familiar with Hebrew than he. It became clear to him that his contribution would be to New Testament studies.

This is the frame of mind Erasmus was in when, in the autumn of 1504, he discovered Lorenzo Valla's unpublished "Notes on the New Testament" in the Praemonstratensian Abbey of Parc near Louvain. Here was proof that the Church is no guarantee against textual error; philology is absolutely necessary. Valla, using only three Latin and three Greek manuscripts, had no difficulty pointing out and emending many errors, both in readings and in translation. It was immediately clear to Erasmus what a powerful weapon the Greek New Testament might become. Erasmus published Valla's notes in 1505 under the title *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*. In his preface he writes:

> What crime is it in Lorenzo if after collating some ancient and correct Greek copies he has noted in the New Testament, which is derived from the Greek, some passages which either differ from our version or seem to be inaptly rendered owing to a passing want of vigilance in the translator, or are expressed more significantly in the Greek; or, finally, if it appears that something in our text is corrupt? (Epistles 1:382)

Here Erasmus is able to use Valla's findings as ammunition against traditionalism without taking a significant personal risk. This work of Valla's also helped prepare the way for Erasmus's own more risky contributions, which were now far along in their period of gestation.
Erasmus's magnum opus was his critical edition of the Greek New Testament, first published in 1516. Erasmus was well aware of the opposition he faced. For example, in 1514, a Dutch scholar named Martin Durpius had written Erasmus, pointing out that accurate linguistic scholarship was not needed for the Bible, since the Latin Vulgate could have "no mixture of falsehood or mistake. . . . [It would be] unreasonable to suppose that the Universal Church has been in error for so many generations in the use of this edition" (Epistles 2:169).

A big chunk of his Greek New Testament had been produced in England during 1511 while he was teaching a course on Jerome at Cambridge University. It soon became evident that others were thinking along the same lines. In Spain, Cardinal Ximenes had begun work on a sumptuous edition of the Bible in all ancient languages and version. Called the Complutensian Polyglot, the New Testament was printed in 1514, and therefore included the first Greek New Testament to be printed. It was held up, however, until 1522--partly to allow the addition of a Greek vocabulary and partly to get a breve from the Pope. Erasmus's publisher, Hieronymus Froben of Basle, took advantage of this delay to hurry Erasmus's text into print; it was published as the Novum Instrumentum in February, 1516. The work was dedicated to Pope Leo X, who also issued it his coveted breve; it has become a landmark in the history of biblical exegesis from the Middle Ages to modern times.

The Complutensian Polyglot turns out to have been based on a number of late manuscripts, and has therefore exerted little textual influence. Erasmus used half a dozen Greek manuscripts, one of
which was the important minuscule I. But the bulk of his text was based on later and (as we now know) less accurate manuscripts. His manuscript of the Apocalypse was missing the last six verses, so Erasmus actually translated from Latin into Greek to fill up the lacunae!

Perhaps it is unfair to expect from Erasmus modern standards of textual accuracy. Part of the problem, of course, is that the text was hurried into print, and was full of typographical and printing errors. Nevertheless, in terms of critical scholarship, Erasmus was miles ahead of just about everyone else in his day, and became the newly accepted standard in biblical studies, and in literature generally.

In his critical notes to the Greek text, Erasmus made some daring commentary. He asserted (as did Jerome) that Matthew probably wrote his gospel originally in Hebrew (Aramaic, according to many modern scholars), a manuscript which has long been lost. Erasmus drew the inevitable conclusion that the Greek translation would never reproduce all of the original nuances. He then went on to point out the probable inauthenticity of a number of passages, including the final twelve verses of Mark, of John 7:53-8:11 (the story of the woman taken in adultery), and of the 'comma Johanneum' (1 John 5:7, the only overt mention of the Trinity in the Bible). Erasmus was perhaps the first to distinguish between inspiration and infallibility with regard to the Bible.

In his critical notes, Erasmus also examined idiomatic expressions common to the Bible, particularly Hebraisms such as hyperbole. He sees irony, even in certain sayings of Jesus. He
demonstrates that many words in New Testament Greek do not necessarily have the meaning assigned to them in classical Greek. He carefully examines the peculiarities which mark the writing style of the Apostle Paul. All of this, it must be remembered, occurred at a time when "there were thousands of theologians who did not know whether the Apostles wrote in Hebrew, in Greek, or in Latin" (Farrar 321).

Erasmus's Greek New Testament was printed together with a new Latin translation. In many ways, the Greek Testament was merely an attempt to justify the Latin. The publication of the Greek text was bold, but in his day it was actually bolder to set aside the Vulgate for this new translation (which became one of the last masterpieces of classical Latin ever penned). From both the Greek and Latin translations of Erasmus, many vernacular biblical translations arose, a development which Erasmus encouraged.

Colet requested that Erasmus follow up his translation work with an extended commentary. This resulted in his highly successful paraphrases of the books of the New Testament, which also made their contribution to literary study of the Bible. Erasmus's purpose was to close up gaps, to soften abrupt transitions, to reduce the confused to order, to smooth out involved sentences, to explain knotty points, to illuminate dark places, to grant Hebraisms to Roman franchise, in short to modernize the language of St. Paul, heavenly orator as he is.

(Works 42:2-3)

These paraphrases are essentially loose translations which preserve the narrative voice of the author, but frequently lapse into expanded commentary. That they were consciously literary may be inferred from a passage in De Copia (1512):
We shall add greatly to our linguistic resources if we translate authors from the Greek, as that language is particularly rich in subject-matter and vocabulary. It will also prove quite useful on occasion to compete with these Greek authors by paraphrasing what they have written. It will be of enormous value to take apart the fabric of poetry and reweave it in prose, and vice versa... (Works 42:xii).

The first paraphrase completed (Romans, in 1517) was so well received that he decided to continue. The paraphrases did not arouse the same degree of opposition that his translations did. Moreover, they helped get the Bible into the hands of ordinary people, which was a hope of Erasmus.

Erasmus had a good sense of the direction literary study of the Bible would take. As early as 1500, he published Adagia, his collection of proverbs. In his preface, he carefully defines the proverb as a literary form and argues that an understanding of this literary form will greatly enhance our ability to make sense of biblical proverbs in both the Old and New Testaments. He also describes how the failure to recognize a proverb as such will often create textual misinterpretation. This acknowledgment of the importance of recognizing literary form for hermeneutics, whether of sacred or secular literature, has been a central tenet of modern literary biblical study.

Erasmus believed that the literary art of the Bible could hold its own against any of the pagan works:

...Are the books revealed by the Holy Spirit mean in comparison to the writings of Homer, Euripides, or Ennius? ... Compare, if you will, the story-teller, Herodotus, with Moses; compare the story of the creation of the world, beginning with Egypt, with the stories of Diodorus; compare the books of Judges and Kings with Livy; ... compare Plato and Christ; ...
the psalms so spiritual with the eulogies of Pindar; the songs of Solomon with the ditties of Theocritus? ... Divine wisdom has an eloquence of its own, and no wonder if somewhat different from that of Demosthenes or Cicero; for one becomes the wife of a king, another the mistress of a braggart soldier. ("Ciceronianus, or a Dialogue on the Best Style of Speaking," in Works 28:393)

Erasmus operated on the assumption that sacred literature is subject to the same philological critique as profane literature. This goes beyond the cautious proposals of Wimpheling, who was concerned solely with rhetorical figures of speech. Erasmus did more than any other man to free biblical study from the clutches of religion. He expressly repudiated the exegetic infallibility of both Pope and Church (cf. Adnotationes in 1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 10:8, 1 Tim. 1:7). Erasmus's philological criticism was the seed from which sprouted, a century later, the historical-critical approach to the Bible and other works of literature.

Considered as a whole, Erasmus's critical method must be considered eclectic. In his work, one finds elements of dogmatic, historical, literary, and what we might call moral exegesis. In his preface to the Greek New Testament, which was later reprinted separately as Ratio Verae Theologiae (1518), he writes:

1. Let him who practices reading Scripture have a pure heart.
2. Let him learn Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and be formed in liberal disciplines, especially grammar and rhetoric.
3. Let him perceive some of the dogmatic complexities inherent in the various texts of Scripture, and yet let him bring everything, many-sided though it be, back to Christ as the center.
5. Let him, finally, pursue his work methodically and not abuse dialectics.

In an interpretive dispute with Colet, Erasmus's literary
contribution becomes clear. Medieval Catholicism was reluctant to admit that Jesus-the-man feared death. So in his prayer in Gethsemane ("Let this cup pass from me," Mark 14:36), Colet followed the church fathers in arguing that the 'cup' to which Jesus referred was his pain at witnessing the behavior of the Jews. In contrast, Erasmus appealed to the biblical text, taking into consideration historical circumstances, human experience, and probability within the specific literary context:

The crucifixion lay threateningly close at hand . . . Christ to whom there was nothing that was not known, knew what was afoot; he sought privacy, and began to be discomfited and sad, to sweat, to be deeply downcast . . . If rational proofs are derived from probable influence, do not all these facts, taken together, loudly proclaim that here is a man who stands in fear of death? (Correspondence 214)

Unfortunately, Erasmus had no direct successor. Perhaps one reason for this might be that the religious situation in Europe was becoming increasingly polarized. One's orthodoxy was now a matter of utmost importance. Secondly, the Renaissance quickly took a turn toward the scientific. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) created a revolution in biology and engineering, Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galilean (1564-1642) in astronomy, and Kepler (1571-1630) in physics. The great minds of the period tended toward science rather than literature.

Nevertheless, the influence of Erasmus was very great. Philology now replaced philosophy as the handmaid of religion. The science of textual criticism was born. The sixteenth century became an extremely fruitful period of Bible translation, and the literary quality of many of these translations is surprisingly high.
The Reformation

One very important translation which was indebted to Erasmus was that of the famous pastor and professor of biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther (1483-1546). For twenty-four years, the translation of the Bible into the German vernacular was the main business of Luther's literary activity. The German of Luther's time was almost Babel-like, because of a host of local dialects. But Luther was born in Middle Germany, which occupied a linguistic middle ground between North and South. Basing his translation on the Soncino Hebrew Bible and Erasmus's Greek New Testament, Luther put his stamp so deeply on the German language that his German Bible marks the beginning of Modern German Literature. His translation was so successful that it became a model for many other vernacular translations, for it showed the literary world what could be done by a translator who thoroughly understood the needs of his people.

Luther's primary contribution to literary study of the Bible was his insistence upon 'literal' rather than allegorical or spiritual exegesis, thus making possible 'objective' (secular) modes of analysis. For example, prior to Luther the Psalms were important primarily because they prefigured the crucifixion of Christ. But after Luther's early exposition of the Psalter (1513-15), this important collection of songs became "a universal compendium of human emotion, David as Everyman" (Kugel 219).

In his very early work, Luther actually did employ the medieval fourfold hermeneutical scheme, although he insisted (like Aquinas) that the spiritual senses are subordinate to the literal.
Aquinas) that the spiritual senses are subordinate to the literal. But in his later work, Luther made a clean break with medieval scholasticism. In his answer to Emser, one of his many critics, Luther wrote: "The Holy Ghost is the all-simplest writer that is in heaven or earth; therefore his words can have no more than one simplest sense, which we call the scriptural or literal meaning" (Luther 39:178). Whereas Erasmus believed that the Holy Spirit had meant words to be taken in various senses, and that this was a result of the fecundity of Scripture, for Luther the literal sense alone carried meaning. He ultimately rejected the validity of allegory, along with the entire fourfold approach.

But Luther did retain typological symbolism, which became a cornerstone of his hermeneutic. According to Luther, every Scripture refers either directly or indirectly to Christ. "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic," he said, "even if a Peter or a Paul taught it" (cited in Farrar 335). Hence he valued some books of the Bible above others, seeking a canon within the canon. His dislike of the Epistle of James, which he called "ein recht strohen Epistel" (a right strawy epistle) is well known.

This insistence that the totality of the biblical corpus speak of Christ was, of course, a theological-critical and not a literary requirement. Nevertheless, Luther's willingness to jettison the uniform inspiration (and therefore significance) of the Bible is in keeping with most contemporary literary study of the Bible. For Luther, the 'Word of God' was not coextensive with the Holy Scriptures; Christ alone was the essential logos, or word of God. What is more, the 'divine inspiration' of the Bible was not verbal.
Rather, it meant that the human authors of the Bible were inspired as they wrote. This is not all that different from the kind of inspiration Milton sought for himself in the preparation of his poetic epics. Luther even held that divine inspiration was not limited to past events, but was also a possibility in the present.

Luther and subsequent 'reformers' enlisted Renaissance learning in the service of Christian piety. For example, Luther learned from Erasmus's publication of Valla's works that the Greek work 'metanoein' means 'repent'—not, as the Vulgate says, 'do penance.' There were differences among the Protestant reformers, yet they were in general agreement regarding their reading of the Bible. There was a rejection of scholasticism and the fourfold allegorical approach, a refusal to make the opinions of the church fathers definitive, a return to the original biblical languages, close attention to the literal sense and to authorial intent, a belief in the perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture, the study of Scripture as a whole rather than as a collection of prooftexts, and an interest in the Christocentricity of the Bible.

Some of these reformation emphases would soon clash with those of secular humanism. But both Luther and Calvin admitted the immense debt they owed to the Renaissance humanists. Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, made extensive use of pagan classical authors in his exegesis, and drew heavily upon humanist rhetorical theory in order to distinguish between various tropes, such as alloiosis, catachresis and synecdoche, which were of potential theological significance (McGrath 168). The interest among Protestant scholars in learning Greek, and even Erasmus's Greek New Testament, would
almost certainly not have arisen apart from the new Renaissance mindset.

Luther never tired of saying that a man must do his own believing as he does his own dying. He was perhaps the first person in history to argue in favor of the right of private interpretation, which is an unspoken assumption of most modern literary study of the Bible. For Luther and most of the reformers, the authority of the church was replaced by that of the Holy Spirit as it operated on the conscience of the individual believer. Milton would later state the belief succinctly:

Every believer has a right to interpret the scriptures for himself, inasmuch as he has the spirit for his guide, and the mind of Christ is in him; nay the expositions of the public interpreter can be of no use to him, except so far as they are confirmed by his own conscience.

(De Doctrina Christiana 1.30)

This, quite naturally, launched an era of tremendous theological and literary ferment. In attempting to prove their various positions from the sacred text, Protestant scholars became very interested in the literary qualities of the text. The study of rhetoric received new impetus. Sets of hermeneutical guidelines were composed by various individuals. A good example is the set composed by Thomas Wilson (1525-81), entitled Theological Rules, to Guide Us in the Understanding and practise of holy Scriptures (London, 1615). Such handbooks tried to instill a sensitivity to the operation of literary forms, styles, and idioms, often with numerous examples. Wilson was well aware of the rhetorical effect of Hebrew parallelism:
It is the manner of Scripture, having said a thing in one member of a sentence, to repeat the same againe in the latter member, whereof many examples in Proverbs, & Psalomes... It is done partly by way of explication, and sometime for confirmation, sometime for expressing or exciting zeale. (Wilson 35, cited in Zim 75)

Roman Catholic exegesis was not static during this period. One of the keenest minds of the Roman Catholic counter-reformation following the Council of Trent was the Italian Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). As observed in Chapter Four, there was a movement within late medieval Catholicism away from the fourfold sense of Scripture toward the primacy of the literal sense. Bellarmine summarizes the Renaissance Catholic position:

As... the begotten Word of God hath two natures, the one human and visible, the other divine and invisible; so the written word of God hath a two-fold sense: the one outward, that is historic or literal; the other, inward, that is mystic or spiritual. (cited in Zim 67)

Lumped together within this 'spiritual' sense are the allegorical, tropological and anagogical senses. This position may be compared with that of William Whitaker, who spoke for the reformed English church in his *Disputatio de sacra scriptura* (1588):

We affirm that there is but one true, proper and genuine sense of scripture, arising from the words rightly understood, which we call the literal: and we contend that allegories, tropologies, and anagogues are not various senses, but various applications and accommodations of that one meaning. (Whitaker 404)

In this revised form, as expressed by Whitaker, the fourfold approach continues (even within Protestantism) to the present day.

At first, the Reformation opened exciting new possibilities
for literary study of the Bible. Having rejected Church tradition as a critical authority in biblical interpretation, the reformers considered other options. For Calvin, the guiding hermeneutical principle was 'faith.' For Luther, it was 'the witness of the Spirit.' Luther and Calvin both believed that there existed a continuum of significance among the biblical books; not all were equally divinely inspired. In Luther's emphasis upon hermeneutical subjectivity, he is surprisingly close to modern reader-response theories of textual interpretation. In his emphasis upon the authority of the Bible—"Scripture is its own interpreter" (Luther 7:98)—he resembles twentieth-century New Criticism. Calvin, in his commentary on Genesis, makes clear that the biblical cosmology is an accommodation to an uneducated understanding, described much as it would appear to the naked eye. It is not intended as a source for science or physics (Calvin 86-7). This contrasts sharply with the interpretation of nineteenth-century British defenders of the Mosaic cosmology, for whom it was heresy to argue that the biblical account was a theological rather than a scientific description.

The later Reformation became much more rigid than Luther or Calvin ever were. The successors of the reformers, in their search for a basis of authority, reverted to the traditional principles of verbal inspiration and infallibility. Within a generation or two, there was again a fixed canon of Scripture, and dogmatism was the order of the day—for Protestants as well as Catholics.

By the seventeenth century, then, Protestant orthodoxy had become as rigid as any medieval theological construction. A movement which had initially been hostile to scholasticism now
developed a scholasticism of its own. Protestants simply replaced the authority of the Church with the authority of the Bible. Instead of a work of literature, the Bible came to be regarded as "a thing all of a piece, endued with talismanic virtues," as Matthew Arnold would put it two centuries later. Arnold actually believed that Protestants handled Scripture worse than the Catholics:

And Protestants did practically in this way use the Bible more irrationally than Rome practically ever used it; for Rome had her hypothesis of the Catholic Church endued with talismanic virtues, and did not want a talismanic Bible too. (Arnold 6:161)

The Making of an English Literary Masterpiece

Both the Renaissance and the Reformation arrived slowly in England. The study of biblical languages came later at Oxford and Cambridge than on the continent. The energies of most scholars were absorbed by the political struggle between Catholic and Protestant. It is characteristic of the English situation that as late as the end of the sixteenth century, Hooker, a specialist in Hebrew, achieved his renown as an apologist and philosopher rather than as a biblical scholar.

England was also exceptional in having no printed vernacular version of the Bible prior to the Reformation. But shortly after Erasmus's tenure at Cambridge, a student there by the name of William Tyndale made what is undoubtedly the single greatest contribution to the history of the English Bible. Wycliffe's earlier translation had been based upon the Latin Vulgate, but Tyndale mastered Hebrew and Greek. His conclusion:
The Greek tongue agreeth more with the English than with the Latin. And the properties of the Hebrew tongue agreeth a thousand times more... The manner of speaking [in Hebrew and English] is both one, so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it into the English word for word. (cited in Cook xi)

In 1524, against overwhelming odds, Tyndale began translating the Bible into modern English. His greatest opponent was Thomas More. More was willing to concede the need for a new English Bible, but with circulation limited to bishops and other approved persons. Tyndale had not completed his task by the time he was strangled and burned in 1536. Nevertheless, he is credited with doing more toward shaping the style of the (Authorized) Kings James Version—and thereby English prose style in general—than any other single person.

Like other writers of the period, Tyndale understood that English prose style was waiting to be created. It is of interest that although Tyndale was well versed in Latin, from seventy to ninety percent of the words in his Bible are of pure English origin (Wild 462). Observes C.S. Lewis: "Tyndale's fame as an English writer has been most unjustly overshadowed both by the greater fame of More and by his own reputation as a translator. He seems to me the best prose writer of his age" (Lewis 132).

Many other English translations were undertaken in the sixteenth century, most of them unauthorized. A factor which contributed to the flood of vernacular translations was the hardening of the Roman Catholic Church's position with regard to the Latin Vulgate, which by this time badly needed updating—for reasons of accuracy as well as style. The Fourth Session of the Council of
Trent, in April, 1546, declared it to be the only authentic Latin text of the Bible. A definitive edition was thus prepared for issue, which Pope Sixtus V declared in 1590 to be unalterable. Subsequent pontiffs did manage to circumvent this edict and make emendations from time to time, but the procedure was not an easy one. Many would-be revisers simply found it easier to start from scratch. After Henry VIII's schism with Rome, it was evident to everyone that, at least in England, vernacular Bible translations were the way of the future.

The mainline party of the Church of England, under the direction of Myles Coverdale, had produced the Great Bible of 1539. The Puritans produced their Geneva Bible in 1560, which was the first edition to print each verse as a separate paragraph, and to print in italics words not in the original text. The English Catholics published the Rheims New Testament in 1582 and the Douay Old Testament in 1610; both were literal translations of the Vulgate, replete with Latinisms and interpretive notes conforming to Roman doctrine.

With each party of the English church thus favoring its own Bible, factionalism became a serious problem. James I, being particularly irritated at the Calvinistic marginal commentary of the popular Geneva Bible, called for a completely new, theologically neutral English Bible, stipulating that it be printed without marginal notes. And so was born the most influential edition of the most influential book ever penned, in what was rapidly becoming the most influential language of the world. This Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, completed in 1611, continues to rate as
one of the finest literary masterpieces in all of English literature. Perhaps the secret of its success is that it did not seek originality. It consciously sought to incorporate the best features of its English predecessors. For this reason, even at the time it was written, the Authorized Version had a deliberately archaic feeling, which served to dignify its language and make it instantly identifiable as Scripture.

Hayyim Nachman Bialik, the great modern Jewish poet, has described the inadequacy of Bible translation: "He who reads the Bible in translation is like a man who kisses his bride through a veil" (cited in MacGregor 190). Yet, as MacGregor retorts, a well-executed translation sometimes becomes a worthy artistic achievement in itself, much as the right veil can enhance the beauty of even the most beautiful of women. This is apparently what occurred in the production of the King James Bible. The translation took place at the peak of a period of great literary activity, of secular learning, of religious piety, and during a formative period in the development of the English language. Seldom does such a fortuitous combination of circumstances come together. But this should not overshadow the careful procedures of the translators themselves, who heard the work read aloud during their meetings. George Steiner remarks that "The King James [Bible] is the only great thing in this world ever done by a committee" (Steiner 191).

In 1604, forty-seven scholars were commissioned by James to do the first draft. Some work began immediately, although the project could not officially be launched until funding questions were settled in 1607. Intent on displacing the Puritan Geneva Bible,
James's instructions required that the translators follow the Bishop's Bible of 1568 where possible, although other versions and foreign translations were made available and carefully consulted. The final work was scrutinized by university professors of Hebrew and Greek from Oxford and Cambridge, as well as church officials.

The King James Bible was, according to its title page, "appointed to be read in churches." There is widespread recognition that its strength lies in its prose rhythms, which are highly effective in a public setting. Consider, for example, the effect of the long row of anapests (short short long) in Isaiah 53:1: "Who / hath believed / our report, / and to whom / is the arm / of the Lord / revealed?" (This verse has been memorialized in Handel's "Messiah.") Also the cretic feet (long short long) in James 1:19: "Swift to hear,/ slow to speak, / slow to wrath..."

The King James Bible, then, was a product of the best that the Renaissance had to offer, both in terms of scholarship and art. At a time when Tudor English was giving way to modern English, it had a creative effect upon English literature and culture, just as Luther's Bible had in Germany. It went on to become a tutor to many a future scholar and writer. It taught the nonconformist tinker, John Bunyan, how to express himself in vivid, striking English of enduring beauty. Even English writers whose interests were far removed from the Bible—such as Byron or Swinburne—learned much of what they knew about language from this Bible.

The one major shortcoming of the King James Bible is that it was written before the science of archaeology had progressed beyond its infancy. In fact, only sixteen years after its publication, a
biblical manuscript that would have greatly increased textual accuracy was to arrive in England (the Codex Alexandrinus). Revisions have thus become necessary. But the problem for all subsequent revisers has been to preserve the polish and balance of the original while recharging the text with new vigor from the Hebrew and Greek.

Some have criticized the King James Bible for complacently reproducing as prose some of the world's lyric masterpieces. But the workings of biblical prosody were unknown in 1611, and in fact have become a topic of intense scholarly disagreement even in the final decade of the twentieth century. There is as yet no generally agreed upon consensus concerning the stichography of biblical verse.

The King James Bible was slow to gain acceptance. Despite its 'authorized' status, there was no legal compulsion for its adoption. Perhaps this was for the best; we now know that its reputation was entirely earned.

Renaissance Biblical Poetics

The Protestant reformers thought they could replace the authority of the Pope with the authority of the Bible. But the difficulty is that the Bible is a book, not a man. It requires interpretation. This is what led to the institution of the papacy in the first place. Without such an arbiter, it was believed, there could be no divine revelation—only conflicting human opinions. It turns out that these 'conflicting human opinions' within Protestantism resulted in the development of biblical 'hermeneutics.' This new 'science' of literary interpretation would
ultimately blur the boundary between sacred and secular, making possible modern literary study of the Bible.

To the extent that the Bible came to be appreciated as a work of literary art, we may also speak of an emerging biblical poetics. Such a poetics could only emerge with the demise of allegorical interpretation. The reason is that the 'art' of allegorical interpretation is something extrinsic—something brought to the text by 'artful' interpreters—more than it is intrinsic to the text.

Biblical poetics, then, examines the literary art of the Bible. It suggests that such art is analogous to that of classical literature. Prior to the Renaissance, this invariably involved defending the literary quality of the Bible as against pagan literature. The usual approach was to argue that biblical literature was prior to and/or superior to the pagan classics. But during the Renaissance, new issues arose:

A. In the face of Puritan resistance to any literature beyond the Bible, there was a need to justify imaginative literature generally. This entailed the defense of 'poetry' by appeal to biblical precedent.

The notion of 'literature' as an independent discipline was born in the Renaissance. Pagan and imaginative works began to be valued in ways that had previously been reserved for the Bible alone. As such works were compared and contrasted with the Bible, literary criticism was also born.

With the rise of 'literature' came the belief that all great writing is, in some sense, 'inspired'; this idea was explicitly put forth by Thomas Wilson in "On Poetical Narration" (1553). But in
the wake of the Reformation, there arose a backlash against this Renaissance endorsement of extrabiblical literature. As all fiction and poetry increasingly came under attack, the main line of defense was to demonstrate that biblical writers or heroes (such as Jesus himself) had used all the literary forms, devices, and (for verse) metres under discussion.

An early example of the tropes-and-figures approach was *Institutiones Hebraicae* (Lugduni, 1575) by Xantes Pagninus. This is really a pioneering work in Hebrew stylistics. Pagninus summarizes his findings: "Many figures are contained in sacred literature, some of which I shall include here, so that adepts of secular letters may be shown that all devices originated with the sacred" (cited in Kugel 227). In England, works such as Richard Sherry's *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammar and Rhetorike* (1555) demonstrate that the style of the Bible was being subjected, at least three years before Elizabeth's accession, to the same analysis accorded the poetry and oratory of profane authors.

The influence of the Reformation was, in some circles, sufficient to roll back the original Renaissance interest in and appreciation of the pagan classics. In the poem "Urania," from *La Muse Chrestiene* (1574), Guillaume du Bartas proposed a new muse for Christian poetry—the muse of Astronomy. In a dream-vision poem, Du Bartas recounts Urania's visit to him, urging him to reclaim for God the noble gift of poetry which had originated in the Bible, but was subsequently perverted to idolatrous and immoral ends. Promptly translated into English, Urania's arguments were utilized by a generation of Englishmen, among them Lodge, Puttenham, Vaughn, and
Milton. But the most influential writer in this category was Sir Philip Sidney.

Sidney's *Defense of Poesie* was published after his death in 1595. It has come to be regarded as a landmark in the history of literary criticism. Sidney justifies fiction as a category of literature by carefully demonstrating the superiority of 'poetry' to philosophy as a method of teaching. He cites two biblical examples: the allegorical parable of Nathan which helped King David "to see his own filthiness," and the parables of Jesus. Sidney points out that Christ "could as well have given the moral commonplaces of uncharitableness and humbleness," but instead he taught by graphic illustration through parable, "which more constantly, as it were, inhabit both the memory and judgment."

Sidney's treatise broke no new ground in terms of literary Bible study. Similar defenses of literary art were offered by Jerome and a number of the church fathers. But Sidney was instrumental in highlighting for Renaissance England the poetic nature of large portions of the Bible. Sidney summarizes the conclusions of two sixteenth-century Protestant scholars, Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius, whose Latin Bible was to become the 'Vulgate of Protestantism':

David in his Psalms, Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job... do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. (Sidney 110)

Renaissance scholars such as Tremellius and Junius had extended the boundary of the 'poetical books' to include wisdom books such as
Ecclesiastes and Job.

Because of Sidney's notoriety, it now became acceptable for political and religious conservatives to acknowledge this literary dimension of the Bible. Such an appeal to the Bible for the justification of secular literature is quite the reverse of our contemporary appeal to secular literary-critical approaches as justification for reading the Bible as literature.

A key point in the Defense of Poesie was a revival of the patristic belief in the temporal priority of biblical poetry: "The biblical poets were chief not only in excellencie, but in antiquitie." In a similar vein, Ben Jonson wrote: "Poesy... had her Originall from Heaven, received thence from the 'Ebrewes, and had in prime estimation with the Greeks, transmitted to the Latines and all the Nations that profess'd Civility" (Jonson 74). When Milton's Satan in Paradise Regained reminds Christ that "All knowledge is not couched in Moses' law," Christ retorts:

...if I would delight my private hours
With Music or with Poem, where so soon
As in our native language can I find
That Solace? All our Law and Story strew'd
With Hymns, our Psalms, with artful terms inscribed,
Our Hebrew songs and harps, in Babylon
That pleased so well our Victors' ears, declare
That rather Greece from us these arts derived,
Ill imitated... (IV, 334-338)

These Renaissance appeals to the precedence and preponderance of biblical poetry were an innovation in English. They would not have been possible apart from the availability of the Bible in English translations sensitive to its rhetorical and artistic qualities. When we recall that these discussions predate the
appearance of the Authorized Version, we realize that by 1611 there was already a well established biblical-literary tradition in England.

Giles Fletcher's introduction to *Christs Victorie and Triumph in Heaven and Earth, Over and After Death* (1632) and George Ballard's "The Author's Petition" (1638) further develop the notion that God chose to use human art as his vehicle for divine truth. These writers saw the Bible as superior not because it is the antithesis of classical literature but rather because it teaches clearly those truths which are only dimly perceived in the classics. In the realm of emotion, the Bible was believed to contain the most sublime feeling anywhere to be found. A Latin version of Longinus's celebrated essay "On the Sublime" was printed at Oxford in 1636 and an English translation in 1652. This work came to have a powerful influence over the minds of late seventeenth and eighteenth century English writers, and the Bible gradually became the poetic source of choice.

In *Divine Poems* (1654), Thomas Washbourne reminds his readers that Ambrose's classical sermons converted Augustine from Manichaeism but not from rhetoric. Robert Boyle cautions his readers that "The Scripture Style then, though it were not Eloquent Now, may have excellently suited the Genius of Those Times its Several Books were written in; and have been very proper for those People it was Primarily design'd to Work upon" (Boyle 165). As late as 1678, John Bunyan felt compelled to attach "The Author's Apology for his Book" to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, wherein he defends his 'allegory':
Solidity, indeed, becomes the pen
Of him that writeth things divine to men;
But must I needs want solidness, because
By metaphors I speak? Were not God's laws,
His gospel laws, in olden times held forth
By types, shadows, and metaphors? (Bunyan 4)

B. The Renaissance literary interest in the Bible was more than merely apologetic. Poets now looked to the Bible as a model for their own work. Biblical poetics thus entered the mainstream of English poetics. The pervasive Protestant emphasis upon the Bible as a book requiring philological and literary analysis fostered a theory of biblical aesthetics whereby the Bible became normative for poetic art as well as for spiritual truth. This resulted in careful examination of biblical genres, figures of speech, and typological symbolism as a prelude to the creation of wholly new works of art.

1. Genre. Renaissance biblical poetics began with the Psalms, whose literary character had long been appreciated. Versifying the Psalter became a favorite exercise. Petrarch had been among the first to do this. In England, the sixteenth century was the great age of lyric poetry, and writers were seeking foreign sources to rework.

Richard Rolle, the mystic of the middle of the fourteenth century, was—in England—first in the field with his translation and paraphrase of the Psalms. Rolle is of interest as one of the first English writers to use the vernacular as well as Latin in his writings. For Rolle, explanation was as important as accuracy of translation.

Psalms versification was fueled by the need for congregational singing material. By 1539, Myles Coverdale had published his
Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songs drawn out of the Holy Scripture, which was greatly influenced by Martin Luther. Its intent was to stimulate original composition in the biblical mode. The French metrical versions of Clément Marot (c.1540) were translated by Thomas Wyatt (1549) and others. In 1549, Robert Crowley published the first complete metrical psalter in English. The versions of Eobenus Hessus (1488–1540) in German and Theodore Beza (1519–1605) in French were highly regarded in their countries. The popular champions of this art form were Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, whose renditions in ballad-meter were later included in the Book of Common Prayer (1562) and sung by tens of thousands. Metrical psalms were to become the best known English verse of the sixteenth century.

A new direction in Elizabethan psalmody was begun by Sir Philip Sidney. Before his death in 1586, Sidney began rewriting the Psalms. This was carried to completion by his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. These 'Sydnean Psalms' (for they are more than translations) were in circulation before 1600, although they were not published until 1823, and then only in a limited edition of 250 copies. Donne and Herbert were familiar with them.

According to the Countess of Pembroke, the intention of earlier versifiers of the Psalms was "to suite the Capacitie of the Vulger." In contrast, she clearly avows an artistic purpose when on the title page to the joint work she recommends the Sydnean work as "more rare and excellent for the method and varietie then ever yet hath bene don in English" (cited in Rathmell xiii). The Sydnean Psalms were intended for private devotional use. So instead of the
narrow range of simple stanza patterns that was appropriate for memorization in song, each is cast in a metrical form and rhyme scheme suitable to its content.

After Sidney, the tradition continued in Michael Drayton's *The Spirituall Songes and holy Hymnes, of godly men, Patriarkes and Prophetes* (1591), George Sandys's *Paraphrase upon the Divine Poems* (1638), and the New England *Bay Psalm Book* (1680). Sandys's is among the most complete of these compilations, containing as it does biblical poetry outside of the Psalms.²

To those who questioned the propriety of this reworking of the Holy Scriptures, George Wither (1588-1667) argued that a metrical rendering, far from depriving the originals of their gravity, restores to them their former majesty. His *A Preparation to the Psalter* (London, 1619) was actually a treatise upon the style and versification of Hebrew poetry. He suggests why God caused the Psalms to be written in verse:

> The Spirit of God seeing mankind so enclinable to pleasure and delights, that they were hardly drawn to virtue or religion, which were enemies to sensuality: He mingled his heavenly precepts, with the sweet and pleasing strains of music and numbers; that so the ear, having that which delighted, might without tediousness listen, whilst wholesome and profitable instructions were unaware infused into us. (cited in Reid 122)

Renaissance biblical poetics was not limited to the psalter.³ It would be easy to come to the conclusion that such Renaissance scholars regarded the Bible as merely a collection of genres. An underlying unity was also asserted. The literature of the Bible was understood to contain the full range of human feeling and emotion, of prayer and praise, of styles and lyric genres.
2. Figures of Speech. Horton Davies has observed that the English Puritans rejected the ecclesiastical scenery of the church for the symbolism of the Bible (Davies 270). This led them to pay the closest attention to the tropes and figures of Scripture as the very vehicle of the Holy Ghost. Even doctrinal questions occasionally revolved around the interpretation of a figure of speech. For example, at the Last Supper, Jesus said "This is my body." Calvin (and his English followers) insist this is metonymy. So although the Reformation rallying cry was 'the one [literal] sense of Scripture,' on this issue Calvin accuses the Catholics of being literalists, unable to recognize an example which conforms to the common scriptural usage of such figures.

The 'literal' sense, then, included a proper understanding of the trope or figure intended by the biblical author, and not a wooden word-for-word literalism. As Donne expresses it,

> The literall sense is not alwayes that, which the very Letter and Grammar of the place presents,... but the literall sense of every place is the principall intention of the Holy Ghost in that place: And his principall intention in many places is to expresse things by allegories, by figures; so that in many places of Scripture, a figurative sense is the literall sense. (Donne 6:62)

Such an understanding required that every Bible reader become something of a literary critic, and promoted the notion of the Bible as a poetic work. So after the Reformation, handbooks of rhetoric began to flourish. The comment of Donne is typical of the period: "We cannot finde so high, and so lively examples, of those Tropes, and Figures, (in other authors) as we may in the Scriptures" (Donne 2:170-171). Donne also recognizes that the figurative language of
the Bible reflects the background of the various human authors:

The Prophets, and the other Secretaries of the holy Ghost in penning the books of Scriptures, do for the most part retain, and express in their writings some impressions, and some air of their former professions; those that had been bred in Courts and Cities, those that had been Shepheards and Heardsmen, those that had been Fishers, and so of the rest; ever inserting into their writings some phrases, some metaphors, some allusions, taken from that profession which they had exercised before. (Donne 1:236).

Even Isaac Walton's *The Compleat Angler* (1653) makes mention of the Bible's figurative speech:

As concerning fish in that Psalm [104], wherein for height of Poetry and wonders, the Prophet David seems to excell himself, how doth he there express himself in choice metaphors, even to the amazement of the contemplative reader, concerning the seas, the rivers, and the fish therein contained. (Walton 45)

3. Typology. The Renaissance revised medieval typological theory. The types now became an integral part of the literal sense rather than alternative senses of the text. This movement toward the primacy of the literal sense had begun during the late Middle Ages. The result was a new understanding of the essential spiritual identity of the two testaments:

In the usual medieval conception, Old Testament personages and typical things are merely literal signs, shadows ... the Israelites under the Old Covenant lived a carnal life without knowledge of the Law's intention, acting out without knowing it a typological history which led them nowhere. This history has spiritual value only for Christians who understand it as pertaining to Christ ... By contrast, the [new] Protestant formulations emphasized the continuities between the two covenants in regard to the spiritual condition of the faithful. (Lewalski 125)

Such a recognition led to the realization that biblical typology can
be progressively clarified and fulfilled in history.

Given the traditional notion that types might find their fulfillment in the Christian Church (as well as in the person of Christ), current events suddenly came to be examined as possible fulfillments of biblical prophecy. For example, during the Renaissance, the pope was commonly understood to be the Antichrist of Revelation. During the English Reformation, Civil War, and subsequent Puritan colonialism in America, parallels between ancient Israel and England were drawn. Cromwell's troops sang the Psalms of David as they marched into battle against the 'Philistines.' Those who understood the Bible as literally prefiguring events in England (and, by extension, America) developed a distinctive theology which became formalized in the nineteenth century, and is today known as British Israelitism.

Others understood the biblical narratives in a more universal sense, and limited themselves to the drawing of analogies. Their approach may be characterized as tropological. Henry VIII, for example, came to be described by writers as a modern Moses who delivered England from "Romish Pharao" (Zim 86), or as a latter-day King David. Henry's son Edward VI then became the wise son Solomon. Milton's Paradise Lost can be read as a commentary on current events in post-Puritan England as much as a retelling of the biblical epic. Readers gradually came to expect that serious English literature would carry several layers of meaning. After a century and a half of such typological/tropological application, Dryden was able to assume an experienced readership for his own political satire under the cover of King David's son, Absalom, and his
counselor, Achitophel. By this time, the older typological framework had largely given way to the more universal tropological (or figurative) approach.

In the late Middle Ages, Dante led the way by adopting biblical hermeneutical procedures for the reading of secular poetry. The Renaissance now witnessed the production of a huge body of secular literature which relied for its effect upon allusion to the Bible. Typological, tropological, and allegorical readings were now assumed to be applicable to secular works, especially those understood to have a serious moral purpose, such as epic or tragedy.

For example, the action of Shakespeare's play, Measure for Measure, turns on a question of biblical hermeneutics ("letter" vs. "spirit"). In The Comedy of Errors, Shakespeare evokes the themes of the Epistle to the Ephesians by setting his commentary on Christian marriage in the city of Ephesus. When Abraham Cowley (1618-67) sought subject matter for his major work of epic poetry, he seized upon King David. In his preface to Poems (1656), he offers the reason:

Whom should a Poet more justly seek to honour, then the highest Person who ever honoured his Profession? ... I consider this and how many other bright and magnificent subjects of like nature the Holy Scripture affords and proffers, as it were, to Poesie, in the wise managing and illustrating whereof the Glory of God Almighty might be joyned with the singular utility and noblest delight of Mankinde.

(Cowley 12)

This appreciation by secular writers of biblical poetics added a rich secondary level of meaning to the stories. It also served as a convenient hedge against censorship and prosecution. To a greater
or lesser extent, most European literature since the Renaissance (and particularly English literature) has alluded to the Bible.

Renaissance preachers now began to organize their sermons according to biblical poetics. Donne's exhibit a three-fold pattern of interpretation. The literal sense serves as the basis for both a universal moral statement about mankind and also of a typological application to Christ. In one of his many sermons on the Psalms, Donne explains his method: "Historically, David; morally, we; typically, Christ is the subject of this text" (Donne 2:97).

Donne was particularly drawn to those passages where deep feeling is evident, such as the Psalms. He informs us that this was his favorite Old Testament book, the chief reason being that the Psalms are poetry (Donne 2:49-50). Of his extant 160 sermons, 34 were preached on this book. In the New Testament, he was drawn to the Gospels, and in particular to the death of Christ, where themes of love and death fascinated him. The symbolism of the Gospel of John (Christ as "logos," "light," "ladder," "vine," the crucified serpent, etc.) offered him tremendous preaching possibilities. Donne was one poet who did not abandon his poetical imagination upon entering the pulpit.

Typological fulfillment was increasingly personalized and privatized during the Renaissance. The individual Christian was seen to recapitulate Old Testament events in himself. At first, this revolved around specific characters, such as David in the Psalms. But soon other parallels were drawn—such as with the temple. Traditionally, the Old Testament temple was taken as a type of Christ or of the Christian church. But during the Renaissance,
in commentators such as Thomas Adams, the individual Christian suddenly became the antitype. In the writing of Joseph Hall, the individual actually becomes the primary antitype:

Where ever God dwels, there is his Temple; . . . In every renewed man, the individuall temple of God;... What is the altar whereon our Sacrifices of prayer and praises are offered to the Almighty but a contrite heart? What the golden Candlestickes but the illumined understanding. . . . Let the Altars of our cleane hearts send up ever to thee the sweetly perfumed smoakes of our holy meditations and faithful prayers, and cheefull thanks-givings.  
("Contemplations," cited in Lewalski 135-136)

The same kind of personalization occurs in The Way of Christ (1624) by the German mystic Jacob Boehme. In reaction against Lutheran scholasticism, Boehme was concerned with personal religious experience. Finally, John Donne announces, "All Gods Prophecies, are thy Histories: whatsoever he hath promised to others, he hath done in his purpose for thee: And all Gods Histories are thy Prophesies; all that he hath done for others, he owes thee" (Donne 7:356).

Other Renaissance writers also give witness to the literary character of the Bible, frequently adopting its poetics as a model for their own.5

In 1656, Abraham Cowley suggested that no one had yet mastered the art of writing 'divine poetry':

All the Books of the Bible are either already most admirable, and exalted pieces of Poesie, or are the best Materials in the world for it. Yet, though they be in themselves so proper to be made use of for this purpose; None but a good Artist will know how to do it: neither must we think to cut and polish Diamonds with so little pains and skill as we do Marble. (Cowley 14)
Perhaps this was just the challenge John Milton (1608-74) had been waiting for. Milton's poetry has given rise to some of the most fruitful investigation into Renaissance biblical poetics. In his three greatest poems, Paradise Lost (1667), Paradise Regained (1671) and Samson Agonistes (1671), we observe the ultimate fusion of biblical and classical learning, the twin fountainheads of Western civilization.

Milton had long appreciated the literary character of the Bible. In De Doctrina Christiana (c.1660), he writes that in the Bible "both in the literal and figurative descriptions of God, he is exhibited not as he really is, but in such a manner as may be within the scope of our comprehensions" (Milton Works 14:31). In The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelatry (1642) Milton calls the book of Job a "brief model" of the epic, the Song of Solomon a "divine pastoral drama," the Apocalypse (Revelation) of St. John "the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy," and he reckons "those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets" to be "incomparable over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy" (Milton CPW 1:816).

The book of Job particularly fascinated Milton. He was strongly affected by its characterization, poetry, ideas, and structure. The character of Job's Satan is more fully developed by Milton, together with an analysis of his degeneration. Job's musings upon God's treatment of man are echoed in the soliloquies of Milton's Satan, the questionings of Milton's Adam, and the cries of Milton's Samson. The structure of the book of Job profoundly influenced the structure and form of both Samson Agonistes and
Paradise Regained. Job is the combination of epic and drama that Milton was seeking to recreate.

In Paradise Lost, Milton convincingly demonstrates that in the biblical story of creation lay all the key ingredients of the epic. Milton used the raw materials of the biblical story to create an epic poem which is often considered an equal to any of Homer's.

More than any other writer, Milton helped establish the conviction that the art of the Bible was not limited to those passages traditionally understood to be lyrical. Milton's Christ states this explicitly in Paradise Regained:

Their Orators thou then extolls't as those
The top of eloquence—statists indeed,
And lovers of their country, as may seem;
But here in to our Prophets far beneath,
As men divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of civil government
In their majestic, unaffected style
Than all the oratory of Greece and Rome.

(IV, 354-360, emphasis mine)

For Milton, divine inspiration meant not only superior precept, but also a superior, "majestic, unaffected style."

Milton saw the ancient Hebrew writers as like himself and like the classical writers in their purposes, and in the choice of the forms in which they wrote:

I applied myself... to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above, of being a Christian, might do for mine... (The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelatry, emphasis mine, in Milton CFW 1:812)

Here Milton implies that, humanly speaking, the Hebrew Bible was a
national literature produced by men motivated just like himself. Further developed and applied, this concept might have resulted in much more extensive comment on the literature of the Bible than we encounter in Renaissance writers. But it was not part of the spirit of the age to so develop and apply it.

Milton clearly saw the poet's function as a prophetic one. He believed that the truly great poet is one chosen by God, into whom God has breathed the spirit of prophecy—much like the prophets of the Old Testament and the John of Revelation. The power of Milton's verse is such that many a reader, in the course of Paradise Lost, has turned back to the Scriptural account with a sense of loss.

One who, like Milton, appreciated the epic character of the Bible but lacked his poetic ability was John Bunyan (1628-88). The Pilgrim's Progress (1678) is an extended moral allegory, in the tradition of the early Renaissance morality plays in England. It was highly successful: "After the Bible, the book most widely read in England is The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. The reason is, that the basis of Protestantism is the doctrine of salvation by grace, and that no writer has equalled Bunyan in making this doctrine understood" (Taine 2:58).

Bunyan's prose closely follows that of the King James Bible, though his Puritan emotional intensity exceeds that of the stately 1611 translation. Bunyan's theology is Calvinist, and there is much to be read between the lines about the religious politics of Bunyan's age. Bunyan was a dissenter, and The Pilgrim's Progress contains alarm about popery in the face of the Catholic leanings of Charles II (and his brother) and the threat from France.
Writers of the late Renaissance thus perceived biblical themes and emotions as worthy of the most serious poetic restatement. What is more, they sought to do this in accordance with biblical poetics. Their finished work will undoubtedly become the most enduring expression of literary study of the Bible.

The Renaissance, then, began with a renewed interest in classical thought and literature. When this new learning came to bear upon the Bible, the result was the upheaval we now call the Reformation. The Bible now justified the existence of (and became the model for) a wide range of literature. At the close of the twentieth century, as secular learning is once again being applied to the Bible, another upheaval within biblical studies is well underway.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


2 The whole of Job, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Moses's two songs (Ex. 15 and Deut. 32), the song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5), the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2), David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1), three songs from Isaiah (Ch. 5, 26, 29), the song of Jonah (ch. 2), as well as 2 Samuel 7:18-29, Habakkuk 3, and the three songs contained in the Gospel of Luke.

3 The books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) also received considerable scholarly attention. Commentators as far back as Origen had detected a natural progression in these three books— the adage, the sermon, and finally the lofty song. In its preface to these books, the Douay Bible associated them with three stages of spiritual development—youth, adulthood, and maturity. Protestants, such as Beza, compared the progression to the three parts of the Hebrew temple.

Commentators of the period disagreed over the precise generic definition of the proverb. Erasmus, as has been mentioned, wrestled with this question. Whereas the Geneva Bible used the term 'proverb' interchangeably with 'parable' and 'sentence' ("sententia"), the Douay Bible attempted a distinction: "Proverbs, that is, common & usual pithie sentences, shorte in wordes, ample in sense, and Parables, signifying likenes or similitudes, whereby more important thinges are understood then expressed" (cited in Lewalski 56).

In his Latin version, Proverbia Salomonis, Philip Melanchton
(1497-1560) emphasized the poetic quality of the Book of Proverbs. The first nine chapters are presented in verse paragraphs, chapters ten to thirty as epigrammatic couplets, and the final chapter in a flowing, discursive form. Francis Bacon, in *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum libris* (London, 1623), had high praise for the aphoristic style of this biblical book.

John Donne (1572-1631) specified the precise rhetorical form of Ecclesiastes as an "Anatomy" whereby "Solomon shakes the world in pieces, he dissects it, and cuts it up before thee, that so thou mayest the better see, how poor a thing, that particular is, whatsoever it be, that thou sets thy love upon in this world" (Sermons 3:51,48).

The Song of Songs was classed as a three-part epithalimium by Donne (Donne 9:132), echoing Jerome's classification. William Baldwin, however, called it "the principall Balades of holy Scripture" (*The Canticles or Balades of Salomon, phraselyke declared in English Metres*, London, 1549). John Hall considered it a pastoral (*An Open and Plaine Paraphrase upon the Song of Songs*, London, 1609). Francis Quarles, by breaking up the eight chapters into twenty-five short poems, entitles his paraphrase of the book "Sion's Sonets" (1625).

Other genre were also sought and found within the pages of the Bible. The Lamentations of Jeremiah was regarded by Calvin and others as a 'complaint.' It is a funeral elegy mourning the death of King Josiah, which is taken to be a foreshadowing of the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem. The German biblical scholar, David Paraues (1548-1622), in his commentary on the book of Revelation, observes that the structure of Revelation resembles classical tragedy. Paraues divides it into several acts, which are separated from each other by the chorus of heavenly beings.

Melanchthon's *Institutiones Rhetoricae* (1521) was followed by Henry Peacham's more elaborate *Garden of Eloquence* (1577), which concentrated on questions of ornamental style. There followed the highly influential *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (1617) of Flacius Illyricus, which comments on parallelism, although within Greek categories, and—most comprehensive of them all—Salomon Glass' *Philologia Sacra* (1623).

The study of the 'Bible as rhetoric' was by this time becoming highly systematized. Later works condensed and simplified the findings for popular usage. These include Thomas Hall's *Centuria Sacra* (1654), John Smith's *Mysterie of Rhetorique Unveil'd* (1656), Henry Lukin's *Introduction to the Holy Scripture* (1669), and Benjamin Keach's *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (1682). In his *Réflexions sur l'usage d'éloquence* (1672), René Rapin recommends that the preacher who aims at eloquence read the prophets incessantly. It is worth noting that the literary interest of works such as these extends beyond those books traditionally considered poetic. Seventy-five percent of Smith's examples, for example, come from non-poetic books (Baroway 472).

In addition, there were works which examined only one variety of figurative language. Joachim Zehner's *Adagia Sacra, sive*
Proverbia Scripturae (Leipzig, 1601) is an exhaustive list of adages in the Bible. Similarly, Robert Cawdrey mined his Treasurie or Store-House of Similies from the Bible.

Henry Peacham's enthusiasm for biblical figures of speech is evident in "The Compleat Gentleman" (1622):

What lively similitudes, comparisons, as the righteous man to a bay tree, the soul to a thirstie Hart, unitie to oytment and the dew of Hermon! What excellent allegories, as the vine planted in Egypt, what Epiphonema's, prosopo-poeia's, and whatsoever else may be required to the texture of so rich and glorious a piece! (cited in Spingarn 1:197)

Francis Quarles's Emblemes (1635) is a collection of pictures, each accompanied by a biblical text as motto, a verse meditation, comment, or prayer, and a concluding verse epigram. In his preface, Quarles considers each emblem "a silent parable." Here is "a new variation on the fourfold method of exegesis" (Zim 101).

Donne's contemporary Michael Drayton wrote that the poetical 'truth' of Scripture was as delightful a model to imitate as "any poetical fiction," and more useful since it taught divinity ("M.D. to the curteous Reader," in A Heavenly Harmonie of Spirituall Sonqes, and holy Himnes, 1610).

George Wither's The Hymnes and Songs of the Church (1623) went beyond strict biblical paraphrase. In his introduction, he claims the approval of James I for their use as a supplement to the Psalter for liturgical use. He also encouraged the adaptation of biblical writing to contemporary occasions, such as recommending David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan "as a Patterne for our Funerall Poemes" (cited in Lewalski 35).
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CHAPTER SIX

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

'Modernity' impels critics to reappraise the ancient, authoritative texts of their culture. Philo reinterpreted the Homeric myths. The Bible, too, has undergone repeated revaluation. The early Christians reinterpreted the Hebrew Scriptures typologically. In Late Antiquity, allegorical interpretation took over. Dogmatic exegesis reigned during the Middle Ages. The tremendous textual and philological advances of the Renaissance helped literal/grammatical interpretation displace other approaches. But modern biblical criticism—which has always incorporated a literary dimension—was not born until the Enlightenment.

The Age of Reason

Criticism is the reasoned interpretation and evaluation of a work of art. The ascendancy of Reason during the Enlightenment is not to suggest that rationality was lacking in previous eras. Following Aristotle, medieval scholasticism placed great emphasis on logic. Renaissance textual criticism was a highly rational affair, and the questioning of inherited dogma during the Reformation was a fitting prelude to the Age of Reason. As Leslie Stephen would later put it, "The Protestant writers against Rome were forging the weapons which were soon to be used against themselves" (Stephen
During the Enlightenment, reason acquired a status and a role it had not held since the days of Hellenistic criticism of ancient Greek mythology. In the aftermath of the Reformation, men were no longer prepared to limit their inquiries to the narrow confines prescribed by orthodoxy. Human reason came to be accepted as a valid and adequate determiner of textual meaning. What began as rational defense of religion soon became rationalistic criticism of religion. Mark Pattison, of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) fame, concludes: "Reason was at first offered as the basis for faith, but gradually became its substitute" (Pattison 48). In the past, the Bible had interpreted (and given meaning to) the physical world. But now, the physical world was determining the meaning of the Bible. Interpretation had become "a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story" (Frei 130). Men would begin to position themselves outside the Bible as its critic and judge.

The assumption that the Holy Spirit was the real author of the Bible had made it unnecessary for earlier commentators to pay close attention to either the literary style or the historical setting of the biblical writings. But the Enlightenment broke the back of dogmatic biblical exegesis, opening up new critical possibilities. 'Biblical criticism' now began to answer literary and historical, as well as religious, questions. Both the historical-critical approach to the Bible and modern literary study of the Bible thus grew out of Enlightenment biblical criticism. It is ironic that in the
twentieth century, the historical-critical approach to the Bible has become the greatest rival to literary study of the Bible, for in the beginning there was a sense of solidarity among practitioners of these two varieties of 'nondogmatic exegesis.'

This chapter will recount how literary study of the Bible and historical biblical criticism both derive from Enlightenment rationalism—yet managed to transcend it, and ultimately outlive the Age of Reason.¹

**Early Rationalistic Biblical Criticism**

Although Renaissance scholars such as Lorenzo Valla (1405-57) were rationalistic critics of the highest order, their efforts were generally restricted to textual questions. Criticism of the actual contents of the Bible was almost unheard of. Only during the Enlightenment did this begin to change.

The spirit of the age was early apparent in the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650), who maintained that our approach to knowledge must be governed by doubt. We are to reject everything which, when tested by reason, remains uncertain. So whereas the Reformation had necessitated defenses of secular poetry, the Enlightenment promptly called forth defenses of the Bible.

The earliest such defenses were put forth by Anglicans in their search for a 'middle way' between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism. Catholicism did not rely upon the authority of the Bible in the same way Protestantism did, and Puritanism, influenced by Calvinism, denigrated natural human reason. The close union of church and state in England also provided the kind of public arena
that rational religion requires. Rationalism, after all, was a reaction against the extreme individualism of sectarian Protestantism, which had proved to be socially unstable on the European continent.

The seventeenth-century Anglican divines all agreed that Scripture was 'true'—but true in what sense? Historically? Cosmologically? Doctrinally? Why was it true? Because its authors are believable? Or because it intrinsically compels belief? Is it true for all men, including the savages of the Americas? These are the kinds of issues that concerned early rational defenders of the Bible.

Anglican exegesis owes much to the masterpiece of Richard Hooker (1553-1600), Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1593). This was essentially a defense of the Elizabethan church against Puritan criticisms. Hooker went back to the scholastic synthesis of reason and revelation, thereby creating a vision of the universe ordered by reason and governed by law. In such a world, reason—in the form of tradition and authority—complements and interprets the divine revelation of Scripture. Hooker's warning of the risk of overstating the case for the authority of the Bible was farsighted:

As incredible praises given to men do often abate and impair the credit of the deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed lest by attributing to scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it hath abundantly to be less reverently esteemed. (Hooker 2.8.7)

A generation later, William Chillingworth, in his Religion of Protestants (1638), maintained the sufficiency of reason to
determine what Scripture clearly teaches. Neither Rome's authority nor the private inspirations of Protestants are needed. Chillingworth and other like-minded Anglican divines were vague concerning both the precise nature of this 'reason' and which doctrines were 'clearly' taught in Scripture. Successive thinkers sought to fill in the details.

The solution of the English Latitudinarians was to reduce the number of doctrines held to be clearly taught. Herbert of Cherbury, in De Religione Laici (1645), shaved the Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglicanism down to five self-evident truths: (1) there is a God, (2) to whom worship is due, (3) in acts of faith, love, and virtue, and (4) repentance for sin, which (5) will be rewarded or punished in an afterlife. Although he was no reductionist, John Dryden expressed a similar sentiment: "Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;/ The things we must believe, are few and plain" ("Religio Laici" 431-2, emphasis his).

The Cambridge Platonists of the mid-seventeenth sought, rather, to ground the Christian faith in an alternative to the Aristotelian-Augustinian tradition. They believed that reason is an elevated faculty which, through its contacts with innate ideas, participates in divine reason.

There is a fine line between employing reason to determine Scriptural teaching and employing reason to distill 'truth' from the Bible. This latter approach led to Deism, which turned out to be a dead end for biblical criticism. Deists assumed the existence of universally accepted a priori religious and moral truths. They were embarrassed by the biblical idea that God "chose to reveal his
nature and purpose in an obscure corner of the earth to a barbaric tribe, and in a series of trivial and sometimes outrageous laws and anecdotes" (Neil 247). Although Deism dethroned it, the Bible continued (at least initially) to hold a place of honor, reinforcing such truths as Reason might approve.

John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696) was the Deist manifesto. There can be nothing mysterious about Christianity, it insisted, because mystery is contrary to reason. Naturalistic explanations were now offered for everything from the crossing of the Red Sea to how the animals from Noah's ark managed to migrate across oceans. As faith in Reason mounted, there was less of a need for special divine revelation, and the Bible became largely superfluous. When Matthew Tindal published *Christianity as Old as the Creation* in 1730, the message of the Bible was deemed one and the same as natural law (i.e. "doing good"), and consisted of the truths common to all religions.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, it became apparent that biblical criticism needed to rest on a foundation more secure than rationalism. Bishop Berkeley and William Law had already demonstrated the invalidity of 'natural' reason, and David Hume had shown that skepticism could turn reason against itself. Gotthold Lessing (1729-81), a man of letters and the most influential figure in the German Enlightenment, did away completely with the need for biblical revelation by pointing out that Christianity functioned quite well prior to the formation of the Bible. If, then, true religion was self-authenticating, religious literature had no need for cognitive analysis. Biblical rationalism had thus removed its
own raison d'être. Immanuel Kant fittingly announced the close of this era with his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* (1793), albeit highly influential, turned out to be rationalistic biblical criticism's last gasp.

**The Literary Dimension of Early Historical Exegesis**

Paths other than deism were now considered. After the failure of rationalism to provide an adequate foundation for either religion or biblical criticism, empirical approaches were sought out. This shift away from the pursuit of Truth (which was deductively apprehended) and toward knowledge (which was inductively apprehended) made possible modern historiography, certainly one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in Western thought. This new outlook may be described as "the substitution of a process of *individualizing* observation for a *generalizing* view of human forces in history" (Meinecke iv, emphasis his).

This new historical awareness, combined with the growing emphasis on the literal sense of Scripture, gave birth to historical biblical criticism. For perhaps the first time, Europeans began to appreciate the vast gulf which separated them from the world of biblical events. Exegesis began to realize what a mistake it would be to read the cultural conditions of their day into the world of the Bible.

The influence of the Bible in the genesis of this new historical awareness must not be overlooked. John Drury reminds us that "it was the Bible itself which had taught them [the critics] to
think historically in the first place. That is the remarkable thing about the Bible. It begins with historical time and ends with it" (Drury 4). Undoubtedly, the experience of the Reformation, which to some extent was a rejection of the past, also had something to do with this new sense of history. "Historicism was biblical criticism's charter of freedom from ecclesiastical control" (Drury 11).

Among those who initiated this new 'historical' way of reading the Bible was Henry Hyde, the future Earl of Clarendon. While in exile on the island of Jersey in the late 1640's as a result of his royalist sympathies, Hyde began writing Contemplations and Reflections upon the Psalms of David, Applying those Devotions to the Troubles of the Times. The novel element here is that the 'times' Hyde refers to are David's times, and not his own. This was an attempt to study the meaning these Psalms had for David in their original historical context. Although modern criticism largely denies Davidic authorship, Hyde's attempt was both a serious historical-critical and literary-critical effort.

One way of investigating the historical background of a text is to study the literary milieu in which it arose. Huigh de Groot (Latinization: Hugo Grotius), the founder of international law, was a Dutch lawyer who had studied classical philology. He collected passages from the Greek and Latin classics and published them beside similar biblical texts in his Annotata ad Novum Testamentum (Amsterdam, 1641) and Annotata ad Vetus Testamentum (Amsterdam, 1644). By pointing out the differing historical influences within each of the testaments, he succeeded in severing the traditional
bond between them. Using a similar comparative method, the Anglican rabbinic scholar, John Lightfoot, realized that many New Testament hermeneutical problems could only be solved by a better understanding of their Jewish background. His *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*, published intermittently between 1658 and 1678, was a serious effort at placing the New Testament in its proper first-century Jewish setting.

As early as 1632, Louis Cappel, a Huguenot seminary professor in France, wrote a book entitled *Critica Sacra*. He was finally able to get it published in 1650. Cappel documents textual corruption through scribal handling, and concludes that claims of divine preservation of the biblical text are untenable.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) believed in both reason and the authority of the Bible, but felt that the two did not mix well. Writing at the close of the Thirty Years' War, Hobbes was seeking ways to contain religious extremism in the interest of the common good. The gist of his best-known work, *Leviathan* (1651), is simply that society must have a supreme political authority for the sake of quietness. Hence any authority which is able to keep the peace is to be recognized. Over half of the work is devoted to defending 'true religion' against the twin dangers of nonconformity (with its emphasis upon the authority of the Bible and religious individualism) and Roman Catholicism (with its insistence upon loyalty to a foreign sovereign).

Hobbes seeks to undermine the intrinsic authority of the Bible by ascribing to it instead an authority derived from the temporal ruling power. His findings, based exclusively upon internal
biblical evidence, contradicted many conventional beliefs:

--The Pentateuch was not composed by Moses.

--The book of Job is not a historical work, for it is written mainly in verse.

--The Psalms were not written by David, but compiled after Judah had returned from Babylonian captivity.

--The book of Proverbs could not have been compiled by Solomon.

--Ezra is responsible for the final canon of the Hebrew Bible.

--Biblical statements concerning astronomy and psychology are not to be taken literally:

The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdom of God, and to prepare their minds to become obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their natural reason. Whether the earth's, or the sun's motion make the day, and night; or whether the exorbitant actions of men, proceed from passion, or from the devil, so we worship him not, it is all one, as to our obedience and subjection to God almighty; which is the thing for which the Scripture was written. (Hobbes 50)

Hobbes thus divorces faith from knowledge fully twenty years before Descartes, concluding that the Bible is not itself the revelation of God, but rather the fallible human record of that revelation.

The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670) of Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza (1632-77) may be considered the Magna Carta of biblical criticism. Like Hobbes (with whom he was familiar), Spinoza's biblical exegesis is determined not by tradition but by the text: "This, then, is the universal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, to ascribe no teaching to Scripture that is not clearly established from studying it closely" (Spinoza 142). In Spinoza,
something entirely new is occurring. Here is a biblical critic who held no a priori faith.

With regard to our literary approach, Spinoza makes three contributions:

a. His biblical method was, at least in principle, thoroughly inductive. Earlier writers such as Hobbes put forth detailed deductive arguments for matters such as the existence of God. Spinoza refused to admit any sort of preconceived notion as evidence. Spinoza may have been the first person ever to read the Bible as he would any other book.

b. He moved beyond internal to external evidence in his biblical criticism. He emphasized the importance of understanding Semitic thought forms throughout the entire Bible. "Although the latter books [i.e. the New Testament] were published in other languages, their idiom is Hebraic" (Spinoza 143). We learn that portions of the New Testament actually make better sense when translated into Hebrew. This adds a new twist to Erasmus's stress on studying texts in their original language.

c. It is most ironic that while Spinoza is in many ways the father of historical biblical criticism, he also pointed out its severe limitations. He says it is virtually impossible, due to the temporal and cultural distance of modern interpreters from the biblical world, to satisfactorily reconstruct everything necessary for a proper theological foundation. His solution: divorce philosophy from theology. Reason will be adequate for philosophical investigation, and the moral teachings of the Bible are transcultural and not dependent upon historical investigation.
Spinoza's notion of the universality of the moral teaching of the Bible strikes us today as simplistic. Yet he is prophetic when he points out the limits of historical-critical study of the Bible. It is precisely these limitations that have accelerated contemporary interest in literary study of the Bible.

In 1678, the French Catholic priest, Richard Simon, wrote Histoire critique du Vieux Testament, the first serious attempt to explain the historical inconsistencies in the Old Testament. Simon's solution, which has now become the historical-critical consensus, is that the biblical books were not the product of a single author. He was the first to propose that our Old Testament is the result of work done on more primitive records by a school of 'publick writers,' or what twentieth-century historical critics call the Deuteronomic editors. Through detailed stylistic analysis, Simon detected the 'seams' in the narrative where the various sources had been stitched together by later editors.

Simon concluded that, since the final biblical texts are edited abridgements of much earlier sources, we can no longer know for sure what biblical events are factually historical. Protestants, therefore, base their religion upon a text whose original form has either been lost or corrupted. Protestants also base the authority of the biblical books upon their having been written by inspired individuals such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, or David. Therefore, the Bible, in its present form, is hardly an adequate foundation for religious belief; one must place one's faith in the tradition of the Catholic Church! Simon's anti-rational 'fideist' position proved unsatisfying, even to his fellow Roman
Catholics, and his work was condemned by the Parliament of Paris (which for a time enhanced his English readership).

John Locke (1632-1704) is chiefly remembered for pioneering the empiricist approach to knowledge. In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), he rejected the rationalist idea that the mind has stamped on it from birth certain self-evident notions which are able to bypass the senses. In his later years (as is so often the case), Locke devoted himself to examination of the Bible. His two masterpieces of biblical criticism are The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures (1695) and Paraphrases and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul, published posthumously 1705-07. In these works, Locke demonstrates both historical and literary sensibility.

In The Reasonableness of Christianity, Locke takes on a problem which had proven insoluble within orthodox theology: the secrecy of Jesus. First, Locke posits the exigencies of time. In pedagogy, not everything can or should be explained right away. Then he offers a well reasoned historical rationale for Jesus's behavior. He builds up a picture of first-century Judaism, bereft of prophetic leadership, under foreign domination, and fervently expecting the Messiah. In so explosive a situation, open declaration by Jesus of his messiahship would almost certainly have brought his ministry to a premature end.

Locke's paraphrase of the Epistles of St. Paul is preceded by a brilliant preface, "An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles by Consulting St. Paul Himself." Here Locke emphasizes the importance of the historical context of each epistle, which is to be
inferred from internal evidence; he notes that "the Terms are Greek, but the Idiom or Turn of Phrases may be truly said to be Hebrew" and that the style is such that Paul must be "beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance" (Locke 104). He then stresses the importance of the literary context of individual passages, and recommends repeated sequential readings of each epistle at one sitting; only in this way can Paul's "thread and coherence" become the governing criterion that it ought to be (Locke 110).

Anthony Collins argued in his Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion (1724) that the New Testament gospels were not a disinterested record of historical fact, but rather creative interpretation of Old Testament texts. "He showed New Testament evangelists interpreting Old Testament prophecies with all the fantastic dexterity and disregard for literal truth of the Jewish rabbis— and founding their history on the results" (Drury 9). Collins was also the first to propose that the book of Daniel was a retrospective prophecy written during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, rather a prediction of future events.

The Pietistic movement rocked Germany at the end of the seventeenth century. Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) saw that true religion was being buried under dead formalism and sterile theological confessions. Spener's spiritual son, August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), led a revival at the University of Leipzig in 1689. The spirit of the Reformation had been rekindled in Germany, and Germans were pleased neither with English deist attacks on the Bible nor with the harsh secularism espoused by Voltaire and Rousseau. In principle, however, the Germans did accept the
validity of biblical criticism. As Francke expressed it in his *Manuductio* (1693), to reach the tasty kernel of the Scriptures, it is proper that critical science should first break the shell. (George Wither had used the same analogy in 1619 to convey the importance of moving beyond the literal sense of Scripture to arrive at allegorical meaning.)

Thus was born the momentous German movement in biblical criticism. By concentrating on history, the Germans sought to uphold the integrity of biblical religion by examining it in its original context, and not through the distorting lenses of Enlightenment philosophy. So German biblical scholars took upon themselves the task of reading the Bible as a work of ancient oriental literature. Such an approach to the Bible was possible in Germany because of the influence of Pietism, which had made German religion largely a private affair. Such a rigorous academic approach would not have been possible in English universities, closely tied as they were to the Anglican Church.

The first great German biblical scholar was the pietist, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1667-1752). Bengel "entirely abandoned the notion of mechanical Inspiration, which then erected a barrier against all spiritual progress, and recognised the distinct individualities and manifold differences of the sacred writers" (Farrar 392). His edition of the Greek text of the New Testament in 1734 is the basis of modern editions.

In the 1750's, the French Roman Catholic physician, Jean Astruc (1684-1766), followed up the 1711 hypothesis of a pastor named Hennig Bernhard Witter, which suggested that there were
different literary traditions within the Pentateuch. Astruc conducted a detailed study of the writing styles within Genesis. In particular, he theorized two independent sources for the creation story, having noticed that the name of God differs in the two accounts. His Conjectures on the Original Memorials of which Moses seems to have made use in composing the book of Genesis (1753) was immediately put on the index, and Astruc had to move to Germany. Astruc's documentation of the sources used by the writer of Genesis initiated a new stage of historical criticism—'higher' criticism, as J.G. Eichhorn later called it—to distinguish it from the minutiae of 'lower' (textual) scholarship.

Johann Semler's Treatise on the Free Investigation of the Canon (1771) spotlighted the human aspects of canonical development and pointed out differences in religious worth within the canon. This refuted the traditional view that all was equally inspired and valuable, and enabled the critic to evaluate the various biblical books independently.

Between 1774 and 1778, Gotthold Lessing published anonymously the Wolfenbuttal Fragments by an Unknown Author. These were actually the work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), who asserted the very modern notion that the gospels are not historical because their narratives reflect concepts that were developed long after the events they purport to narrate took place. Reimarus shows the necessity of assuming a "creative element in the tradition" (Schweitzer 24).

After careful textual study, J.C. Doderlein announced in his commentary, Isaiah (1775), a difference in style beginning with the
fortieth chapter. This led him to propose that the later chapters were composed during (and not before) the Babylonian exile.

The orientalist J.G. Eichhorn (1752-1827) was Professor of Oriental Languages at Jena. With his anonymous publication in 1779 of a series of articles on the opening chapters of Genesis, Eichhorn inaugurated the so-called mythical school of biblical criticism. He argued that if certain supernatural embellishments were stripped away, the historical narrative of creation could be 'demythologized,' i.e. reconstructed from the biblical 'myth.' This recognition of biblical myth was a valuable contribution to our literary approach. But, finding myth an impediment to the recovery of historical information, Eichhorn had little use for it. In his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1780-85), which earned him the right to be called "the father of modern Old Testament criticism" (Neil 273), he methodically documented the use of sources by the biblical writers (or editors). Although a brilliant piece of historical criticism, it launched the modern tendency in biblical criticism to consider the finished literary product little more than a compilation of its constituent sources.

Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-1826) was the first to carefully distinguish between biblical theology, which is descriptive, and dogmatic theology, which is prescriptive:

Biblical theology is historical in character and sets forth what the sacred writers thought about divine matters; dogmatic theology, on the contrary, is didactic in character, and teaches what a particular theologian philosophically and rationally decides about divine matters in accordance with his character, time, age, place, sect or school, and other similar influences.  
(Bright 114)
J.D. Michaelis's *Introduction to the Divine Writings of the New Covenant* (Fourth Edition, 1788) was a landmark historical examination of the 'synoptic problem.' This is the term used to describe the narrative differences among the gospel accounts, particularly among Matthew, Mark and Luke, the three 'synoptic' gospels.

It is clear that Enlightenment biblical criticism contributed to modern literary study of the Bible. It successfully challenged dogmatic biblical exegesis, thereby opening up the possibility of alternative Bible study approaches. And by paying careful attention to the internal data of the biblical text, it managed to outgrow rationalistic 'dogma.' This kind of close reading, noting differences of style, and appreciating the historical/literary context in which the Bible was written, is today an essential prerequisite for sound literary criticism of any kind. Contemporary literary study of the Bible rests upon the achievements of these early biblical critics.

Yet, having acknowledged a literary dimension to early historical exegesis, it must be recognized that historical criticism of the Bible was responsible for hermeneutical reductionism. For pre-Enlightenment readers, the 'literal sense' signified more than mere historical factuality. But beginning with deist attacks on the Bible, criticism began to focus on the textual referents, and not on the stories themselves. The thesis of *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* by Hans Frei (Yale, 1974) is that the 'history-likeness' of biblical narratives seduced critics into assuming that the meaning of the
stories lay in history. The 'literal sense' thus came to mean the
'historical sense' only, and religious/aesthetic dimensions of the
old (pre-Enlightenment) realistic sensibility would now have to be
dealt with separately.

Enlightenment Literary Study of the Bible

There is some truth in the assertion that, ever since the
Enlightenment, literary study of the Bible has been a reaction
against historical biblical criticism. This reaction is seen in
the seventeenth-century quarrel about Ancient and Modern learning
that originated in France with reference to Homeric scholarship, and
quickly spread to England. The latter half of Dryden's "Religio
Laici" (1682) is a critique of Richard Simon's biblical criticism.
Dryden's conclusion: "In doubtfull questions 'tis the safest way /
To learn what unsuspected Ancients say" (435-36). At the height of
the controversy in England, Swift wrote The Battle of the Books
(1697), which satirized the excesses of modern criticism. In the
Dunciad (1728), Alexander Pope voices a strikingly modern objection
to the new historical criticism: "The critic Eye, that microscope of
Wit, / Sees hairs and pores, examines bit by bit" (IV, 233-4).

But literary study of the Bible was never merely reactionary.
Renaissance writers made much of the literary art of the Bible,
though it must be granted that those ubiquitous praises of biblical
'poetry' were frequently little more than lip service, intended as
they were as justification of secular poetry. Those few attempts at
emulating biblical style tended to restrict themselves to typology
and biblical imagery. Even Milton felt compelled to turn to
classical epic or to Greek drama for the form of his great biblical epics. What was perceived (probably unconsciously) as the stylistic inferiority of the Bible made it necessary to look elsewhere for literary models. It is interesting that the preface to Sir Richard Blackmore's *A Paraphrase on the Book of Job* (1700) denounces the classical source of contemporary verse—and then goes on to model his paraphrase on classical epic (Roston 130).

All of this began to change during the Enlightenment. But change was maddeningly slow. The reason is that, in the modern period which began with the Enlightenment, objective 'truth' became more important than aesthetic 'truth' as an alternative to traditional dogmatic exegesis. Yet literary study of the Bible managed to make significant headway during the Enlightenment.

For centuries, literary people made excuses for the Bible's perceived lack of elegance. The old argument that the Bible was the original source of pagan poetry continued to be proffered. Another common excuse was that the Bible's original poetic merit had been obscured by translation. But Joseph Addison realized that the Bible withstood translation far better than the classics. But he was at a loss to explain why this was so, for the workings of Hebrew prosody had not yet been discovered.

After Milton and Bunyan had submitted their offerings, Milton in poetry and Bunyan in prose, very few other writers cared to compete. But perhaps the main factor behind the demise of the allegorical/metaphysical school of writing was the rise of rationalism. Addison and others now began looking to the Bible for raw material which could be refashioned into neoclassical poetry.
Addison thought Psalm 19 excellent poetic material (Spectator No. 465). Matthew Prior found Proverbs a storehouse of prudential morality for didactic poems. Of course, Psalms and Proverbs are already poetry, and their verse structures had been extremely well-preserved in the Authorized Version and ought not to require refashioning. But such biblical poetry violated neoclassical rules. Without an understanding of Hebrew principles of versification, the Authorized rendition of such biblical poetry was not highly esteemed. Until someone could demonstrate that biblical poetry was bona fide poetry—on its own terms—it would continue to be translated into heroic couplets. Consider Addison's version of Psalm 23:

The Lord my pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with the shepherd's care
His presence shall my wants supply,
And guard me with a watchful eye;
My noon day walks He shall attend,
And all my midnight hours defend. (Addison 1:199)

The earliest encomiums of biblical art were of its lofty themes. Ever since Augustine, it was generally thought that the 'poetic' merit of the Bible lay in the sublimity of its story-message, which would compensate for any of its aesthetic shortcomings. In his 1704 essay, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," John Dennis cited the authority of Longinus to show "that the greatest sublimity is to be deriv'd from Religious Ideas" (cited in Prickett 1986, 40), and thus proclaimed the superiority of sacred poetry to all other poetry. Similarly, James Thomson, in his 1726 preface to "Winter" for the second edition of his Seasons, affirms that poetry constitutes "The sublimest passages of the inspired
writings themselves" (Thomson 239). Perhaps for this reason, the eighteenth century witnessed the production of a number of explicitly biblical poetic works.\(^6\)

It was only a matter of time before critics were not only claiming aesthetic virtue for the Bible, but were finding it in the 'grandeur,' 'majesty,' 'beauty,' and 'simplicity' of the biblical literature. Granted, what they found reflected their own neoclassical literary taste. But the movement had begun in earnest.\(^7\) The metaphysical rage had passed, and the spare, unadorned style of biblical writing was seized upon as a mark of its greatness.

Only very gradually did the idea present itself that perhaps Hebrew writing might have a poetic of its own.\(^8\) The climate was becoming ripe for a thorough investigation of Hebrew prosody. This was to be the main contribution of the Enlightenment to literary study of the Bible, and the man who pointed the way was Robert Lowth (1710-87). T.K. Cheyne, who a century later was a key figure in the composition of the English Revised Version of the Bible, wrote in the preface to his own version of Isaiah that it was Lowth who began that important aestheticizing movement in biblical criticism.

Later to become Bishop of London, Lowth was Professor of Poetry at Oxford when he delivered his momentous thirty-four "Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews" in 1741. As a capable literary critic and one of the leading Hebraists of his time, Lowth's enduring contribution was the recognition that Hebrew poetry was not dependent upon metre but rather upon a certain balance of ideas and phrases: "The correspondence of one Verse, or Line, with another I call Parallelism" (Lowth 1778, 10). According
to Lowth, parallelism invests "the most common and familiar with the greatest dignity... If any person of more nicety than judgment should esteem some of these rustic images grovelling or vulgar, such an effect can only result from the ignorance and peculiar prejudices" of the critic (Lowth 1787, 79-80, 83-84).

Lowth's lectures were delivered in Latin as the Oxford Poetry Lectures for that year. Seeking to place his approach within the tradition of Longinus, Lowth introduced the word "sublime" into the titles of six of his lectures, as well as into the lectures themselves. They were published in 1753 as De sacra poesi hebraeorum praelectiones, and achieved wide circulation after their English translation in 1787.

Prior to Lowth, everyone assumed that there was a sharp distinction between the language of poetry and that of prose. Lowth himself insisted on a distinction between the two. Yet his work resulted in a blurring of the boundary. It became clear that biblical poetry did not rely upon devices of sound, such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, or metre, as was customary in all European poetry of the time. Consequently, it was highly translatable:

... a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into the prose of any other language, whilst the same form of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and fair appearance of versification.

(Lowth 1787, 71-72)

This recognition that vernacular translations retain the art of biblical poetry was a tremendous boost for popular literary study of
the Bible. The prose renderings of biblical poetry in the Authorized Version were newly appreciated, and began serving widely as a poetic model. This newfound appreciation of the poetics of prose undoubtedly played a part in the nineteenth-century shift from verse to prose as the main creative literary medium.

Lowth not only rejected European poetic models; he also threw out the classical concentration upon tropes and figures:

I shall also venture to omit the almost innumerable forms of the Greek rhetoricians, who possessed the faculty of inventing names in the highest perfection; I shall neglect even their primary distinction between tropes and figures, and their subdivision... I do not pretend to say that in their proper place they are destitute either of reality or use; but our present concern is not to explain the sentiments of the Greek but of the Hebrew writers. (Lowth 1787, 22)

Lowth could have chosen to illustrate his theory from Psalms or from a part of the Bible that had long been considered to have a poetic dimension. Instead, he chose the prophets. Prior to Lowth, prophecy had been considered (by Christian exegetes, anyway) as basically prediction of the future—and Old Testament prophecy as essentially predictive of the birth of Christ. But now the prophets, long considered to be prose writings, were to be regarded as 'poetic.' That meant that most of the Hebrew Bible would have to be acknowledged as such. With regard to the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), Lowth remarks: "As far as relates to style, [they] may be said to hold the same rank among the Hebrews as Homer, Simonides, and Aeschylus among the Greeks" (Lowth 1787, 179). So biblical prophecy was now (at least in theory) subject to literary analysis. In fact, little serious literary study of the
prophets has been done to this day.

In his commentary on Isaiah, published in 1778, Lowth provides a host of pertinent examples to support his theory. Earlier critics had necessarily been vague in their remarks concerning Hebrew poetry; their theories were not able to withstand close examination. But Lowth was convinced that the art of the Bible would stand up under the closest scrutiny and the most careful comparison with classical writers. His numerous examples served to direct the reader's attention to the Bible itself, and away from neoclassical paraphrases of it.

Lowth faced one problem in translation. He wanted to turn Hebrew poetry into English prose. But if he left it as prose, the fact that it is verse would escape notice. So he decided to set the prose out line by line to indicate that it nevertheless constituted verse. This decision profoundly affected later writers, particularly Macpherson, Smart, and Blake.

Lowth's innovation is evident when it is compared with the beginning of the Authorized Version of Isaiah:

1. The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah.

2. Hear, 0 heavens, and give ear, 0 earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

3. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

It is clear from the absence of parallelism in verse 1 that this opening verse was intended as a prose superscription for the prophecy as a whole. Lowth makes this clear by means of
capitalization, and in succeeding verses he highlights the parallel ideas:

1 THE VISION OF ISAIAH THE SON OF AMOTZ, WHICH HE SAW CONCERNING JUDAH AND JERUSALEM: IN THE DAYS OF UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AHAZ, HEZEKIAH, KINGS OF JUDAH.

2 Hear, 0 ye heavens; and give ear, 0 earth! For it is JEHOVAH that speaketh. I have nourished children and brought them up; And even they have revolted from me.

3 The ox knoweth his possessor; And the ass the crib of his lord: But Israel knoweth not Me; Neither doth my people consider.

Notice how Lowth has exchanged "master's crib" for "the crib of his lord." This not only retains the Hebrew syntax; it draws the parallel between "ass" and "Israel," and between "lord" and "Me."

Lowth believed he had captured something of the passion of biblical poetry. In his lecture on "The Sublime of Passion," he observes that biblical poetry lays open to public view the secret feelings of the author: "... and the veil being, as it were, suddenly removed, all the affections and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its lofty sallies and irregularities are conspicuously displayed" (Lowth 1787, xiv). Murray Roston suggests that this reads like an even more ambitious program for the romantics than was to appear nearly fifty years later in Wordsworth's preface to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads (Roston 106).

To be fair, Lowth's poetic insights were not altogether original. Renaissance critics had noted repetition, emphasis, and
restatement via the tropes-and-figures approach. Jewish exegetes
had done the same even earlier. Even John Dennis had announced that
"Poetry is the natural Language of Religion... the Prophets were
Poets by the Institution of their Order, and Poetry was one of the
Prophetick Functions" (cited in Prickett 1986, 102). But Lowth's
creative arrangement and synthesis of the biblical data, together
with numerous examples, went beyond such claims to instruct the
literary community in a new way of reading the Bible.

In England, Lowth's work sparked a great deal of interest in
biblical literature. Samuel Johnson, in advising Boswell to read
the Bible with a commentary, recommended Lowth on the Old Testament
(Boswell 3:58). James Macpherson was a student of Lowth at the time
Lowth's lectures were published in 1753. The parallelism of
Macpherson's Ossianic poems bears a remarkable resemblance to
biblical style. This parallelism was mistakenly seized upon by
critics such as Hugh Blair as evidence of their authenticity.

The gap between Lowth's publication of the theory of
parallelism in 1753 and his own translation of Isaiah in 1778 was
marked by several attempts to follow his new theory of translation,
although they revealed a reluctance to carry out the theory in its
entirety. Hugh Blair considered Lowth's work to be of sufficient
importance to devote a whole chapter of his Lectures on Rhetoric and
Belles Lettres (1783) to summarizing the implications of Lowth's
discovery of parallelism. He began by pointing out how the prose of
the King James Version captures the spirit of Hebrew poetry better
than any verse rendering:

It is owing, in a great measure, to this form of composition,
that our version, though in prose, retains so much of a poeti
cal cast. For the version being strictly word for word
after the original, the form and order of the original
sentence are preserved; which by this artificial structure,
this regular alternation and correspondence of parts, makes
the ear sensible of a departure from the common style and
tone of prose. (Blair 2:270-71)

Blair realized how this discovery served to obliterate the
conventional distinction between the language of poetry and that of
prose. He concluded that what separated them was not diction but
emotion: "it is the language of passion, enlivened imagination"
(Blair 2:212-13). Blair's influence upon the nineteenth-century
Romantic movement would be significant.

Also in 1783, Thomas Howes, Rector of Thorndon, out-Lowthed
Lowth. Lowth had accepted that there may be chronological breaks or
errors in the chronology of Isaiah's prophecy. Howes suggests that
what we have instead is an 'oratorical' or 'poetic arrangement,'
i.e. that which is "best suited to the purpose of persuasion and
argumentation."10

Just as historical biblical criticism sometimes bore literary
fruit, so there were times when literary study facilitated
historical-cultural breakthroughs. For example, Lowth's emphasis on
the distinctiveness of Hebrew poetry was a boost for pre-Romantic
primitivists and orientalists of the time. An important early
advocate of 'oriental' literature was Thomas Harmer. The main theme
of Harmer's first book, Observations on Divers Passages of Scripture
(1764), was that the Bible was written in an oriental country, and
that only by comparing incidents from the Scriptures with the
folklore, customs, and attitudes of the surrounding countries can an
accurate picture of the biblical scene be obtained.
The great German historiographer Friedrich Meinecke observes:

Lowth's book was perhaps the most significant intellectual achievement of the entire pre-romantic movement in England. Without intending to do so, he nevertheless contributed to the liberation of historical research from the bonds of theology, in that it brought the purely human and historical content and value of the Bible into view. (Meinecke 27)

A young German scholar, Johann Michaelis (1717-91), heard Lowth at Oxford and introduced the German universities of his day to the Lowthian approach. Lowth's influence there was substantial, fueling German biblical criticism and helping launch German Romanticism. It would make its way back to England in the next century under the guise of the 'higher criticism'.

While familiar with Richard Simon's historical criticism of the Bible, Lowth chose a different path:

It is not my intention to expound to the student of theology the oracles of divine truth; but to recommend the notice of the youth who is addicted to the politer sciences, and studious of the elegancies of composition, some of the first and choicest specimens of poetic taste. (Lowth 1787, 29)

It is clear that Lowth steadfastly avoided questions of history and theology. Biblical narrative would have to wait until the twentieth century for similarly meticulous literary examination.

While the literati of England were debating the role of reason in religion, there arose a grassroots renewal movement that, for the next century at least, would shake the religious establishment almost as severely as Reason herself, and would ultimately make its own contribution to literary study of the Bible. Evolving out of the continental pietistic movement, in England it became known as the
Evangelical Revival. The English leaders were John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, and George Whitefield, famous for his "imaginative application of Scripture" (Tannenbaum 18-19).

The Evangelicals emphasized literacy and personal reading of the Bible, both prerequisites for modern literary study of the Bible. They reintroduced typological and spiritual interpretation of the Bible, common in evangelical circles to the present day. Finally, they were prolific hymnwriters.

The eighteenth century would prove to be the great century of hymn writing. The Wesley brothers published a number of collections of hymns and sacred verse between 1737 and 1790, and William Cowper contributed his Olney Hymns (1779). An earlier and equally famous collection would be the Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1707) of John Newton and Isaac Watts.11

The passion of these pre-romantic hymns stands out against the neoclassical backdrop. Even the Anglican Augustus Toplady, a bitter opponent of the Wesleys, found himself at times writing with similar feeling:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked come to Thee for dress;
Helpless look to Thee for grace.
(cited in Roston 107)

Such language as "naked," combined with an attitude of utter prostration and dependence upon God, are far removed from the periphrastic poetry of the Augustans.

In Germany, there arose a response to Lowth in Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). The emphasis in his Vom Geist der
Ebraischen Poesie ("The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry"), published in 1782-83, is on the word "Spirit." For Herder, Lowth's technical classifications of parallelism were stiff and formal. Herder's approach is more romantic:

So soon as the heart gives way to its emotions, wave follows upon wave, and that is parallelism. The heart is never exhausted, it has forever something new to say. So soon as the first wave has passed away, or broken itself upon the rocks, the second swells again and returns as before. This pulsating of nature, this breathing of emotion, appears in all the language of passion, and would you not have that in poetry which is most clearly the offspring of emotion? (Herder 41)

Herder considered spontaneous feeling, and not deliberate craftsmanship, to be the mark of true poetry. In contrast to Lowth, who specialized in the mechanics of Hebrew poetry, Herder sought to enter into the language world of the text. His concept of 'poetry' was also broader than Lowth's; he is the first person on record to include in this category the patriarchal narratives. "Among the Hebrews, history itself is properly poetry" (Herder 37).

Herder perceived in Lowth a way to retain the prestige of the Bible apart from religious orthodoxy. The solution was to redefine the meaning of inspiration. For Herder, the Bible is a holy and inspired book because it is great—not because it is sacred. Herder's broad view of literature makes him a key figure in the developing 'science' of comparative literature.

To Herder, poetry is no mere historical artifact or linguistic signpost representing sense data. It is the "mother tongue of the human race" (Meinecke 362). In contrast to the condescension of the historicists toward things primitive, Herder exalts the primitive,
childlike, emotional appeal of Hebrew poetry, theorizing that it belonged to the innocent childhood of humanity. To Herder, this human dimension to the Bible only enhanced its sacred appeal:

The more humanly (in the best sense of the word) you read the word of God, the closer you will come to the purpose of the Artificer, who created man in His image and acts humanly for us in all works and benefices in which He shows Himself to us as God. (Letters Concerning the Study of Theology, 1781, cited in Clark 273)

Herder rebelled against the concept of 'myth' which had been adopted by his German critical colleagues. To Eichhorn, 'myth' was a prescientific description of 'normal' events in terms of the supernatural. But for Herder, myth was a poetic expression of an experience of nature, which was not to be rationalised or explained away. "He [Herder] used the Scriptures to elevate his conception of humanity, not to dwarf his sense of the divine" (Farrar 405).

Herder also worked in the New Testament. He resisted efforts to harmonize the four gospels, insisting that each evangelist be allowed to "retain his special purpose, complexion, time, and locale" (Kummel 79), given that the gospels were not mainly concerned with biography. Herder appears to have been the first to suggest, in a 1774 draft of Maran Atha, that the Book of Revelation was an imaginative reflection by the aged Apostle John upon events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century. As a key figure in the development of German romanticism and a major influence on Goethe, Herder demonstrates how central was the influence of the Bible in the formation of this new literary movement.

Another 'child of Lowth' was William Blake (1757-1827). As
with Herder, Blake's departures from Lowth only underline the resemblances. Just one year after the English translation of Lowth's lectures appeared, Blake printed "All Religions Are One." Whereas Lowth had demonstrated that the Hebrew prophets were also poets, Blake equates the two by arguing that poets are, by definition, prophets:

PRINCIPLE 5th. The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere called the Spirit of Prophecy. ("All Religions Are One," 1788, in Blake 98)

Another of Blake's quibbles with Lowth pertains to the classics. In his preface to Isaiah, Lowth had referred to Aristotle's Poetics as "the Great Code of Criticism." Blake rejected the classics as the supreme arbiter of taste: "Greece and Rome, as Babylon and Egypt, so far from being parents of Arts and Sciences as they pretend, were destroyers of all Art" ("On Homer's Poetry & on Virgil" in Blake 778). Rather, Blake proposes that "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" ("The Laocoon," 1820). And in place of the conventional invocation to the classical muse, Blake warns his readers to heed his divine prophecy:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees.
(Introduction to Songs of Experience, 1794, in Blake 210)

At the heart of Romanticism, then, was a return to what we may call 'biblical aesthetics.'

The Bible was unquestionably the single greatest influence on
Blake, who once "warmly declared" to Henry Crabb Robinson "that all he knew was in the Bible" (Robinson's diary entry, cited in Bentley 322). That Blake derived his poetics from the Bible is evident from his numerous biblical quotations and allusions, from the imprint of the King James Bible on his style, and in his adoption of the concept of biblical myth. His imagery comes straight from the Scriptures, and he adopts the moral connotations which they had borne there: the innocent lamb, the fruitful vine, the deceitful serpent, angels of good tidings, and even the harlots. Each image is introduced simply, without stylistic embellishment, creating a magical effect. He dispenses with the periphrases, wit, and decorum of Augustan verse in favor of biblical directness. "The neoclassicist is concerned ultimately with the harmony of the universe, while the prophet sees the disharmony and longs to rectify it" (Roston 164). Blake sets out his lines in parallel, just as Lowth had done in his Isaiah.

What we have in Blake, then, is an imaginative reworking of Scripture. Blake is co-creator with God, and invites us to follow his lead and thus assume our full humanity. This approach to the Bible was sure to dissatisfy both orthodox dogmatists and empirical historicists; Blake unflinchingly refers to his 'Bible of Hell' in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (1790). As Blake would later express it, "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's" (Plate 10 of Jerusalem, 1804, in Blake 629). At first, Blake sought to emulate the biblical canon by combining a number of disparate books into a coherent, unified vision from Creation to Apocalypse. But in his later works, he turns more to the epic mode, casting the
entire vision of the Bible into a single work.

Whereas Herder's contribution to literary study of the Bible was his criticism of biblical poetry, Blake's was his adoption of the biblical model for new works of poetry. Yet they both shared the same 'romantic' understanding of the Bible's divine inspiration. For example, Blake owned a copy of Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1796), which had been a reply to Tom Paine. In this battle between the dogmatist and the historian, Blake sides with neither. Blake wrote this marginal comment in his copy of Watson's book:

I cannot conceive the Divinity of the books in the Bible to consist either in who they were written by, or at what time, or in the historical evidence which may be all false in the eyes of one man & true in the eyes of another, but in the Sentiments & Examples, which, whether true or Parabolic, are Equally useful as Examples given to us of the perverseness of some & its consequent evil & the honesty of others & its consequent good. This sense of the Bible is equally true to all & equally plain to all. ("Annotations to Watson's Apology" in Blake 393)

For Blake, to regard the Bible as an exclusive Word of God would be to make the same mistake that conventional religion had made:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity.

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began Priesthood.

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human
breast.
("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" plate 11, in Blake 153)

Blake was in touch with German developments in biblical criticism. During the 1790's, he belonged to one of the few intellectual circles in the country in touch with Continental ideas. During this period, the ideas of Michaelis, Lessing, Eichhorn, and Herder made their way, chiefly through Unitarian channels, into progressive study groups in Britain. But Blake cared nothing about questions of authorship or historical accuracy. He rebelled against the scientism of his time, which had first reduced the meaning of Scripture to the literal sense, and then reduced the literal sense to mere historical factuality. In Blake's poetry, figures such as Locke, Newton, and Bacon repeatedly symbolize evil and tyranny, although he granted that writers like Tom Paine "might be useful in breaking up a good deal of stupid orthodoxy" (Frye 109) and, in so doing, serve the cause of true religion.

Blake employed biblical poetics more literally and more systematically than probably anyone during his time or since. His originality is well known, yet he did have his mentors, who themselves practiced a kind of literary study of the Bible. Jakob Boehme, the German mystical pietist, wrote The Way of Christ (1624) as a reaction against the aridity of Lutheran scholasticism. It greatly influenced the Englishman William Law (1686-1761), who became

the greatest influence on men who would later be Evangelicals—or Methodists or even Swedenborgians. Law had helped to inculcate a new respect for emotion and 'mysticism' in religion, and he had laid the basis for
the attack on rational deism that the Evangelical clergy
would lead. Blake makes no secret of his admiration for
Evangelicals like John Wesley and George Whitefield; and
he defends 'Methodists.' (Paananen 16)

Other mystical influences upon Blake were those of Paracelsus
(1490-1541), and particularly the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg
(1688-1772), who is mentioned by name in "The Marriage of Heaven and
Hell." Swedenborg's study of kabbala led him to formulate a system
of correspondences between the seen and the unseen; such a system
underlies much of Blake's writing. It has even been suggested that
Blake was influenced by the renewed eighteenth-century interest in
the ancient gnostics (Tannenbaum 15).

Despite his mystical connections, Blake himself was no
mystic. Mysticism "is a form of spiritual communion with God which
is by its nature incommunicable" (Frye 7). Rather, Blake is a
visionary artist, who "creates, or dwells in, a higher spiritual
world in which the objects of perception in this one have become
transfigured and charged with a new intensity of symbolism" (Frye
8).

Evidence of the influence of Lowth on Blake is strong, albeit
inferential:

Though the first English translation of his [Lowth's]
Lectures was not published until 1787, the Preface to his
translation of Isaiah, published in 1778, restates their
essential arguments with much new material. Moreover,
The Christian's Magazine, a fiercely anti-Wesleyan
publication, had put out an edited version in serial
installments as early as 1767. It would certainly appear
that Blake had read Lowth by 1788 when he etched a short
piece entitled 'All Religions Are One.'

(Prickett 1991, 192)
The work of Blake spans the turn of the century, and he is ordinarily classed with the nineteenth-century English Romantics, who share this 'biblical' style of directness and simplicity. But in most of the Romantics, the biblical source is less apparent. Given Blake's unabashed biblicism, and that his poetical program was spelled out by 1790, I have chosen to place him in the eighteenth century.

Enlightenment biblical criticism initiated a whole new era in biblical studies. It not only marked the end of the monopoly of traditional dogmatic exegesis; it also changed its character. Henceforth, even dogmatic exegesis would appeal to reason as a support.

Nondogmatic exegesis would now become a real option. Historical criticism, born during the Enlightenment, would mature in the nineteenth century, and literary study of the Bible in the twentieth.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


2 Jean LeClerc's challenge to Richard Simon is one of the earliest such objections:

To tell the history of a book is not simply to say when and by whom it was made, what copyists transmitted it and what mistakes they made in transcribing it. It is not enough to tell us who translated it and to draw our attention to the faults in his version, nor even to teach us who commented on it and the defects in these commentaries. We also have to discover, if that is possible, to what end the author composed it, what occasion made him take up his pen and to what opinions or
events he may be referring in this work. (Sentiments de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament (1686), first letter, cited in Armogathe 71)

3 Aaron Hill's famous "Preface to Mr. Pope" in The Creation: A Pindaric Illustration of a Poem, Originally Written by Moses on that Subject (1720) argued that God "taught poetry first to the Hebrews and the Hebrews to mankind in general" (Hill 4). Anthony Blackwall's An Introduction to the Classics (1725) and The Sacred Classics Defended and Illustrated (1727) maintained that the descent of the Homeric gods in human form in order to converse with mortals was copied from God's walking in Eden with Adam and Eve. Blackwall concluded that "every Scholar and every Christian is oblig'd to the utmost of his abilities to defend the Bible as literature" (Introduction to the Classics, cited in Freimarck 75).

4 In his essay "Of Poetry" (1690), Sir William Temple thought it particularly praiseworthy that the Song of Deborah (in Judges 5) retained much of its nobility despite its translation into "so common prose" (Sparing 3:87).

5 If any one would judge of the Beauties of Poetry that are to be met with in the Divine Writings, and examine how kindly the Hebrew Manners of Speech mix and incorporate with the English Language: after having perused the Book of Psalms, let him read a literal Translation of Horace or Pindar. He will find in these two last such an Absurdity and Confusion of Stile with such a Comparative Poverty of Imagination, as will make him very sensible of what I have been here advancing. (Spectator No. 405)

6 In addition to those already mentioned, some of the better known include the ninth night of Edward Young's "Night Thoughts," entitled "Poem on the Last Day" (1713), Bodmer's "Noah" (1750), Gessner's "Der Tod Abels" (1758), Klopstock's "Messias" (1748-73), and Richard Cumberland's "Calvary; or The Death of Christ" (1792).


8 In 1720, Aaron Hill observed that the simplicity of Hebrew poetry was usually lost "by our mistaken Endeavours, after heightening the Sentiments, by a figurative Expression" (Hill 4). From time to time, commentators such as John Husbands—in his preface to A Miscellany of Poems—would insist that the Bible was divine in its language as well as in its spiritual message, and therefore deserved to be selected as a model for poetry.
Thomas Percy's *Song of Songs* (1764) marked a turning point in the translation of this much abused biblical work. Giving due credit to Lowth, Percy proved his fidelity to the original Hebrew by translating into prose. Thomas Leland attempted to break new ground with his *Dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence: With Particular Regard to the Style and Composition of the New Testament* (1764). Benjamin Blayney's *Jeremiah* (1784) was a conscious attempt to provide a sequel to Lowth's *Isaiah*. Alexander Geddes brought out a *Prospectus of a New Translation of the Hebrew Bible* (1786), praising Lowth lavishly and suggesting that Lowth's approach be applied to the rest of the Scriptures.

**Doubts Concerning the Translation and Notes of the Bishop of London to Isaiah, Vindicating Ezechiel, Isaiah, and other Jewish Prophets from Disorder in Arrangement** (1783, cited in Prickett 1986, 113).

With regard to biblical art, Watts had commented in the preface to his *Horae Lyricae* (1709):

I must copy out a good part of the writings of David and Isaiah, if I would represent the poetical Excelencies of their Thoughts and Stile: Nor is the Language of the lesser Prophets, especially in some Paragraphs, much inferior to these. . . .

Nor did the blessed Spirit which animated these Writers forbid them the use of Visions, Dreams, the opening of Scenes dreadful and delightful, and the Introduction of Machines upon great occasions: The Divine License in this respect is admirable and surprizing and the Images are often too bold and dangerous for an uninspir'd Writer to imitate. (Watts xi, xvi)

In this same preface, Watts inaugurated the revolution from psalmody to hymnody when he contended that, if we would prepare David's psalms to be sung in our day, we should translate them as David would have composed them had he lived in our time. Henceforth, the psalms would provide a pattern for musical composition rather than the precise subject matter of the lyrics.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

There is a well known story of how Thomas Jefferson, under the influence of Tom Paine, took a scissors to his New Testament. Such a deed belongs to the Enlightenment, and not to the nineteenth century. According to Enlightenment critical theory, Reason—when applied to the textual data of the Bible—would either confirm or disconfirm biblical Truth. But eighteenth-century philosophy had called the existence of Reason into question, and as European explorers circled the globe, it was becoming apparent that categories of Western thought were by no means universal.

Given this breakdown of rationalism, nineteenth-century Western thinkers shifted toward a more empirical approach to knowledge. They abandoned belief in a priori Truth in favor of the truth of experience. All that remained to be decided was whether experiential truth ought to be objectively or subjectively verified. This movement toward empiricism had already taken place among a number of late-Enlightenment thinkers. But until the nineteenth century, the societal implications were as yet unrealized.

This shift from rationalism to empiricism was evident in biblical studies. The Bible came to be regarded less as a collection of truths (perhaps mixed with falsehoods), and more as a record of human experience. Subjectivists would now undertake a
Romantic reading of the Bible, focusing on the personal, passionate, or visionary dimension of the biblical literature. Objectivists would henceforth regard the Bible as the record of the historical experiences of the Hebrew people. Among such objectivists, 'scientific' historical criticism—termed the 'higher criticism' by Eichhorn—became the preferred approach.

There were two significant literary developments within biblical studies in the nineteenth century. The first was the Romantic revolt against rationalism, early in the century. The second, occurring toward the end of the century, was a reaction against the 'higher criticism.' These two literary reactions would, for the first time, clearly differentiate literary study of the Bible from other modern critical approaches.¹

**The Romantic Revolt**

By 1800, the aesthetic sublimity of the Scriptures had become a critical commonplace. Yet, in his canons of criticism, Samuel Johnson followed the normal Protestant practice of keeping the Bible separate from secular literature: "The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament" (Johnson 1:204). Such a separation was institutionalized in 1809 by Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt at the University of Berlin, when he separated the humanities from the Faculty of Theology and created a Faculty of Arts. This division, which was widely imitated throughout Europe and America, discouraged the interaction of the Bible with other literatures.

The Romantic movement considered this special handling of the
Bible absurd. For example, the French romantic, François René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), made lengthy comparisons between the style of Homer and that of the Bible:

[The Hebrew language] proclaims the idiom of a people, who by a remarkable combination, unite primitive simplicity with a profound knowledge of mankind.

The Greek [language], probably formed from the Hebrew (as may be reasonably conjectured from its roots and its ancient alphabet), displays in its intricate conjugations, in its endless inflexions, in its diffuse eloquence, a nation of an imitative and social genius; a nation elegant and vain...

(Chateaubriand 2:204)

The Romantic poets were the first to realize in a thoroughgoing way that the Bible had begun to lose its explaining and consoling power. Many of them yearned to invent a replacement for the time-worn Judeo-Christian world view. William Blake, for one, demonstrated that the Bible could be understood in a fresh, nontheological, literary manner. Poets became prophets of a new order, inspired by a higher Spirit.

Many Romantics held the Bible to be their poetic model. In his famous attack on neoclassical poetic diction in the appendix to the second edition of his *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), William Wordsworth (1770-1850) exemplifies this attitude:

Perhaps in no way, by positive example, could more easily be given a notion of what I mean by the phrase poetic diction than by referring to a comparison between the metrical paraphrase which we have of passages as they exist in the Old and New Testament, and those passages as they exist in our common Translation. (Wordsworth 1:162)

In the 1815 edition of his preface to the same work, Wordsworth goes even further:
The grand storehouses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical as contradistinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton; to which I cannot forbear to add those of Spenser. I select these writers in preference to those of ancient Greece and Rome, because the anthropomorphitism of the Pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form; from which the Hebrews were preserved by their abhorrence of idolatry. (Wordsworth 3:34)

That Wordsworth stands in the Lowthian tradition is evident. His famous theory of poetic diction, expressed in this same preface, asserts that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (Wordsworth 1:134-135). And in a lengthy note attached to "The Thorn," Wordsworth pointed to biblical parallelism as the primary source of his incremental repetition in the poem (Roston 173).

Not only Wordsworth's style, but the mood of much of his work comes from the Bible. Just as Psalms exhibits all nature bursting into a song of praise to its creator, so does nature personified become a central feature in Wordsworth's poetry. The majesty and attitude of worship communicated in the Psalms is retained as well. In a poem like "Tintern Abbey," one cannot escape the sense of the sacred. In poems such as "Michael," biblical imagery and morality are preserved as well.

Samuel T. Coleridge (1772-1834) shared much of Wordsworth's poetic theory. In Chapter XIV of his Biographia Literaria (1817), the Lowthian influence is unmistakable:

A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition...poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contra-distinguishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of Isaiah--indeed a very large
portion of the whole book—is poetry in the most emphatic sense... (Coleridge 7.2:14-15)

Coleridge certainly shared Lowth's fascination with prophecy. In his most famous poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the mariner—like a biblical prophet—leaves the wedding guest a sadder but wiser man. We also know from his own references that Coleridge used Lowth's translation of Isaiah for his 1795 "Lectures on Revealed Religion" (Coleridge 1:153).

Coleridge was the only romantic poet capable of reading the Hebrew Bible in the original. He was unusual in that he balanced an acute historical-critical awareness of the Bible with poetic sensitivity, and was the first to clearly distinguish the two approaches. Coleridge did not believe that historical criticism necessarily undermined the literary value of the Bible. After all, literary critics know that a work very often becomes much more interesting when they can go behind the apparently seamless fabric of the received text and explore the fragments, drafts, cancelled pages, and other remnants left by the author. If only the higher critics had had some of Coleridge's literary sensibility, the history of biblical criticism would have been very different indeed.

In his later years, Coleridge summarized his life's work as having been an attempt to reconcile the Hebraic and Greek modes of thought: "If there be any two subjects which have in the very depth of my Nature interested me, it has been the Hebrew and Christian Theology & the Theology of Plato" (Letter to Sotheby, 1802, in Letters 2:459). Yet his sympathies were with the Hebraic: "Could you ever discover any thing sublime, in our sense of the term, in
the classic Greek literature? I never could. Sublimity is Hebrew by birth" (Coleridge 14.2:180).

Coleridge's primary critical work on the Bible was his "Letters on the Inspiration of the Scriptures," written around 1826, and published posthumously by his nephew under the title Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (1840). Confessions offers a humble yet extremely rigorous questioning of the accepted doctrine of the 'plenary' (verbal) inspiration of the Bible. Though nowhere taught in the Bible, this 'dictation' theory of biblical inspiration was hardly questioned until the Enlightenment. It is of interest that Coleridge's critique rests upon literary considerations.

Coleridge did appreciate objectivity in religion, so far as it was a possibility. But the doctrine of plenary inspiration was a forced attempt on the part of religion to objectify inspiration, and Coleridge felt the time had come to sound the alarm. In so doing, he replies to both dogmatists and higher critics by offering an alternative understanding of inspiration:

Need I say that [in the Bible] I have met everywhere more or less copious sources of truth, and power, and purifying impulses;—that I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and pleadings for my shame and my feebleness? In short, whatever finds me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit. . . . The great object of my pursuits and studies [is] to convince myself and others that the Bible and Christianity are their own sufficient evidence.

(Confessions 42,47)

Coleridge believed that the 'inspiration of the Bible' simply meant that its authors were inspired writers who were able to produce inspiring literature. We are not to reverence the Bible
because of any external authority. Rather, the Bible is self-authenticating, in that it serves as a conduit of divine grace and truth. Here is a further internalization of Truth, a process which began as far back as the Reformation, with its stress on private interpretation of the Bible. What Wesley was to call 'the inward witness' had become for Coleridge the primacy of personal experience. Coleridge goes so far as to suggest that if divine inspiration is not perceived in the sacred writings, the fault lies not with the writings but with the perception of the reader:

Friend! The truth revealed through Christ has its evidence in itself, and the proof of its divine authority is its fitness to our nature and needs;—the clearness and cogency of this proof being proportionate to the degree of self-knowledge in each individual hearer. (Confessions 64)

A fundamental tenet of modern literary study of the Bible is that we are entitled to approach the Bible as we would any work of literature. We are under no obligation to bring with us preconceived notions of canonical authority. This is one of Coleridge's complaints about the doctrine of plenary inspiration. He points out that the Bible demands for itself no special handling. It is only as the reader comes freely to the biblical text that its true worth is perceptible:

I demand for the Bible only the justice which you grant to other books of grave authority, and to other proved and acknowledged benefactors of mankind... The more tranquilly an inquirer takes up the Bible as he would any other body of ancient writings, the livelier and steadier will be his impressions of its superiority to all other books, till at length all other books and all other knowledge will be valuable in his eyes in proportion as
they help him to a better understanding of the Bible.

(Confessions 62,75)

It is clear that Coleridge does uphold the uniqueness of the Bible—-but his reasoning is modernly a posteriori, not a priori.

Another major problem with the doctrine, as he sees it, is that it imposes a unity among the various biblical texts that is simply not there. It denies or minimizes the great variety of biblical material. Even the Jews, who held to the plenary inspiration of the Pentateuch, generally recognized unevenness of inspiration within the canon:

Between the Mosaic and the Prophetic inspiration they [the Jewish teachers] asserted such a difference as amounts to a diversity; and between both the one and the other, and the remaining books comprised under the title of Hagiographa, the interval was still wider, and the inferiority in kind, and not only in degree, was unequivocally expressed. (Confessions 46-47)

When Bible passages conflict, the proponent of plenary inspiration feels an obligation to bring harmony: "On what other ground can I account for the whimsical subintelligiturs of our numerous harmonists[?]" (55, emphasis his). The construction of such artificial 'harmonies' is, according to Coleridge, a waste of time, first of all because the outright conflicts are so few and insignificant:

What, I say, could have tempted grave and pious men thus to disturb the foundation of the Temple, in order to repair a petty breach or rat-hole in the wall, or fasten a loose stone or two in the outer court...?

(Confessions 56)

But harmonization also betrays a lack of artistic and moral
sensibility. Verisimilitude dictates that minor differences in the accounts of eyewitnesses are to be expected. If the parallel biblical accounts were identical to the last detail, we should (rightly) suspect collusion: "The very difficulties argue the truth of the whole scheme and system for my understanding, since I see plainly that so must the truth appear, if it be the truth" (41).

If such a doctrine as plenary inspiration really is critical to the unity of Christendom, Coleridge wonders why the miracle should stop at the Greek Version, and not include the Vulgate (71). The reason, of course, why the doctrine does not maintain religious solidarity is that it overlooks the necessity of interpretation. The text is one thing; what it means to the reader may be quite another. This is precisely where Coleridge puts the greater emphasis—on the reading process. He is serious when he says, "If you reject a priori all communion with the Holy Spirit, there is indeed a chasm between us, over which we cannot even make our voices intelligible to each other" (62).

Even though the biblical influence is diffused, the later Romantic poets were likewise indebted to the art of the Bible. The forward thrust of biblical parallelism is evident in Byron's incremental repetition. Byron also turned to the Bible for those deeper passions with which to express his own heartache and longings. Perhaps the clearest indication of his affinity to Hebraism is the collection of poems, Hebrew Melodies (1815). Here Byron consciously sought after Hebraic concepts, settings, and rhythms in his endeavor to recreate the world of the Scriptures. The two themes to which Byron kept returning in this collection of
poems were the ruin of Saul and the destruction of the Temple—both themes closely associated with his personal fears and aspirations. One can only conclude that Byron's heretical tendencies were not so much an attack on the Bible as upon the traditional Christian interpretation of it.

In much the same way, Shelley's avowed atheism in no way lessened his reverence for the beauty of biblical poetry. For all his antipathy to religion (or perhaps because of it—the biblical prophets had likewise condemned the religion of their day), Shelley read the Bible avidly. Although he tended to follow classical models in matters of technical form, poems such as his "Ode to the West Wind" breathe the same spirit of moral zeal that characterizes biblical prophecy. In Prometheus Unbound (1819), his attempt at creating an alternative mythical universe, he not only seeks to replicate the biblical achievement; he also imitates Job's challenge of the apparent injustice of the created order.

In A Defense of Poetry (1840) that Shelley clarifies his belief in the power of biblical art:

It is probable that the astonishing poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah, had produced a great effect upon the mind of Jesus and his disciples. The scattered fragments preserved to us by the biographers of this extraordinary person, are all instinct with the most vivid poetry. (Shelley 7:126)

In this Defense, Shelley proposes that prose, if it has great philosophical or moral value, is by definition 'poetry.' Here again is the Lowthian tendency to obliterate the distinction between verse and prose.
English post-Romantic poets such as Robert Browning (1812-89) sought to retain the rhythmic throb of biblical prose while translating it into English accentual metre. The Lowthian tradition culminated in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), who claimed that rhyme and metre are nothing less than species of parallelism! "The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism, ranging from the technical so-called Parallelism of Hebrew Poetry and the antiphons of Church music up to the intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse" (Hopkins 80). Parallelism thus becomes something fundamental to the structure of all poetry, and not only biblical poetry.

Following Herder, Biblical Romanticism remained a potent force in Germany. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), chair of Protestant theology at the University of Berlin from 1810-34, was a friend of Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and other leading German Romantics. He is known as the founder of what may be called the psychological school of exegesis. Schleiermacher endeavored to establish a conviction of the truth of Christianity by finding it psychologically adapted to human needs and satisfying to human aspirations. An early work of his, Über die Religion (1799), anticipates how Coleridge would sound a generation later in England: "The holy books have become the Bible in virtue of their own power, but they do not forbid any other book from being or becoming a Bible in its turn" (cited in Neil 274). Schleiermacher thus collapsed the distinction between sacred and profane literature.

The German romantic, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), offered a corrective to rationalistic criticism in his Poetry and
Goethe was displeased by the tenor of the biblical critics of his day. Referring to them as "scoffing spirits," he writes: "I saw their dishonesty at once. I not only detested them, but they even prompted me to rage; and I still perfectly remember that in my childish fanatical zeal I could have throttled Voltaire, for his Saul, if I could only have got at him" (Goethe 2:58). Goethe was able to see through their naturalistic bias, and detested the destructive nature of their criticism.

Goethe's chief complaint against the biblical critics was that they concentrated on peripheral issues, and were blind to the essence of the Bible:

For a fundamental opinion had already formed definitely in my mind, without my being able to say whether it had been suggested, or inspired, or had arisen from my own reflection. It was this—that in anything which is handed down to us, especially in writing, the real point is the groundwork, the inner meaning, the sense, the tendency of the work; that here lies all that makes it original, divine, effective, unassailable and indestructible; and that neither time, nor outward influences or vicissitudes, can in any degree affect this inner primitive nature, at least no more than sickness of the body affects a healthy soul... Hence it is everyone's duty to try to discover the inner, essential nature of a book which particularly interests us, and at the same time, above all things, to consider in what relation it stands to our own inner nature... (Goethe 2:56-57)

Romantic critics such as Goethe followed Herder in going beyond the 'letter' to seek the 'spirit' of the text.

It was by means of a literary approach that David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) helped the higher criticism to clearly differentiate itself from earlier rationalistic criticism.
for biblical 'difficulties.' But when these explanations proved unconvincing, the biblical accounts were simply dismissed as unreliable. Strauss argues that rationalists and traditionalists employ the same hermeneutic. The only difference is that when there appears to be a conflict, rationalists deny the historical factuality of the biblical accounts, whereas traditionalists continue to insist upon their reliability.

Strauss presented a completely new possibility. Realizing that both the Christian religion and biblical criticism would stand or fall on the life of Christ, he decided to go straight to the heart of the matter with his Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet (1835; English translation by George Eliot: The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined, 1846). He points out that traditionalists and rationalists alike proceed from the false assumption that what we have in the gospels is testimony to fact, whereas narrators sometimes testify not to outward facts, but to ideas. This is the essence of 'myth.' According to Strauss, myth is "the representation of an event or of an idea in a form which is historical, but at the same time characterized by the rich pictorial and imaginative mode of thought and expression of the primitive ages" (Strauss 28). In this way, Strauss maintains that myth is able to communicate spiritual truth better than any mere positivist statement.

Mythical elements in the Old Testament had already been acknowledged. Strauss simply extended the application to the New. Specifically, the gospel accounts had been generated not by plain fact, but by the transformation of Old Testament texts into what
Strauss called the "Christ-myth." This is not the same as legend. "Mythus is the creation of a fact out of an idea: legend the seeing of an idea in a fact" (Strauss 39).

Strauss's book created an immediate sensation. It was the first attempt at a biography of Jesus from a wholly nonsupernatural point of view. Just as the Bible was a book to be read 'like any other,' so now Jesus was a man to be understood 'like any other.'

The weakness of Strauss's method was that he failed to supply a criterion for separating history from myth or legend. This was left to Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860), Strauss's teacher at Tubingen. Baur mained that the question of authenticity depends upon the point of view of the writer. Baur thus set out to ascertain the biases of the various New Testament writers, which included their purposes in writing and the issues which concerned them.

Strauss successfully created a new awareness of literary art in the Bible. However, for Strauss, this recognition of biblical myth meant that the work of interpretation was just beginning. The next step was to 'demythologize' the text, i.e. discern the historical kernels of truth that lay behind the various myths and legends. Strauss's literary concerns were therefore ultimately subservient to his historical interests.

The Zenith of the 'Higher Criticism'

Although historical exegesis originated during the Enlightenment, it did not mature until the nineteenth century. This is largely because it took some decades to amass sufficient
historical data to shed light upon the ancient writings. Such careful historical scholarship would become the nineteenth century's primary contribution to biblical studies.

From 1840-60, Constantin Tischendorf, Professor of Theology at Leipzig, traveled to libraries throughout Europe and the Near East seeking the earliest extant Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. He is credited with discovering both the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, the earliest complete Bibles to date. In 1887, tablets in Akkadian script were unearthed by archaeologists in Egypt. In a few short decades, ancient cultural practices were better understood, ancient languages cognate with Biblical Hebrew were deciphered, and the disciplines of comparative religion and mythology were born. The knowledge explosion had begun, and the result of historical inquiry was a new attitude toward the Bible. No longer would the Bible be regarded as a collection of timeless truths independent of context.

Perhaps the clearest expression of nineteenth-century higher criticism appears in the work of Julius Wellhausen (Old Testament) and Adolph Harnack (New Testament). In his Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (1878), Wellhausen identified the four major sources of the text of the Hebrew Bible, the Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly (sometimes abbreviated J, E, D, and P). Harnack delivered a series of sixteen lectures in 1899-1900 at the University of Berlin that were immediately published under the English title, What is Christianity? Here he distinguished between the religion of Jesus and religion about Jesus. His critical conclusions remain the scholarly consensus: the priority of Mark,
the two-source hypothesis as the solution of the synoptic problem, the distinctive character of John, and the progressive Hellenization of Christianity during its first two centuries of existence.

The new 'scientific' exegesis did not raise too many eyebrows at first. For one thing, scientific threats to the authority of the Bible were not altogether new. The discoveries of Columbus and Vasco de Gama had raised questions not only about the notion of Christendom, but about the geography of Genesis. The discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo created doubts about the cosmology of the entire Pentateuch. Yet once the necessary worldview adjustments had been made, the condition of religion seemed none the worse. If the earth was not the center of the universe, at least mankind remained the centerpiece of God's creation. Even Sir Charles Lyell, in his Principles of Geology (1830-33), bent over backwards to accommodate his findings to the book of Genesis. And in the wake of the pietistic movement on the continent and the Wesleyan revival in England, religion appeared (for a while, at least) to be on the rebound.

To the English, higher-critical developments seemed particularly distant in that they originated on the continent, and England had entered a kind of self-imposed isolationism in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The 'higher criticism' thus made its way very slowly into England, and any unsettling findings could be dismissed as 'German poison.'

The first great English spokesman for the 'higher criticism' was Coleridge in his Constitution of Church and State (1830), and (posthumously) in his Table Talk (1835). In 1846, George Eliot
translated Strauss's Leben Jesu, only to discover that no respectable English publisher would touch it. Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) and Edward Pusey (1800-82) assisted her, as they were among the very few English scholars of this period who could read German.

But the main reason for the slow impact of the higher criticism was its exoticism. Who cared if Babylonian cosmology influenced the writer of Genesis? This did not seem like a clear and present danger to people of faith, for most of whom such arguments were unintelligible in any event.

Nevertheless, the higher criticism was riding the wave of science, and the cumulative effect of this wave would jolt nineteenth-century religion worse than anything the deists ever devised. For it was quickly becoming evident, even to the common person, that science claimed dominion not only over man's world, but over man himself. During the Enlightenment, too little was known about the natural world for science to pose any serious threat to the authority of the Bible. Earlier scientific discoveries, although unsettling theologically, did not directly contradict anything in the Bible. But with nineteenth-century advances in geology and biology, all of this changed rapidly.

This may have been a difficult time for religion, but not for literary study of the Bible. Seldom has there been such an impetus to develop a fresh biblical hermeneutic! Dogmatic exegesis had come off badly, and historical criticism was helpless at discussing questions of origins. Scholars were now free to read the biblical narratives afresh, and inquire into their literary significance.
Not all nineteenth-century thinkers viewed science and religion as mortal enemies. Most scientists of the period were, in fact, men of sincere religious faith, and theologians were beginning to adopt inductive, scientific attitudes. Whereas in 1880, an estimated 99% of the biblical scholars in England, Scotland and America still supported the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Glover 36), by 1890 this figure was radically reduced. Much of the credit goes to theologians like Samuel R. Driver and George Adam Smith, both specialists in the Hebrew Bible, and J.B. Lightfoot and B.F. Westcott, New Testament specialists, who mediated the results of the German higher criticism with typically English moderation. What decades of rationalism had failed to achieve in England was largely accomplished in a single decade by her theologians.

A reaction against biblical historicism was in the making, particularly among literary people. Yet, had it not been for the efforts of these historical critics, modern literary study of the Bible would not have developed. There are several reasons for this:

a. The laborious textual work of nineteenth-century critics is too often taken for granted by twentieth-century critics. In Germany, for example, Tischendorf produced no fewer than eight editions of the Greek New Testament. In England, Westcott and Hort spent twenty-eight years on this same text. Kittel's work on the text of the Hebrew Bible was similarly impressive. Twentieth-century literary study of the Bible rests on the careful philological work of these unsung critics, and relatively few textual corrections have since been required.

b. What respectability the Bible possesses in academic circles
today is largely due to the painstaking labor of these higher critics. After the nineteenth-century Anglican church had quite thoroughly discredited the Bible during the Bible-science controversies, it was the higher critics who picked up the pieces. Of course, in all fairness to the church, we must recognize that mid-nineteenth-century Anglicanism had no alternative way of reading the Bible. To them (and to their critics as well), a historical reading of the text was the only kind they knew; the Bible must either be factual history or worthless invention.

c. The higher critics actually carried out the kind of scientific study that had been proposed by Spinoza and earlier rationalists. Moreover, they arrived at a number of conclusions that have largely (although not completely) stood the test of time. This willingness to apply their critical tools to the biblical literature set an example for twentieth-century literary critics, who have done much the same thing with their literary-critical tools.

d. The higher critics were the first to appreciate the presence of myth and legend within the biblical literature. The recognition of these literary genres, together with an acknowledgment of their ability to impart a kind of metahistorical truth, laid a significant foundation for later literary study.

e. Breakthroughs in biblical criticism (textual criticism, source criticism) contributed to the development of the broader discipline of literary criticism, which has in turn spurred modern literary study of the Bible.

f. Historical biblical criticism may be understood as a serious attempt at solving literary problems. For example, the initial
motivation for chasing after the various literary sources of the Pentateuch was that the text as it stood presented hermeneutical difficulties. Careful readers had long noticed discrepancies, inconsistencies, and redundancies in the narrative. The fundamental difficulty here is confusion about genre: "the ultimate basis of biblical criticism does not lie in historical concerns, but in the renewed perception of genre" (Barton 214).

g. Occasionally, historical criticism solved some longstanding literary puzzles. For example, once the oriental backdrop of the New Testament was appreciated, scholars made much more sense of some of the sayings of Jesus. Edward Everett, a Unitarian minister in Boston and later president of Harvard, recognized in 1814 that when the apostolic writers applied Old Testament quotations to Jesus "in a reference other than their original and true one," they did so because as Jews they were using the same method of interpretation of Scripture that the rabbis used (cited in Teeple 96). Historical criticism thus solved hermeneutical difficulties that had caused earlier exegetes to turn to allegory:

The allegorical interpretation had done for the cultured and philosophically minded Fathers of the ancient Church what the historical method was to do for the Victorians and their successors: both methods helped to reconcile the scriptural teaching with changed views of the universe, whether Ptolemaic or Copernical, whether Stoic or Darwinian, and they made it possible to explain away ethical injunctions and practices which no longer commended themselves to the enlightened conscience.

(Richardson 302)

h. Prior to historicism, Bible readers would move directly from the biblical texts to their external referents. But now, even
dogmatic interpreters first consider the intention of the biblical writers in their respective historical settings. In short, historical criticism has helped biblical criticism to become more text-conscious, thereby moving it in a more literary direction.

**Voices of Protest Against the 'Higher Criticism'**

During the Enlightenment, there had been a great deal of overlap among dogmatic, historical, and literary approaches to the Bible. But as biblical study became more specialized, the various critical approaches went off on their own, gradually ceasing to speak the same language. The ever-widening popularity of historical biblical criticism tended to minimize the contributions of other approaches.

According to historical criticism, the meaning of a biblical text could not be ascertained without first understanding the meaning it had in its original context. Consideration must then be given to its place in the development of the corpus of biblical literature. Finally, its original sense must be translated into the modern context. Although the latter half of the nineteenth century was to become the 'golden age' of historical criticism, there arose a simultaneous chorus of protest that would, in the twentieth century, issue in the development of a serious literary alternative.

Even though Eichhorn intended nothing of the sort, the term 'higher criticism' seemed to connote 'superior' or 'more thoroughly evolved' (thus hinting at a sort of critical Darwinism). In coining the phrase, Eichhorn wanted to suggest something like 'taking in the big picture from high elevation.' It is ironic, then, that a
primary literary complaint against the higher criticism was its atomism—it sacrificed textual unity for the sake of historical precision.

Another complaint concerning the higher criticism was its reductionism. The ideology of 'historicism' regarded texts only as products of particular historical-cultural contexts, and textual meaning could only be derived from a study of the culture that produced them.

Finally, the higher criticism reversed the Reformation principle of the Bible as the People's Book. It seemed that once again the Bible was becoming captive to the 'priesthood' of religious specialists. Joseph Parker expressed this point of view eloquently:

Even [a higher critic such as] Baur or Colenso may, contrary to his own wishes, be almost unconsciously elevated into a literary deity under whose approving nod alone we can read the Bible with any edification. It is no secret that when Baur rejected the Epistle to the Philippians as un-Pauline, Christian Europe became partially paralysed, and that when Hilgenfeld pronounced it Pauline, Christian Europe resumed its prayers. Have we to await a communication from Tubingen or a telegram from Oxford, before we can read the Bible? (Parker 72-73)

Although Parker here speaks for orthodox religion, his complaint was shared by literary people, who resented the notion that true religious feeling required an immense detour through historical scholarship. Many of them would begin to point out how indifferent historical critics had become to biblical art. George Eliot, for one, greatly respected Strauss's insights. She even reproduced them in English translation. Yet she found much of
Strauss "repulsive"— especially his "dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion" (Cross Ch.2).

George Eliot's transition from theology to literature may thus reflect a wider shift that was underway. If art was being threatened by the biblical critics, and if myth could convey truths more important than those of factual history, perhaps prose fiction was the way of the future. It may be no accident that while typology and symbolism were disappearing from theological discourse, they were resurfacing in the new art form of the novel.

One who managed to bridge both theology and literature was John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-90), himself a poet. In his famous lecture, "The Idea of a University" (1852), Newman stresses the importance of cultivation of the fine arts. Six years later, in a lecture entitled "Literature," he speaks out against those who deny ornament in the biblical writings:

Why, consider the Epistle to the Hebrews--where is there in the classics any composition more carefully, more artificially written? Consider the book of Job--is it not a sacred drama, as artistic, as perfect, as any Greek tragedy of Sophocles or Euripides? Consider the Psalter--are there no ornaments, no rhythm, no studied cadences, no responsive members, in that divinely beautiful book? (Newman 217).

One of the greatest nineteenth-century challengers of science--and scientific criticism of the Bible--was Matthew Arnold (1822-88). Arnold was born into one of the few English families of the time that kept up with the latest developments in biblical criticism. Although Matthew's approach to the Bible was much more literary than that of his father, there is nevertheless a remarkable continuity of thought between the two of them.
Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), headmaster at Rugby, had kept abreast of developments in German criticism. His foresighted Essay on the Right Interpretation and Understanding of the Scriptures (1831) insisted that religion must not be confounded with "all questions of science, of history and of criticism," and that it is impossible to understand the Bible if it is regarded as in "all its parts of equal authority...and like the Koran, all composed at one time, and addressed to persons similarly situated" (T. Arnold 2:429,481).

Like his father, Matthew recognized the historical contribution of the higher critics, but was convinced that some things are more important than historical factuality. Like Aristotle, Matthew Arnold claimed for poetry a 'higher' truth than for history. This became evident shortly after the publication of Bishop Colenso's The Pentateuch and Joshua Critically Examined (1863). Arnold did not, on historical grounds, oppose any of the Bishop's higher-critical conclusions. This is why his condemnation of the work took Victorian intellectuals by surprise. Arnold's objections were twofold. First, he considered Colenso's decision to publish as tactless. Arnold maintained that biblical criticism ought always to be helpful, both to individuals and to the larger body politic. But in addition, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the limitations of a purely historical-critical approach to the Bible. Arnold believed that this could only lead to reductionism, and therefore the higher critics are "often really farther from the truth, all the while, than even the traditional view which they profess to annihilate" (Arnold 7:375).
Arnold's reluctance to embrace the higher criticism was also related to his general distrust of specialists. He viewed the specialist much as he did the 'homo unius libri'—the uncultured philistine who has some acquaintance with the Bible but not much else that is literary (6:152). "The finest heads for letters and science," bemoans Arnold, "have turned themselves in general to other departments of work than criticism of the Bible" (Arnold 6:277). Consequently, it has been necessary for Englishmen to rely upon Germany for biblical facts. But this is as far as the dependence ought to go. Here is Arnold's assessment of D.F. Strauss and his famous Leben Jesu (1835):

To what is unsolid in the New Testament he applies a negative criticism ably enough, but to deal with the reality which is still left in the New Testament requires a larger, richer, deeper, more imaginative mind than his... This no man can have who is a mere specialist, who has not what we call culture in addition to the knowledge of his particular study; and so many theologians, in Germany as well as elsewhere, are specialists! (Arnold 6:158, emphasis his)

But perhaps Arnold's greatest difficulty with the higher criticism was its indifference to art. Arnold complained that it repeatedly failed to discern fruitful ambiguity in the biblical material. For example, in the latter part of Isaiah, there appears the well known 'suffering servant' passage. Who is this unnamed person? Christianity has traditionally considered this a reference to Christ,

but certainly this was not the primary application. Who was originally meant? the purged idealised Israel? or a single prophet, the writer of the book? or the whole body of prophets? or the pious and persisting part of the Jewish nation? or the whole mass of the Jewish
nation? It may safely be said that all these are meant, sometimes the one of them, sometimes the other; and the best critic is he who does not insist on being more precise than his text ... But a German critic elects one out of these several meanings, and will have the text decidedly mean that one and no other.

(Arnold 7:70, emphasis his)

Fortunately, Arnold did more than simply criticize the higher criticism. During his mature years, as literary questions increasingly merged with religious ones, the Bible began occupying most of his attention. The result was three full-length biblical studies: St. Paul and Protestantism (1870), Literature and Dogma (1873), and God and the Bible (1875). These three biblical treatments constitute his most extended work of literary criticism. And although he was a Greek scholar, Arnold learned Hebrew in order to translate Isaiah of Jerusalem (1883). No other text engaged his critical energies like the Bible.

In these studies, Arnold both propounds and demonstrates what a literary approach to the Bible might resemble. His case rested upon a sophisticated understanding of the workings of metaphor, which anticipated the twentieth-century linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. "The language of the Bible is fluid, passing, and literary, not rigid, fixed, and scientific" (Preface to Literature and Dogma in Arnold 6:152). Wittgenstein would later show that different modes of discourse are appropriate to particular types of life experiences, and that to apply the logic of one universe of discourse to a very different one is to create linguistic confusion.

Beginning with St. Paul and Protestantism, and continuing
through his later works, Arnold declared that it was time for a complete redefinition of the Christian faith—and that this was to be accomplished by means of a radical reinterpretation of the Bible. The basic problem, according to Arnold, was that the Bible had been misread for centuries. The church had come to regard it fundamentally as a source of dogma, whereas it was first and foremost literature, filled with all kinds of imagery and symbolism which were never intended to be a depiction of empirical reality:

Terms like grace, new birth, justification,—which he [Paul] used in a fluid and passing way... people have blunderingly taken in a fixed and rigid manner, as if they were symbols with as definite and fully grasped a meaning as the names line or angle, and proceeded to use them on this supposition. Terms, in short, which with St. Paul are literary terms, theologians have employed as if they were scientific terms. (Arnold 6:170, emphasis his)

Arnold claims that his approach is not antireligious, but that true religion has always been founded on aesthetics. In this way, he sees himself as the real conservative—restoring the original biblical faith after centuries of misinterpretation.

A. St. Paul and Protestantism (1870).

Here argues claims that the doctrinal differences which separate the dissenters (whom he refers to as "Puritans") from the Church of England are a result of misreading Scripture, and particularly of Paul:

What in St. Paul is secondary and subordinate, Puritanism has made primary and essential; ... On the other hand, what is with St. Paul primary, Puritanism has treated as subordinate. ... The object of this treatise is not religious edification, but the true criticism of a great and misunderstood author. (Arnold 6:8,46)
Arnold also maintains that what Paul intended as figurative, Puritanism reads literally, and vice versa! The Puritans do not realize that Paul 'orientalizes' (speaks in figures), and that this is consistent with his Hebrew background—for the Hebrew thought-world works largely in metaphors and avoids abstraction. The Puritans' problem is therefore their inability to recognize figurative language. This inability to read aright is, according to Arnold, a result of lack of 'culture.' One must have some familiarity with language and its conventions; a sense of history is also helpful. The only fully adequate literary criticism is a 'cultured' one:

This literary criticism, however, is extremely difficult. It calls into play the highest requisites for the study of letters;—great and wide acquaintance with the history of the human mind, knowledge of the manner in which men have thought, of their way of using words and of what they mean by them, delicacy of perception and quick tact, and, besides all these, a favourable moment and the 'Zeit-Geist.' (Arnold 6:276).

B. Literature and Dogma (1873).

If in St. Paul and Protestantism Arnold took on the dissenters, here he takes on the Anglican establishment. This was to become the best-selling of his works within his lifetime, although after two installments Leslie Stephen, editor of the Cornhill Magazine, decided to discontinue it for fear of offending his readership.

Arnold's thesis is that the original pure religion of the Hebrews has become corrupted as a result of the accrual, over the centuries, of "auberglaube" ("extra-belief"). This had arisen due to (a) the unfamiliarity of later generations with Hebrew metaphor
and (b) a tendency to want to systematize or abstract literary expressions into philosophical categories or to translate them into the language of science:

This Aberglaube has sprung out of a false criticism of the literary records in which the doctrine is conveyed; what is called 'orthodox divinity' is, in fact, an immense literary misapprehension... For dogmatic theology is, in fact, an attempt at both literary and scientific criticism of the highest order; and the age which developed dogma had neither the resources nor the faculty for such a criticism. (Arnold 6:276,345)

An example of a term which was originally literary but which, according to Arnold, has been co-opted by religion, is the term "God." When this happens, the literary character of the Bible is no longer appreciated and religious confidence is undermined. Therefore, instead of "God," Arnold proposes that religion adopt the term "the enduring power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness" (Arnold 6:200). He explains: "The word 'God' is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence... a literary term" (Arnold 6:171).

In the same way, when Jesus claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, we ought to ask,

Is the language scientific, or is it, as we say, literary? ... As the Old Testament speaks about the Eternal and bears an invaluable witness to him, without yet ever adequately in words defining and expressing him; so, and even yet more, do the New Testament writers speak about Jesus and give a priceless record of him, without adequately and accurately comprehending him. (Arnold 6:243,258)

Tennyson (and others) were repelled by this suggestion, and it
was hooted down with nary an afterthought. Lionel Trilling would later ask, "Will men build Chartres to a 'power not ourselves that makes for righteousness'?" Ironically, a century after Arnold, the thesis of Harold Bloom's *The Book of J* (1990)—that Yahweh was a literary creation who has been misappropriated by religion—is a replay of Arnold's.

**C. GOD AND THE BIBLE (1875).**

This book is billed, "A Review of the Objections to Literature and Dogma." The first three chapters, "The God of Miracles," "The God of Metaphysics," and "The God of Experience," constitute Arnold's definitive dismissal of the notion of a personal God. Arnold argues that there are many metaphors for God in Scripture, some of them personal and some impersonal. He is a father, a shepherd, a pillar of fire, a voice from a whirlwind, a fortress, a reaper, a winnower, a plumb-line, a refiner's fire. None of them adequately describe "the Eternal," and therefore we should not be selective or limiting in our ascriptions of the deity.

The final three chapters contain some of Arnold's finest and most enduring biblical criticism. A century later, most of it remains surprisingly up-to-date.

Chapter Four, "The Bible Canon," attempts to undermine the religious notion that all parts of the Bible are equally authoritative. Such study will always work against bibliolatry, reminding us, as it does, of the thoroughly human agents who made the selection. In this chapter, Arnold begins by pointing out how it is nearly impossible to achieve certainty about historical questions such as dating, authorship, and chronological priority of
biblical books. Moreover, he asserts that such questions are in the end irrelevant, for the reader's ultimate aim is "to enjoy the Bible and to turn it to his benefit" (7:239). Nevertheless, a careful study of canonical origins should overturn the notion of the New Testament's "having from the first been one sure and sacred whole as it stands, a whole with all its parts equipollent; a kind of talisman, as we have elsewhere said, that had been handed to us straight out of heaven" (7:256).

Chapters Five and Six are a detailed analysis of the Gospel of John. Arnold is apparently drawn to this gospel because of its somewhat mystical preoccupation with the identity of Jesus rather than with the miraculous works of Jesus. He offers an alternative reading to that of the literalists while simultaneously rebuking the liberals for their premature dismissal of this vital book, and defends his thesis that "Jesus was over the heads of his reporters" (6:260), but that the real Jesus shines through in this gospel despite the clumsy reporting. Chapter Five, "The Fourth Gospel from Without," is an examination of external historical evidence concerning the authenticity of this gospel. Chapter Six, "The Fourth Gospel from Within," is Arnold's unique literary contribution, and a model literary study of a biblical book.

Matthew Arnold's contribution to literary study of the Bible was not limited to his biblical criticism. He also made a personal contribution through his life. During Arnold's career as inspector of nonconformist schools in England, his desire was to help students move beyond sectarian reading of the Bible. Later in his career, as England began to move more in the direction of public elementary
education, there was talk of removing the Bible from the public curriculum altogether. Arnold resisted this trend with his whole being:

The Bible ... is for the child in an elementary school almost his only contact with poetry and philosophy... Even in the lowest classes the children in a German Protestant school begin learning verses of the Psalms by heart, and by the time a scholar reaches the top of the school he knows by heart a number of the finest passages from the Psalms and from the prophetical and historical books of the Old Testament and nearly all the principal Gospel discourses and parables of the New. These have become a part of the stock of his mind, and he has them for life. (7:412)

This conviction impelled him to take Chapters 40-66 of the Book of Isaiah—one of the most sublime and poetic passages in the history of world literature—and rewrite it in such a way that schoolchildren could follow it. The result: A Bible Reading for Schools (1872), which initiated the modern 'Bible as literature' course. It achieved a modest success. Arnold went on, in 1883, to rewrite all of Isaiah for the general public. Upon the publication of Isaiah of Jerusalem, Arnold told his publisher: "I have never done a piece of work that pleases me more" (10:484). Isaiah's prophecy that Israel was to become "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6) was, in a sense, being fulfilled through Israel's poetic heritage as Arnold circulated 'the best that has been known and said in the world.'

In his introduction to Isaiah of Jerusalem, Arnold states his belief that Isaiah offers a starting point for getting a conception of the course of man's history and development as a whole. The morally uplifting, joy-producing theme of redemption in Isaiah
satisfied Arnold's criterion for a literary 'touchstone.' Moreover, the Hebrew language and genius are "seen in Isaiah at their perfection" and the Kings James translation of Isaiah is "a monument of the English language at its best" (7:52,58). Arnold therefore sought to make as few changes in the Authorized Version as necessary, for style is inevitably altered anytime diction or rhythm are changed. Arnold's revisions sometimes involved adjusting diction; at other times they called for a more linear rearrangement of the text (much of Isaiah is a collection of oracles lacking explicit historical reference).

Arnold considered much of the findings of historical criticism irrelevant to literary study. In discussing the authorship of Isaiah 40-66, Arnold expressed his opinion that the author is not Isaiah—but added that this "is not a belief which a [literary] work like the present has to concern itself with" (Arnold 7:67). This lack of interest in authorship would become a trademark of twentieth-century 'New Criticism.'

The new thing that had occurred in Matthew Arnold's biblical criticism is simply that, for perhaps the first time in literary history, a secular critic of the caliber of Arnold had taken on the Bible as a critical challenge. That Arnold saw little positive response to his literary biblical criticism is less important than that he dared to enter a realm which was generally considered off-limits to a secular critic.

Arnold prophesied that the religious legacy of the West would survive as art. Its sacred book would be immortalized as literary art and its sacred buildings as supreme architecture. The growing
number of secular critics who are finding a home in the Bible and the phenomenal success of the 'Bible as Literature' movement in the twentieth century attest to Arnold's foresightedness.

**Beginnings of the 'Bible as Literature' Movement**

At the very moment, then, when historical criticism of the Bible was at the zenith of its influence, the reasons for its decline in the twentieth century were becoming apparent to both religious and secular critics. By the end of the nineteenth century, the outlines of the 'Bible as Literature' movement were taking shape. Arising out of the Lowth-Coleridge-Arnold tradition, this movement would ultimately go beyond Arnold in establishing the validity of literary criticism of the Bible as a discipline independent of religion.

The foundational text of the 'Bible as Literature' movement appeared during the final decade of the century. Richard G. Moulton was an English critic, classicist, and Shakespearian scholar who developed an interest in the Bible. He moved to the United States to become Professor of Literary Theory and Interpretation at the University of Chicago. His textbook, *The Literary Study of the Bible: An Account of the Leading Forms of Literature Represented in the Sacred Writings* (1895), merits careful attention, for it was to become the standard literary approach until well into the twentieth century.

Moulton's subtitle is the tipoff to his methodology: "An Account of the Leading Literary Forms." Moulton explains: "Its underlying principle is that a clear grasp of the outer form is an
essential guide to the inner matter and spirit" (vi). Moulton unreservedly adopts the classical system of genre classification as the basic scheme for his biblical treatment. He writes of the "biblical ode," "elegy," "monody," "dramatic lyrics," "lyric idyl," "epic poetry," "epic history," and the like. In an appendix, he offers a detailed breakdown of the various literary types.

In his preface, Moulton defines and defends a literary approach to study of the Bible, attributing the newness of such an approach to recent developments in literary studies:

In the sense in which I use the term, the Literary Study of the Bible is a new study. Its newness rests, not upon sudden advance in our knowledge of Semitic peoples and institutions, but upon our changed attitude to the whole field of literary investigation. It is not too much to say that the Study of Literature, properly so called, is only just beginning. In the past we have concerned ourselves, not with Literature, but with literatures... We are now beginning to feel that there is a separate entity, Literature, which claims to itself a special type of treatment... So the investigation which recognises the unity of literature, and frames its methods solely in application to this literary field, is the newer Study of Literature; and in the spirit of this study the present work has been undertaken. (iv-v)

Whereas Arnold's literary approach was intended in the service of religion and culture, Moulton speaks to academia in his effort to restore respectability to Bible study:

It has come by now to be generally recognised that the Classics of Greece and Rome stand to us in the position of an ancestral literature,—the inspiration of our great masters, and bond of common associations between our poets and their readers. But does not such a position belong equally to the literature of the Bible? ...Our school and college curricula will not have shaken off their medieval narrowness and renaissance paganism until Classical and Biblical literatures stand
side by side as sources of our highest culture. (xiii)

Moulton respects the contributions of historical criticism, but emphasizes the importance of not confusing the two approaches:

The 'Higher Criticism'—so it is called in popular phraseology—seems to me in the main an historical analysis. Its allegiance is not to literature, but to Semitic Studies... In the inquiry here undertaken, topics like these will have scarcely any place. Literary investigation stops short at the question [of] what we have in the text of the Bible, without examining how it has come to us. It is for the interest of accuracy in both studies that their procedures be kept distinct...

(vi, emphasis his)

Finally, Moulton upholds the methodological priority of the literary approach: "Historical and literary study are equal in importance: but for priority in order of time the literary treatment has the first claim" (viii-ix).

In the same year (1895), Moulton published The Modern Reader's Bible: The Books of the Bible with Three Books of the Apocrypha Presented in Modern Literary Form. This new arrangement followed the English Revised Version (R.V.), but eliminated chapter, verse, and most paragraph divisions, which Moulton considered an injury to literary form. In addition, poetry was printed in verse (utilizing the principle of parallelism developed by Lowth), drama was recast as dramatic dialogue, and the order of the Bible books was rearranged with historical considerations in mind, but primarily according to genre—which he terms a 'structural' arrangement: "Its scheme has been... to investigate, from internal evidence of the writings themselves, and by principles of comparative literature, the exact literary form and detailed structure of the
books of Scripture" (Modern Reader's Bible vii).

Although he was not writing in the service of religion, Moulton's literary approach is not antagonistic to faith:

The revelation which is the basis of our modern religion has been made in the form of literature: grasp of its literary structure is the true starting-point for spiritual interpretation, and the literary study of the Bible is the common ground on which varying theologies may meet. (Modern Reader's Bible vii)

Yet this 'assumption' of religion is one more way in which his work is now dated. Even granting that Moulton might have been courting a largely religious audience, one wonders whether he would be able to comprehend a thoroughly secular approach to the Bible. Moulton unashamedly asserts the unity of the biblical books, an act that raises suspicions of religious bias in our current literary climate:

The sacred canon is not a mere Reading List, recommending the sixty Best Books of the Churches. These sixty books, with all their varieties of age, authorship, literary form, are, when properly arranged, felt to draw together with a connectedness like the unity of a dramatic plot. (Modern Reader's Bible viii)

But overall, Moulton's approach is decidedly modern. In his notes to teachers, Moulton emphasizes the importance of treating the biblical text as a whole, stressing the 'book' as the literary unit:

The teacher should in a single lesson give the class their first impressions of a book. Then it should be studied in detail... But before passing from the book, the teacher should again present the whole at a single view. No principle of literary study is more important than that of grasping clearly a literary work as a single whole. (Modern Reader's Bible 1719)

Moulton is also aware of the danger of allowing Bible 'helps' and
other secondary material to distract the reader:

[T]he Bible is unique. And the best treatment for this literature is to read it. For those who wish, there exists a vast apparatus of all kinds of helps in Bible study. But let us not forget the subtle and besetting danger in all literary study—that the process of studying tends to eclipse the literature itself. Scholarship can do much for the Bible: but imagination and literary receptivity can do more. (Modern Reader's Bible ix-x)

In 1896, a collection of essays, entitled The Bible as Literature, appeared. The lead essay, which is Moulton's, carries the same title as the collection. It is largely a defense of the literary approach to the Bible. Here Moulton points out how "the very name 'Bible' may be translated 'Literature'" (Moulton 1896, 3). He describes how the traditional doctrine of inspiration has led people to do "homage to the separate sentences" and ultimately regard the Bible as "a store-house of isolated texts" (4). He finally argues for the priority of literary study for "proper spiritual interpretation" (5).

In the first (1895) edition of Literary Study of the Bible, Moulton had realistically remarked that "the number is few of those to whom the Bible appeals as literature" and that only "one person is willing to read the Bible for every ten who are ready to read about it" (iii-iv). This may well be true even now, a century later. Yet, in 1899, Moulton could write in his second edition: "It is with the greatest satisfaction that I have noticed, in the four years which have intervened since the first edition of this work, the rapid advance in public recognition of the specially literary study of the Bible" (xiv).
W.R. Inge confidently wrote in 1899, "We may be thankful that the cobwebs...spun over the sacred texts have now been cleared away, so that we can at last read our Bible as its authors intended it to be read" (Inge 272). Inge was referring to the benefits of historical biblical criticism, and most literary critics would not want to minimize such contributions. A historical reading of the Bible can be a profound experience.

Nevertheless, as nineteenth-century literary critics began pointing out, historicism has severe limitations. Just as the 'higher criticism' had at one time been a dissenting voice within the heavily dogmatic field of biblical studies, so now literary study of the Bible was becoming a minority 'alternative' to historical criticism. When, in the twentieth century, the influence of historicism would decline, literary study of the Bible would bid fair to become a serious contender among critical approaches to the Bible.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:


2 The main point of controversy was the Genesis creation story. The average church member had no doubt that the universe and its inhabitants had been created in six twenty-four hour days. This belief was popularized by Bishop Ussher in the marginal commentary of the Authorized Version of the Bible. Subtracting back through the genealogies, Ussher calculated that humans were created in 4004 B.C.E. Given England's recent isolation from the continent, the impact of science on the English mind was particularly devastating, and it hit the general public at mid-century:

---1859. Darwin published On the Origin of Species. The first printing sold out on the first day. The public suspected (and Darwin confirmed in his 1871 sequel, The Descent of Man) that the doctrine of the special creation of man as distinct from animals was under revision.

---1860. The Wilberforce-Huxley debate at Oxford made evolution a highly public issue. In the same year, Essays and Reviews, a collection of papers by seven leading Anglican churchmen under the leadership of Benjamin Jowett, was published. It became evident that German scholarship was beginning to influence the Church of England.

---1862. The first part of a treatise on the Pentateuch by John W. Colenso, Bishop of Natal, appeared. It was a very mild version
of the German higher criticism, and had been prompted by the questions of an untutored Zulu regarding certain historical discrepancies in the biblical accounts. Colenso was temporarily defrocked.

—1863. Lyell's Evidence of the Antiquity of Man eliminated the possibility of harmonizing Genesis and the findings of geology. This same year, the French orientalist Ernest Renan's Vie de Jesus created a storm in France and was immediately translated into English. Borrowing heavily from German scholarship, Renan's book was probably the single greatest cause of the Roman Catholic Church affirming the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870. Many French Bible scholars were excommunicated during the nineteenth century, and Rome did not embrace modern scholarship until well into the twentieth century.

—1864. Eleven thousand English clergy signed the Oxford Declaration, upholding the whole Bible as the Word of God and affirming the biblical teaching that the wicked would be everlastingly punished. Given the empirical nature of the Bible-science controversy, the issue had been settled in favor of science before the battle even began. Nevertheless, the English Church sounded the battle cry. The time had come for people to choose sides in the debate. What followed was a head-on clash between science and religion. It was an indication of the heatedness of this issue that the two foremost English politicians of the Victorian era, Gladstone and Disraeli, felt obligated to take a position. Robert Browning, not one to be easily disturbed in matters of faith, could only write in "Gold Hair," his poem of this same year,

The candid incline to surmise of late
That the Christian faith may be false, I find;
For our Essays-and-Reviews debate
Begins to tell on the public mind,
And Colenso's words have weight.

(Browning 4:235)

A later poem of Browning's, "Development" (1889), depicting as it does the poet's reaction upon learning that the Homeric epics are 'myth,' is surely intended as an allegory of the higher criticism. The narrator of the poem recalls that the German Homeric critics had

Proved there was never any Troy at all,
Neither Besiegers nor Besieged,—nay, worse,—
No actual Homer, no authentic text,
No warrant for the fiction I, as fact,
Had treasured in my heart and soul so long—
Ay, mark you! and as fact held still, still hold,
Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts...

(Browning 10:353)

The fine points of natural selection had not yet been resolved. But by the time of Darwin's 1871 sequel, The Descent of Man, the principle of evolution in nature had become scientifically incontrovertible. The mainline churches soon gave up the battle.
Christian theologians managed to put a positive spin on the findings of science with their doctrine of 'progressive revelation' which taught that religion, too, was upwardly evolving and would not be superseded by the nineteenth-century doctrine of progress. The abiding achievement of Cardinal Newman was his synthesis of this new concept of doctrinal development with traditional belief in the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith.'

3 Moulton's comments on poetry and prose are instructive:

The rhythmic system of Hebrew scripture is peculiar from its overlapping of verse and prose. . . . The books of the prophets are miscellanies of prose and verse... The only reason then for such a title as Bible Poetry is that three books of Scripture stand apart from the rest of the Old Testament in not falling under its divisions of history, prophecy, and wisdom. The three are the Book of Psalms, the work traditionally known as the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the single relic of sacred love poetry that has come down to us as Solomon's Song. There is, however, no other point in common between the three except that they are poetry.

(Modern Reader's Bible 1430-31)

His classical bias does not rid him of romantic notions:

The Bible goes back to a remote antiquity when literature indeed was at its highest development... At first, the literary forms conveying all this were simply story and song; as the nation reaches its maturity, the expanding literature breaks away from the historic framework into independent departments of prophecy, poetry, wisdom... Scholarship can do much for the Bible: but imagination and literary receptivity can do more... The simplicity of the idyl is found perfect in Ruth and Tobit, and far more attractive than the artificiality of Theocritus.

(Modern Reader's Bible v,ix,x)
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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO 1960

It is the thesis of this dissertation that literary study of the Bible is as old as the Bible. Over the centuries, it has been carried out either unconsciously or as a somewhat suspect alternative to more conventional approaches. There have been a couple of brief periods when, for reasons that were usually extraliterary, the literary approach attained a measure of notoriety. But in the twentieth century, something altogether new is occurring. The Bible is receiving widespread, serious consideration as a work of literary art. This is due both to the steady decline of historicism and to a gradual coming together of biblical and secular criticism.¹

The Decline of Historical Criticism

The nineteenth century was the heyday of historical criticism. Scholars had come to believe that 'truth' lay not in church dogma but in the study of origins. Biblical critics therefore needed to go behind the final text of the Bible. The resulting 'histories of Israel' and 'lives of Jesus' relied heavily upon source criticism—the examination of the Bible's constituent literary sources. It was believed that only such a procedure could supply a firm foundation for either religion or history.
But historical biblical criticism, which reigned virtually unchallenged at the close of the nineteenth century, has fallen on hard times in the twentieth. Interestingly, it first foundered on historical grounds—a weakness which had been noted by the father of the historical-critical method himself, Benedict Spinoza. Here is how it happened.

By the close of the nineteenth century, New Testament source critics had concluded that Mark, as a primary source for Matthew and Luke, was the earliest of the written gospel accounts. Being closest in time to the original eyewitnesses, it was generally accepted that Mark could be used with confidence as a source of knowledge concerning the life and ministry of Jesus. The death knell of this uncritical acceptance of the historicity of Mark, and the first big blow to the entire historical-critical method, was sounded by Wilhelm Wrede (1859-1906) in his Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien ("The Messianic Secret in the Gospels"), published in 1901. Wrede traced the theme of secrecy, which permeates the Gospel of Mark, and conclusively demonstrated that this gospel was as much a theological statement as a historical record. It was written in faith and for the purpose of inspiring faith. After Wrede, never again could biblical scholars regard Mark (or any of the gospels) as a simple unbiased account.

The next step was taken by Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) in Von Reimarus zu Wrede (1906), translated into English as The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede. This study, which popularized some earlier findings of Johannes Weiss, shattered the prevailing notion of Jesus
as essentially a moral teacher. Nineteenth-century interpreters, in their effort to portray Jesus as a modern liberal and Christianity as a religion experiencing positive evolutionary development, had deliberately ignored the miraculous and apocalyptic dimensions of the gospel accounts. It was now realized that these aspects were so deeply embedded in the gospel tradition that they could not be removed. In short, the quest of the 'historical Jesus' does not take us far behind the 'Christ of faith.'

Another source of embarrassment to historical criticism had to do with its research into the religious customs of the ancient Near East. From this perspective, biblical religion was merely one small line of religious development which took place in the ancient Fertile Crescent. This realization seemed to diminish the significance of historical criticism along with that of the religion it was investigating.

Finally, mounting military tension in Europe—which would soon break out into World War I—called into question the widespread nineteenth-century belief in progress. Popular fascination with (and scholarly interest in) history was just one of the casualties of the resulting demise of optimism. In its place, twentieth-century man has become more interested in his present existential needs. Scientific historical criticism strikes him as too distant, detached, and impersonal.

One solution, of course, would be a return to dogmatism. Indeed, this century has seen a resurgence of both Roman Catholicism and religious fundamentalism. But the Judeo-Christian worldview, which had begun to crack as far back as the Renaissance, was by the
beginning of the twentieth century in serious trouble. Twentieth-century criticism has come to reflect this major shift of world view. On the one hand, the aims of criticism became much more modest. Rather than concern itself with the cosmic meaning of a work of art or its historical motivation, criticism would explore its human significance. This involved a drastic narrowing of focus, compared with the aims of earlier critics. Yet, ironically, the status of criticism increased. Serious works of literary criticism attained a status comparable to that which sermons had held during the Victorian era. Part of the reason for this is that aesthetic truth was one of the last categories of truth that retained meaning for modern man.

Formalism and the Biblical Theology Movement

Two critical methods which would satisfy the new mood appeared during the early part of the century, one purely secular and the other conventionally biblical. Although they are distinct, the similarity of their approaches is evident.

The secular approach is known as formalism. Although several variant methods come under this umbrella, they have in common the belief that the meaning of a work of art is determined by (and therefore inseparable from) its literary form. The most influential variety of formalism was the New Criticism, whose origin lay in the writings of the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), particularly his *Aesthetics* (1902). Croce's theories were immediately championed by Joel Spingarn in his 1910 lecture, "The New Criticism."
According to the New Critics, the meaning of a work is not to be sought in extrinsic considerations such as authorial intention or the historical context of the composition of the work. Rather, 'close readings' are carried out, and meaning is discerned upon consideration of the work's internal dynamics.

T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards are commonly regarded as early practitioners of this 'new' approach to literature. Eliot insisted that a work of literary art is not to be understood as the outpouring of the poet's inner self (romantic expressionism), nor as a window onto his world (biographical history), but as a 'thing made,' or artefact. Richards's *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) is an early systematic statement; it insists on the autonomy of the individual work of art. But the New Criticism did not become a true literary movement until the 1930's in America, under the leadership of men such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, René Wellek, and Austin Warren. Its classic expression is John Crowe Ransom's book, *The New Criticism* (1941).

New Critics are united in their concern to demonstrate the intrinsic worth of imaginative literature. Theirs is a protest against a view of life and knowledge that rests on scientific fact. As E.M. Forster expressed it, "Information is true if it is accurate. A poem is true if it hangs together. Information points to something else. A poem points to nothing but itself. Information is relative. A poem is absolute" (Forster 14).

New-critical readings of the Bible would not appear until mid-century. Nevertheless, the same ethos which produced the New Criticism produced a parallel movement within biblical studies which
has come to be called the 'biblical theology' movement. Its originator was Karl Barth (1886-1968).

Exponents of 'biblical theology' acknowledge that the biblical writers had little interest in modern standards of historical accuracy. They would not have been flattered to be called 'objective,' and therefore their writings cannot be considered objective history. As a result, we moderns must accept the Bible on its own terms—as a statement of 'truth' expressed in theological and not historical language.

Barth's Romerbrief (1919; English: "The Epistle to the Romans") became the model for this 'neo-orthodox' exegesis, the grounds of which were neither dogmatic nor historical, but rather existential. Such a possibility was first explored by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55). Barth's concern was always to discern the theology of the text, and not to read any preconceived meaning into it. Later exegetes would seek the distinctive theologies of other biblical books.

Walther Eichrodt's massive Theologie des Alten Testaments ("Old Testament Theology," 1933-39) extended the method of Barth to the entire Old Testament canon. He finds the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel as its unifying theme. Such an extension of criticism to include the entire canon of the Hebrew Bible may be considered a theological counterpart to what T.S. Eliot proposed in his 1928 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent:"

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone... you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he
shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new. (Eliot 4-5)

Parallels such as this demonstrate that the history of criticism—both biblical and literary—is one history. In our century, biblical and secular criticism have proceeded under similar presuppositions. Both of them shifted the locus of meaning in a text from the author to the subject matter. Finding historicism to be a critical dead end, Bible critics moved in a more literary direction at the same time that mainline literary critics took new interest in the Bible. By 1960, the two disciplines—which had become separated because of the Enlightenment dichotomy between sacred and secular—were once again speaking to each other. A truly literary biblical criticism could now begin to emerge.

Interestingly, nineteenth-century historicism helped make this coming together possible. Historical criticism was a 'neutral' exegetical method that could be applied to both religious and secular texts. It helped foster the notion that any literary text could be understood by means of appropriate hermeneutics. So from a purely literary vantage point, historical criticism had served its purpose. It had made its unique contribution to literary study of the Bible (see Chapter Seven), and could now step aside.

The Literary Evolution of Historical Biblical Criticism

A. Form Criticism and Genre Studies.

By the beginning of the century, source criticism had reached
a dead end. Even after endless dissection of the biblical texts into their constituent literary sources, source criticism had not been able to produce a historical Jesus. But the invention of another critical approach—form criticism—seemed, for awhile at least, to revive historical criticism.

By recognizing that the literary sources themselves are products of an oral tradition, form criticism was able to take the historical quest one step further. It focused on the original 'sitz im leben' (life setting) of the communities that transmitted the 'forms' (genres). The fundamental question which the form critic asks is, 'Why was the story told?' or 'What is the point of the story?' The assumption here is that the meaning or point of the story has not only preserved its content but also shaped its form. The meaning of the story is thus inseparable from the way in which it is told.

The original motivation for form criticism was clearly literary. The originator of form criticism, Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), had read Herder at an early age. It drove him to find out how the 'spirit of Hebrew poetry' came into expression in the biblical writings. Gunkel's The Legends of Genesis (1901) laid the groundwork for form-critical study:

The beauty of the legends of Genesis has always been a source of delight to readers of refined taste... Scholars have more rarely expressed appreciation of the beauty of these narratives, often perhaps for personal reasons, and perhaps often because the aesthetic point of view seemed to them incompatible with the dignity of science. However, we do not share this prejudice, but, on the contrary, are of the opinion that one who ignores the artistic form of these legends not only deprives himself of a great pleasure, but is unable properly to
a dead end. Even after endless dissection of the biblical texts into their constituent literary sources, source criticism had not been able to produce a historical Jesus. But the invention of another critical approach—form criticism—seemed, for awhile at least, to revive historical criticism.

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satisfy the scientific demands of the understanding of Genesis. (Gunkel 1901, 37)

Gunkel acknowledged that some legends are 'historical' in that they contain the remnant of a tradition of some actual event. But, emphasizing that legends arose for the purpose of explaining something, he classified the Genesis legends into 'types' or 'forms' on the basis of what they explain: ethnological legends, etymological legends, ceremonial legends, and geological legends. The prime task of the critic is therefore to determine the literary types represented in the Old Testament. . . . To the people of Israel the laws of literary form were as familiar as the rules of Hebrew grammar. They obeyed them unconsciously and lived in them; it is only we who have to learn to understand them. (Gunkel 1906, 59-61, emphasis his)

Gunkel thus extended the notion of genre beyond the classical categories employed by Moulton (tragedy, comedy, epic, etc.) to include oral 'forms' consisting of legends, sayings, parables, proverbs, songs, and other yet-to-be determined genre. This was a great advance over source criticism:

Source criticism had worked with too restricted and narrowly 'academic' a view of this ancient society, as if its members were all scholars not unlike the higher critics themselves, bent over desks from morning till night. But the true path to understanding the literature of the Old Testament lay in recognizing that it was the literature of a whole culture, a people like other peoples past and present. (Barton 29)

From early on, form criticism showed literary promise. An early advocate of this literary dimension of form criticism was Hans Windisch (1881-1935), a German New Testament scholar during the
1920's. Windisch recognized how Gunkel's work could nourish a sense of the permanent value of the Bible for modern man. But, unfortunately from the standpoint of literary study of the Bible, this literary dimension of form criticism would not become its ultimate legacy.

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), already famous for his work on the Old Testament (see Chapter Seven), was the first to propose the application of Gunkel's insights about literary form to the New Testament. In his Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien (Berlin, 1905; English: "Introduction to the First Three Gospels"), he makes it clear that the original gospel sources were small units of oral tradition which reflect conditions in the early church as much as they do information about Jesus. The critic must therefore try to discern which stories are attributable to the historical Jesus, and which were influenced by the needs and concerns of the early church. Martin Dibelius (From Tradition to Gospel, 1917) and Rudolph Bultmann (History of the Synotic Tradition, 1921) then proceeded to carry out this kind of criticism on the canonical gospels.

The form criticism of Bultmann, in particular, established the pattern of biblical criticism for most of the remainder of the century. His stance was clear: "We must recognize that a literary work or fragment of tradition is a primary source for the historical situation out of which it arose, and is only a secondary source for the historical details concerning which it gives information" (cited in Morgan 106). As one of Bultmann's interpreters expresses it, "The remarkable thing about reading the Bible from the biblical
point of view is that the Bible shows no interest in the facts of past history, or in theological data for their own sake. It rather exposes the life of the reader to the problem of his personal existence and directs him to a solution" (Michalson 103-04).

This 'existential historicism' of Bultmann is consistent with the modern understanding of history as interpretation of events, and not merely a chronicle of facts. It is exactly the reverse of nineteenth-century criticism, where the task of the interpreter was to project himself back in time in order to discern the text's meaning within its original context. Bultmann, for example, understands the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ to signify the abandonment of worldly security for 'new life,' and the Second Coming/Last Judgment as mythical depictions of man confronting his mortality.

Bultmann's contribution to literary study of the Bible is equivocal. On the one hand, his attentiveness to 'genre' is evidence that historical criticism was beginning to move in a more literary direction. Bultmann discerned the existence of apothegms (stories that lead up to a climactic saying of Jesus), prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, wisdom sayings, proverbs, community rules, legends, miracle stories, exorcisms, healings, and so on. He accomplished this by comparing these elements of the tradition with comparable first-century material from the Jewish-Greco-Roman world.

Moreover, there was biblical precedent for Bultmann's approach. Continuing in the Barthian 'biblical theology' tradition, Bultmann maintained that his method---known as demythologization---was practiced by both St. John and St. Paul, who restated the
existential significance of the gospel myths in nonmythological language. Whereas nineteenth-century liberal theologians had by and large considered myth irrelevant in the modern era, Bultmann demurred. He insisted that because biblical myth had meaning for its original audience, it could be translated into language that would be existentially meaningful in the modern era.

But form criticism also violated literary sensibility. Bultmann followed the example of Luther, whose distinction between 'letter' and 'spirit' ultimately divorced the religious content of the Bible from its literary form. According to Bultmann, what is existentially significant about Scripture must in fact be separated and translated from the form in which it occurs into a contemporary idiom that will best speak to one's existential needs. Form criticism was also guilty of the same atomizing tendency found in source criticism. It took seriously the literary forms of the oral tradition, but at the expense of large scale literary analysis of the finished product.

The irony is that, in spite of having taken historical criticism one step closer to its referent, form criticism ultimately led to a far more radical skepticism as to whether anything could be known of the historical Jesus. Its practitioners, for one thing, had little interest in history; they were much more concerned with existential meaning. Moreover, form criticism is not a foolproof method. It still requires an educated guess as to which gospel elements are attributable to Jesus and which are the creative invention of first-century believers. At mid-century, it seemed that historical criticism had peered back in time as far as it
possibly could—and the historical Jesus still remained elusive.

Of course, one solution would be to declare that the truth of Christianity does not depend on a historical Jesus, but rather on the development of the faith of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This variation of Richard Simon's seventeenth-century proposal was put forth in the twentieth century by the Roman Catholic Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) in *Le Evangile et l'église* ("The Gospel and the Church," 1902). However, it led to his prompt excommunication, together with the imposition of rigid control on Catholic biblical study until Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) made historical criticism not only permissible but "a duty" (cited in Krentz 2). Even after this, further restrictions were imposed; it was not until the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that full critical freedom was accorded Roman Catholic scholars.

B. Redaction Criticism.

A further move in a literary direction occurred with the advent of 'redaction criticism.' Redaction critics reminded everyone that the early believing community was not the only influence on the composition of the biblical documents. As Baur had pointed out a century earlier, the unique theological interests of the final editor also need to be taken into consideration. Whereas form criticism had regarded the gospel writers as mere collectors of tradition, redaction criticism insisted on their status as editors ("redactors") who were personally responsible for the finished product. Earlier biblical critics, concentrating as they did on sources, minimized such editorial contributions. Robert Alter's
humorous assessment is not far from the mark:

Biblical critics frequently assume, out of some dim preconception about the transmission of texts in 'primitive' cultures, that the redactors were in the grip of a kind of manic tribal compulsion, driven again and again to include units of traditional material that made no connective sense, for reasons they themselves could not have explained. (Alter 20)

The challenge facing the redactors was not only to stitch together the written and oral units of tradition, but to create a 'frame' within which to situate their material. A good example of this is the book of Judges. The modern reader can easily see how the redactor arranged his material in repeated cycles of rebellion, oppression, petition, deliverance, and rest. This framework is part of the meaning of the finished work, and reflects the redactor's theological interpretation of his sources.

By mid-century, then, New Testament scholars were beginning to turn their attention away from the literary history of the biblical texts and onto the redaction (shaping) of the end-product. The first published work of redaction criticism was Gunther Bornkamm's "Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew" (1948), followed by Hans Conzelmann's The Theology of Luke (1954) and Willi Marxsen's Mark the Evangelist (1956). Bornkamm's study shows how Matthew has reinterpreted his Marcan source material. Marxsen's demonstrates how the redactor of Mark has highlighted a succession of confessions of faith: Peter (8:29), Jesus himself (14:62), and finally the Roman centurion (15:39).

From a literary point of view, this was a welcome development. For too long, higher critics had been shredding the biblical texts
into first 'sources' and then 'forms.' And then, after all this, their histories were still largely conjectural. But once it is granted that the biblical writers exercised a measure of creativity, and that the literary shape of the final edition can convey highly-developed theological nuances, it seems that the time is fulfilled and literary study of the Bible is at hand. For if redaction critics are to decide which statements are to be attributed to any given biblical author, they must first engage in basic literary analysis, particularly with regard to point of view. It only remained now to suggest that the biblical redactors might have felt free to alter or go beyond their sources in order to practice genuine literary creativity in the composition of biblical texts.

**The End of the Historical-Critical Method?**

Minus the question mark, this is the title of a book by Gerhard Maier (1974). Yet the demise of historicism is both unlikely and undesirable. Archaeological discoveries continue to provide new and helpful literary insights. For example, it had long been asserted that New Testament Greek was a special 'biblical' dialect of the language. But the growing quantity of first-century papyri has suggested, instead, that the New Testament was written in koiné ("common") Greek, the language in common use at that time. More recently, the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran has supplied scholars with manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible nearly one thousand years older than any previously discovered.

It is ironic that although historical criticism failed to
demonstrate the historical reliability of biblical narrative, the findings of archaeology have tended to support it. In *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940), William Foxwell Albright, the dean of twentieth-century biblical archaeology, vouches for the substantial historicity of the patriarchal and Mosaic traditions. According to Albright, archaeology has confirmed that the ancestors of the Israelites originated from Haran in northwest Mesopotamia.

A similar development has taken place in New Testament studies. Although Protestant fundamentalism was rarely open to critical scholarship, its 'evangelical' successors have produced sophisticated arguments for the essential historicity of the gospel narratives. One example: *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (first edition 1943; sixth edition still in print) by F.F. Bruce, late Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester.

So just as there has been a literary dimension within historical exegesis, there rightly remains a historical dimension to literary exegesis. Archetypal criticism, with its strong interest in primitive myth, is unapologetically historical. The same is true of rhetorical approaches. As the twentieth century draws to a close, historicism continues to serve a hermeneutical function. But no longer is historical criticism the only academically respectable approach to the Bible. The bravura that accompanied so much of nineteenth-century higher criticism has now itself become history.

**Increasing Biblical Interest Within Literary Studies**

Most significant twentieth-century art has, directly or
indirectly, made some kind of ideological statement. As criticism has followed this trend, the boundary line between the sacred and the secular has begun to blur, resulting in a renewed openness to the Bible.


In the opening paragraph of his seminal essay, "Religion and Literature" (1935)—which helped launch the entire religion-and-literature enterprise, Eliot asserts that "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. . . . The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards" (Eliot 21). Even though most twentieth-century critics would not share Eliot's overtly religious stance, his dismissal of both the possibility and desirability of morally neutral, value-free criticism has been applauded by a wide spectrum of subsequent critics—from religious believers to Marxists to feminists. Eliot's reliance upon biblical allusion, particularly in The Waste Land (1922) and Four Quartets (1936-42), is well known.

B. Later New Criticism.

By the 1950's, many New Critics were giving up their early understanding of poetry as strictly autonomous and criticism as entirely aesthetic. The essays of Allen Tate, for example, increasingly dealt with the religious implications of literature. Tate concluded that literature's portrayal of human love is ultimately possible only because of the love of God; hence, the critic applies religious criteria alongside literary ones. Similarly, the later essays of Cleanth Brooks deal with the
religious implications of metaphor and myth.

C. Erich Auerbach (1892-1957).

Ever since Coleridge, secular critics were agreed that the Bible ought to be studied 'like any other book.' But from the standpoint of aesthetics, the Bible's narrative reporting of religious history had always proven difficult to justify as literary writing. The statement of J. Middleton Murry is typical: "[T]he style of one half of the English Bible is atrocious. A great part of the historical books of the Old Testament, the Gospels in the New, are examples of all that writing should not be" (Murry 135).

The genre of historical narrative was simply too problematical. Most literary approaches to the Bible, until well into this century, either treated the Bible as poetry or were concerned with the poetry of the Bible--and even then, the New Critics maintained that only self-consciously imaginative literature could be subjected to genuine literary analysis. Historical realism was consigned to historical and not literary critics.

The status of biblical narrative changed almost overnight with the publication of Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Culture* (1946, English 1953), a work that has been crucial in reuniting secular with biblical criticism. In the chapter "Odysseus's Scar," Auerbach contrasts biblical realism ("fraught with background") with the Homeric, which is heavily foregrounded. That is to say, Homer stresses physical and psychological details, and his epics are well suited to depict physical action. This is very different from the Abraham story; when God speaks to Abraham, we have little indication of Abraham's
location or circumstances.

In similar fashion, Homer's heroes carry little sense of history, whereas the past weighs heavily upon their Hebrew counterparts. This provides a further sense of background that is lacking in the Greek literature. According to Auerbach, the human characters in the Bible "have greater depth of time, fate, and consciousness than do the human beings in Homer" (Auerbach 12). The differing modes of realistic representation thus become a window to their respective understandings of reality; the manner of expression is the best clue we have of the writer's attitude toward the history he is relating.

Here, then, was a nonpartisan, classical scholar finding art in the religious narratives of ancient Israel! What is more, Auerbach described how a truly literary approach would have to take the Bible's truth claims seriously: "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history" (Auerbach 15).

Frank Kermode has declared, "Any historical account of the rise of modern literary studies in the Bible should probably begin with Erich Auerbach's Mimesis" (Kermode 29). In their general introduction to the Literary Guide to the Bible (1987), Robert Alter and Frank Kermode elaborate:

The first chapters [of Mimesis]...not only offered new perspectives on the Bible itself but also suggested new connections between the achievements of the biblical writers and the entire tradition of Western literature. Auerbach showed that the old simple contrasts between
Hebraism and Hellenism were misleading, that the realisms invented by the writers of the Bible were at least as important to the European future as was the literature of ancient Greece. (Alter and Kermode 4)

D. Archetypal Criticism.

The symbolist movement at the turn of the century took an interest in the myths and beliefs of primitive man. If Kant was right—that the human mind is no passive mirror, but rather a shaper of reality—these ancient symbolizations were extremely significant. As mentioned in Chapter Two, an early champion of the poetic value of myth was Giambattista Vico. J.G. Herder was among the first to read the Bible from this perspective (see Chapter Six). Coleridge sought to introduce the mythological approach to the English-speaking world, but the nineteenth century quickly became preoccupied with historical concerns.

The ancient Greek term "archetype" was resurrected in 1919 by the noted psychologist Carl Jung, and was promptly introduced into the language of criticism. Jung was describing those collections of images, sometimes called the collective unconscious, which recur in mythologies widely separated in time and place, and which strike a very deep chord within all human cultures in all periods of history. Archetypal critics such as Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye find in mythical archetypes the key to artistic creation. Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934) catalogs the primordial images that occur in poetry. Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (1957) relies heavily on archetypal criticism in his effort to turn literary criticism into a true science.

Myth has come to be considered the source of religion as well
as literature. Sir James Frazer's monumental study, *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890), is an elaborate documentation of this. The movement of literary criticism in the direction of myth is, therefore, a move which has further blurred the neoclassical distinction between sacred and secular.

Archetypal critics have become avid practitioners of literary study of the Bible. In 1952, the noted psychologist Carl Jung wrote to a friend:

Recently an elderly Swiss clergyman wrote me a touching letter emphasizing that through my writings I had at last opened the way to the Bible for him. I certainly never expected that.... But you can see from this that the figurative language of the Bible is not understood even by a clergyman. (cited in Rollins 56, emphasis his)

Several twentieth-century writers have attempted to recreate the biblical mythological universe in contemporary language. *Joseph and His Brothers*, the tetralogy of Thomas Mann (1875-1955) published in stages between 1933 and 1943, may be the most ambitious biblical epic since Milton. Mann fuses the archetypes of Jung with material from archaeology, orientology, egyptology, comparative religion, and biblical criticism—not to mention Arabic and Persian versions of the Joseph story.

*Joseph and His Brothers* is essentially a bildungsroman. The path of Joseph's development moves from Canaan to Egypt, from the pious and primitive past of his forebears to a highly developed civilization with all its temptations, snobbishness, and absurdities. Mann, always the ironist, finds that 'salvation' simply brings a different kind of bondage.
There has been a movement which might be called "Christian romantic mythopoesis." This includes the religious fantasy of George MacDonald, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Madeleine L'Engle. According to Tolkien, "just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth" (Carpenter 147). For Lewis, it is through myth that "we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction" (Lewis 1970, 66). The hero of his science-fiction fantasy *Perelandra* discovers that "the triple distinction of truth from myth and both from fact was purely terrestrial" (Lewis 1944, 144). Myth, Lewis would say, is truer than fact. Such writers, in true romantic fashion, have fused art and religion.

In summary, a number of literary artists and critics outside of conventional biblical criticism have, during the twentieth century, warmed up to biblical religion. The split that took place between religion and literature shortly after Coleridge may well be coming together in the final decades of this century. Literature would seem to be a more natural ally to religion than history, for history searches into particulars whereas literature is more concerned with universals. C.S. Lewis bluntly pointed out how the historical-critical approach of biblical critics is at odds with good literary criticism:

Whatever these men may be as Bible critics, I distrust them as critics. They seem to me to lack literary judgment, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading.... These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and
can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.  
(Lewis 1975, 106, 111)

The 'Bible as Literature' Movement

The twentieth-century 'Bible as Literature' movement has played a pivotal role in this gradual coming together of biblical and literary criticism. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold sought to elevate poetry to the status of religion. It was only a matter of time before literary criticism would want to explore the poetic dimension of religious literature. Arnold’s own Literature and Dogma (1873) was, in fact, a call for (and early attempt at) this very thing. Shortly thereafter, Richard Moulton's textbook and biblical anthology (see Chapter Seven) charted the course for this forerunner of modern literary study of the Bible.

The phrase "the Bible as Literature" began to appear soon after the publication of Bishop Robert Lowth's De sacra poesi Hebraeorum in 1753. When his lectures were translated and published in 1829, the editor, Calvin E. Stowe, repeatedly referred to "the literature of the Bible." But the name which finally stuck was taken from an 1896 collection of essays, The Bible as Literature.

During the first half of the twentieth century, literary critics believed that the Bible was either too sacred, too heterogeneous, or too crude to be considered a work of literature. As recently as 1959, Dame Helen Gardner expressed reservations about the literary study of the Bible which was then current, remarking that she valued Mark's gospel "precisely because of its lack of literary quality," i.e. as the product of honest, uneducated sincerity (Gardner 101).
Americans have been more open to this movement than Europeans. Because of the disestablishment of religion here, the American university has been an ideal setting for working out a totally nonsectarian approach to the Bible. Richard Moulton is perhaps the first to have introduced a course in 'the Bible as Literature' into a university curriculum, which he did at the University of Chicago at the turn of the century.

Individuals within the 'Bible as Literature' movement published (A) anthologies and other creative arrangements of biblical literature, and (B) literary-critical discussions of the Bible.

A. Anthologies, Abridgments, and related editorial creations.

Even though the Bible was originally an anthology of Hebrew religious literature, the longstanding sacredness of Scripture seems to have discouraged further anthologizing until the present century. There have been two motivations for such modern editing of the Bible. One has been to classify biblical texts into their respective literary forms. This concern is evident in Moulton's Modern Reader's Bible (1899) as well as James Muilenburg's Specimens of Biblical Literature (1923). The only difference among such anthologies has to do with the particular editor's system of genre classification.

The second motivation for anthologizing has been readability. Matthew Arnold's concern that Bible reading remain part of the standard educational curriculum led him to prepare a special edition of Isaiah 40-66 for children. But twentieth-century editors have gone far beyond this. Edgar Goodspeed and J.M. Powis Smith edited
The Short Bible (1933), which eliminates whole passages and
rearranges books into the chronological order of their composition.
According to Ernest Sutherland Bates, editor of The Bible Designed
to Be Read as Living Literature (1936), the traditional length and
format of the Bible are simply too forbidding for modern readers:

The finest aesthetic qualities may be ruined by redundancy
and irrelevance, and from the literary point of view the
Bible is full of both. . . . Thus, one is emboldened to
proclaim the final heresy—that the part is greater than
the whole, and that, for literary appreciation, one wants
not all the Bible but the best of it. (Bates x-xl)

Bates groups the Old Testament books into three parts: the
historical books, the prophetical books, and finally "poetry, drama,
fiction, and philosophy." The order of the New Testament books
remains intact, except that the letters of Paul are rearranged
according to their presumed dates of composition. Simon & Schuster
is presently revising Bates's 1936 anthology for reissue in 1995.

Closely related to this kind of anthology is the abridgment.
The four gospel accounts had been condensed into a single 'synoptic'
as early as Tatian's Diatessaron in the second century. But in
Moulton's 1895 textbook, there appears an advertisement for The
Bible Abridged, edited by David Greene Haskins, and published by
D.C. Heath & Co. A similar work, The Dartmouth Bible (1950),
quickly became a favorite among 'Bible as Literature' instructors.

Yet another approach is to experiment not so much with the
biblical text as with the format. The text of The Bible for Today,
edited by John Stirling (Oxford, 1941), is the original King James
Version. What is novel is the layout, introductory essays, and art
work. Texts such as "the word of the Lord endureth forever" are
illustrated with a picture of a bombed out village; care for the sick is illustrated by a Red Cross nurse bringing provisions to the bedridden, etc. This is a good example of how, instead of going back in time to seek the original meaning of the text, the Bible is encouraged to speak directly to contemporary issues.

B. Literary-Critical Discussions of the Bible.

Works of criticism within the 'Bible as Literature' movement may be evaluated along two continua:

1. Analysis or Appreciation?

Early twentieth-century literary treatments tended to offer highly apologetical appreciations rather than serious textual analyses. Often they were as interested in promoting and defending a literary approach to the Bible as they were in actually carrying it out. And when they did make a serious attempt, it would generally be appreciative remarks about biblical literature rather than careful study of it.2

The problem with appreciative criticism is that it often tends toward sweeping evaluative generalizations rather than to carefully supported critical interpretation and assessment. There is also the danger of descending into sentimentalism; this happened regularly in the early part of this century.3

Perhaps the explanation behind such 'lite' treatments is that much of the Bible was still difficult to justify as literary writing. The art of biblical poetry had been demonstrated by Lowth two centuries earlier. But prior to Auerbach's groundbreaking work, even the most ardent promoters of the 'Bible as Literature' had very little to say about biblical narrative. And when they did venture
to comment, their remarks now strike us as hopelessly dated. Those works which went beyond appreciation to actually carry out detailed textual study tended to do so from the standpoint of comparative literature, and with a classical orientation. This filtering of biblical literature through a classical grid declined as the Bible began to be compared with folk literatures other than the Greek. It declined further as the literary approach became more sure of itself.

2. Purist or Eclectic?

Literary purists were convinced that literary study of the Bible ought not to be combined with religious or historical-critical approaches. Most writers, however, have tended toward eclecticism. While maintaining the theoretical distinctiveness of the literary approach, they nevertheless practice a blend of approaches. The eclectic literary critic of the Bible will, as a rule, favor dogmatic religious interpretation or historical criticism—but not both.

**Breakthroughs in Genre and Narrative**

The two great twentieth-century contributions to literary study of the Bible have to do with breakthroughs in GENRE (which have helped liberate biblical study from historical genre categories) and in the reading of realistic ("history-like") NARRATIVE.

Nineteenth-century critics had understood the importance of genre in recognizing that the keys to interpretation of a literary work inevitably come from a comparison with other similar works.
But what is meant by "similar?" In his 1895 textbook, Moulton adopted a neoclassical arrangement of genre categories. Books of the Bible were thus compared with classical literature. Writers in the early decades of the twentieth century tended toward a comparison with similar works of the same biblical period and cultural milieu. However, Arthur J. Culler's _Creative Religious Literature: A New Literary Study of the Bible_ (1930) pointed out that genre categories need not be dictated by historical considerations; they can (and perhaps ought to) arise from thematic and formal criteria.¹⁰

Literary appreciation of biblical poetry is nothing new, and countless studies in this area will now be skipped over in order to discuss what is undoubtedly the most exciting development in twentieth-century literary study of the Bible. This is the growing appreciation for and understanding of the art of biblical narrative. During the early years of the 'Bible as Literature' movement, there was as yet little understanding of the complexity and subtlety of biblical narrative. The exception appears in an 1896 essay, "What is Art?" by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910).¹¹

Prior to Auerbach, an occasional critic would at least try to discover artistic merit in biblical narrative, even if he couldn't quite find it. In _The Literary Genius of the New Testament_ (1932), for example, P.C. Sands offers the standard excuse for what was perceived to be a lack of literary art in the gospels. According to Sands, "the motto 'We are witnesses' imposes narrow limits upon the editor or composer of these records. In the faithful repetition of
the sayings of Jesus, and the bare recital of what the disciples claimed to have seen, there seems little scope for literary genius" (Sands 2). Nevertheless, as Sands points out, "Story-telling, even of true stories, is not a simple business. It is significant that the most popular Gospel, that of Luke, is that which shows the greatest literary qualities" (Sands 2).

G. Wilson Knight's The Christian Renaissance (1933) is also devoted to demonstrating the literary nature of the New Testament. Perhaps Knight's most insightful observation is that poetry and history-writing have something in common: both are "creative abstractions from reality" (cited in Minor 334).

At first, the New Criticism had little to offer, for its original interest had been poetry. But subsequent New Critics took an interest in the workings of prose fiction. For example, Wellek and Warren's Theory of Literature (1942) includes a chapter on "The Nature and Modes of Narrative Fiction." Similarly, John Crowe Ransom, in an essay entitled "The Understanding of Fiction" (1950), asks to what extent the understanding of poetry may be applied to the understanding of fiction. His proposal is that "fictional analogues of lyrical moments" may be sought.

The Gospel of John received literary attention earlier than the three 'synoptic' gospels, for it least resembles historical writing. Early twentieth-century writers found a dramatic unity in the book. For example, F.R.M. Hitchcock's "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?" (1923), answers in the affirmative. Clayton R. Bowen's "The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material" (1930) asserts that John's gospel is in no sense a narrative, for it lacks a coherent plot.
Serious explorations of the literary dimension of biblical narrative began appearing in the 1940's. The work of Edward Robertson was among the first. His "The Plot of the Book of Ruth" (1941) and "Old Testament Stories: Their Purpose and Their Art" (1944) appeared in the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library. His interest in storytelling and the embellishment of facts to produce effect is essentially a rhetorical approach.

The Golden Years: The Old Testament Narrative as Literature (1947) by Brooke Peters Church anthologizes a number of the narrative portions of the Old Testament. In an effort to isolate the 'literary' qualities of each passage, it examines themes, forms, and literary techniques. It also includes a running comparison with ancient Greek literary practices.

Three insightful studies in the Gospel of Mark now arrived in quick succession. Auerbach's Mimesis (1946) maintains that Mark's characterization of Peter is one that could not have been written from within the classical tradition. According to Auerbach, Mark's revolutionary view of reality has made his writing a model for realism within the Western literary tradition.

A second study in Mark was Morton S. Enslin's "The Artistry of Mark" (1947). Enslin's analysis of the themes and structure of the gospel show conscious artistic shaping, and not mere editorial redacting.

The third study is by Austin Farrer, a theologian with literary training who continues in the symbolist/formalist tradition of T.S. Eliot. In his Bampton Lectures for 1948, published as The Glass of Vision (1948), the concluding lecture is entitled "The
Poetry of the New Testament." Here Farrer offers a literary argument in defense of the 'abrupt' ending to Mark's gospel:

[This] is a literary debate: and if we try to defend the abrupt ending, we must do it by literary arguments. . . . The purpose of our arguments must be to show that the last line is inevitable in its finality—we must show that, so far from its being impossible for St. Mark to stop here, it would be impossible for him to go on. . . . I do not want you to be convinced that my argument is conclusive, I want to persuade you that it is the proper sort of argument for the purpose, and that it belongs to the genre of literary criticism.

(Farrer 1948, 138-39, emphasis his)

Three years later, Farrer published a complete literary analysis of Mark's gospel, A Study in St. Mark (1951). Farrer finds the book to be a great and complex symbol of the resurrection—"whatever his [Mark's] materials or sources, he dominated them" (Farrer 1951, vi). Farrer also discusses and defends the historical sense of the gospel, although this did not successfully fend off the criticism of Helen Gardner: "As literary criticism, I cannot regard the new symbolical or typological approach to the Gospels as satisfactory" (Gardner 126).

Symbolists will find never-ending possibilities in the Book of Revelation. Such is Farrer's A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse (1949). Here is a detailed study of the literary structure, themes, and imagery of apocalyptic literature. This is a genre that even D.H. Lawrence, whose general disgust for the Bible (a result of early force-feeding) is well known, couldn't resist tackling in Apocalypse (1932).

The Anatomy of Criticism (1957) by Northrop Frye (1912-90) signaled the beginning of the end of the New Criticism. It is also
largely responsible for the sustained attention to literary theory, which began in the 1960's and continues up to the present. The Anatomy of Criticism sketched the outlines of what an archetypal approach to the Bible might resemble. Frye's disillusionment with historical biblical criticism is evident:

The absence of any genuinely literary criticism of the Bible in modern times (until very recently) has left an enormous gap which all the new [historical] knowledge brought to bear on it is quite incompetent to fill. I feel that historical scholarship is without exception 'lower' or analytic criticism, and that 'higher' criticism would be a quite different activity... A genuine higher criticism of the Bible, therefore, would be a synthetizing process which would start with the assumption that the Bible is a definite myth, a single archetypal structure extending from creation to apocalypse. (Frye 315)

Frye does not deny that one of the purposes of the biblical literature was to record factual history. But he maintains that "even what is historical fact is not there because it is 'true' but because it is mythically significant" (Frye 325). He upholds the validity of literary study of the Bible while insisting that the Bible is not, strictly speaking, imaginative 'literature' (in the formalistic sense):

The Bible may thus be examined from an aesthetic or Aristotelian point of view as a single form, as a story in which pity and terror, which in this context are the knowledge of good and evil, are raised and cast out. Or it may be examined from a Longinian point of view as a series of ecstatic moments or points of expanding apprehension--this approach is in fact the assumption on which every selection of a text for a sermon is based... Yet the Bible is 'more' than a work of literature... (Frye 326)

Frye's archetypal criticism finds the Bible to be a unified
whole. Howard Mumford Jones, in *Five Essays on the Bible* (1960), rebuts this notion. Jones holds that the Bible is an anthology of often contradictory documents and lacking in aesthetic unity. Nevertheless, its incomparable stylistic power can make us ignore these discontinuities.

**Reactions Against the 'Bible as Literature' Movement**

T.S. Eliot considered persons who enjoy the Bible "solely" because of its literary merit as "parasites." He expressed his position in "Religion and Literature" (1935):

I could fulminate against the men of letters who have gone into ecstasies over 'the Bible as literature,' the Bible as 'the noblest monument of English prose.' Those who talk of the Bible as a 'monument of English prose' are merely admiring it as a monument over the grave of Christianity... The Bible has had a **literary** influence not because it has been considered as literature, but because it has been considered as the report of the Word of God. And the fact that men of letters now discuss it as 'literature' probably indicates the end of its 'literary' influence (Eliot 344-45, emphasis his).

Eliot's resistance here is ironic, given that his own poetry has led many a secular critic into the Bible. Moreover, the very stylistic concerns of critics such as Eliot and Richards (subtleties and shifts in tone, paradoxes, uses of wit, and irony) have won a prominent place in modern literary study of the Bible.

C.S. Lewis acknowledged that "the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature are" (Lewis 1958, 10). But his skepticism with regard to the 'Bible as Literature' movement is evident in a 1950 lecture, "The Literary
Impact of the Authorized Version:

I cannot help suspecting, if I may make an Irish bull, that those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible... I think it very unlikely that the Bible will return as a book unless it returns as a sacred book... It is, if you like to put it that way, not merely a sacred book but a book so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. You can read it as literature only by a tour de force. You are cutting the wood against the grain, using the tool for a purpose it was not intended to serve. It demands incessantly to be taken on its own terms: it will not continue to give literary delight very long except to those who go to it for something quite different. (Lewis 1950, 29-30, 33, emphasis mine)

Both Eliot and Lewis are careful to qualify their objection. Eliot is opposed to those who enjoy the Bible solely as literature; Lewis condemns the merely aesthetic approach.

Perhaps it is a bit surprising that religious fundamentalists have not been more vocal in opposing aesthetic study of the Bible. The reason is that fundamentalists and literary scholars are both ultimately concerned with the 'received' biblical text, i.e. the design of the largest literary units. Recall, for example (Chapter Three), how pre-critical biblical commentary exhibited considerable literary sensitivity. Passages such as Job or the gospel parables were never read as straightforward historical narration. James Barr claims that the mythical or literary mode of impact of the Bible is actually the primary (albeit unacknowledged) one. He reminds us that even in the most traditional cultures, the Bible furnished through use in liturgy, in art and in legend, the images and the coloring for a sort of mythology which permeated Christendom and which went far beyond the scope of the explicit doctrinal theology. In this respect, the effect of the Bible in the religious culture itself may be
considered as closer to a literary than to a directly theological phenomenon. (Barr 16)

In this century, the Italian Jewish scholar, Umberto Cassuto, has demonstrated such a literary sensitivity from a conservative orientation. His article, "The Story of Tamar and Judah" (1929, reprinted 1973), argues that Genesis 38 is an integral part of Chapters 37-50, and that this larger unit fits within the larger unity of Genesis. Cassuto also gave a famous series of lectures in which he defended the literary unity of the Torah. They were published as The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch (1941). Cassuto conceives of the Torah as a document whose very contradictions are purposeful. Whereas historical critics point to the existence of two creation stories as evidence of two contrary traditions regarding origins, Cassuto demonstrates how these differences in style and outlook point up a subtle, complex, dialectical synthesis of theological truth. Unlike most biblical criticism of his day, Cassuto's work remains fresh.
NOTES

1 In addition to the references listed under "Works Cited," I am indebted to the following sources for information in this chapter:

Christensen, Michael J. C.S. Lewis on Scripture. Waco, TX: Word, 1979.

2 For example, J.H. Gardiner, a contemporary of Moulton's, taught a course on the Bible in Harvard University's Department of English. Gardiner's book, The Bible as English Literature (1906), is basically an apologetic for integrating the King James Bible into the traditional English curriculum. A Literary Guide to the Bible (1922) by Laura Wild, Professor of Biblical Literature at Mt. Holyoke College, discusses the value of studying folklore. Similarly, Duncan Black Macdonald's The Hebrew Literary Genius (1933) continues in the Herderian romantic tradition by offering an elaborate appreciation of Hebrew art and culture. Macdonald's area of specialization was Near Eastern studies, and he provides some fascinating biblical background material. But although his work is subtitled "An Interpretation, Being an Introduction to the Reading of the Old Testament," there is little serious exegetical work here.

3 An example may be seen in Mary Ellen Chase's popular text, The Bible and the Common Reader (1944): "The best letters ever written are in the Bible, and St. Paul is the author of them, a more vivid letter writer than even Horace Walpole or Lord Chesterfield largely because he had far more important things to say. St. Paul is never dull..." (Chase 23).

4 For example, even though Gardiner managed to break free from
Moulton's neoclassical genre framework (even including a chapter on "The Narrative"), the only kind of narrative art he is able to point to are the "simplicity" and "depth of feeling" of the biblical writers (Gardiner 34-35). He concludes the chapter,

For these ancient writers, whether in the Old Testament or the New, there were no subtleties: they took note only of the solid facts of life; they had no interest in inferences and modifications and other complications of thought which might be built upon them. I can bring out this difference more concretely by an example from Browning's Saul . . . . The thought of the East was essentially simple. It knew only the objective and solid facts of which man has direct sensation, and the simple and primitive emotions which are his reaction to them. It has no perception of the subtler shades and shadows of feeling in which modern writers delight... (Gardiner 81,86)

In similar fashion, James Muilenburg describes the "simplicity" of biblical literature, and that its essential quality is its "absolute sincerity" (xxviii). Mark the evangelist is said to have been "carried away by his enthusiasm. . . . He plunges into a situation without any consideration as to the form in which he is to present his material" (xxiii). Muilenburg concludes that "it was not until Greek influence made itself felt [in the New Testament epistles] that there arose any complexity of thought" (Muilenburg xxxiii).

5 cf. Horace Meyer Kallen's The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy (1918), which contains a chapter on "The Greek Influence on Hebrew Life and Letters." The old tropes-and-figures approach also continued into this century— one example is "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew" (1952) by A.M. Honeyman.

6 As early as 1931, Charles Dinsmore noted that

many of the books published to promote the appreciation of the Scriptures classify their contents according to literary types. The disadvantage of this method is apparent. It is analytical and fails to communicate the total effect of the writings. The power of all great literature lies in the impression which the drama or the story as a whole makes upon the mind. (Dinsmore v)

7 Moulton eloquently expresses this viewpoint:

Some, indeed, will admit that the historic and the literary studies are theoretically distinct; but why, they ask, should the two not be united in practice? They ought to be united, in the sense that the complete student will undertake both. But they must not be undertaken together; for the whole method and spirit of the two are in opposition. Historic analysis must sceptically question the very details which literary
appreciation must rapidly combine into a common impression.... It is for the interest of accuracy in both studies that their procedures be kept distinct.

(Moulton viii)

8 Gardiner, for example, does not completely dissociate his literary approach from aspects of traditional religion: "In all my discussion I have assumed the fact of inspiration, but without attempting to define it or to distinguish between religious and literary inspiration" (Gardiner vi).

Charles Dinsmore, in The English Bible as Literature (1931), claims to be undertaking a literary approach:

The Bible in recent times has passed through two distinct phases and is entering upon a third. There was a period when it was regarded as an infallible authority, the divine element was emphasized and the human overlooked; then came the age of the critic with his eager search for authors, dates, and documents; his main contentions have been established, his battle is losing its heat and absorbing interest. Now we are entering upon the era of appreciation. (Dinsmore v)

Nevertheless, the questions that are important for Dinsmore are frequently historical in nature: "In Part I, the author tries to answer the question how a people so insignificant in numbers and political importance could write a literature so significant" (Dinsmore vi). He also remains open to dogmatism: "If the increasing movement, beginning with our first parents and culminating in Christ and the Church, is a manifestation of the Divine Will, then the author of the book is God" (Dinsmore 15).

9 Duncan Macdonald claims that his literary treatment should be less offensive to religious readers:

I am well aware that this book will be strange and even repellent to two very different classes of readers. To the specialist in Old Testament criticism it will seem unscientific and even visionary, and to the worthy people for whom their Bible is still Sacred Scripture and the Word of God it may well seem destructive of their basis for eternal truth and even frivolous. To these last let me say that I am far nearer their position than they may at first think, and that the specialist may quite possibly classify me and my book as reactionary. The truth, I think, is that while all precise doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy—in any degree at all—have for me gone by the board, I have come more and more to recognize an eternal purpose in the history of the Hebrew people and a unique guidance behind them and in them. He who has once accepted the theistic position and realizes what it means will have little difficulty in taking this further step. I have therefore tried to show the Hebrew people expressing their innermost self—and selves— in
their literature and to bring out very clearly that in the end this forces us back to the fact of Jehovah and His choice of them as His own peculiar people.

(Macdonald xvii)

George Sprau's Literature in the Bible (1932) has equally high regard for religion, even if Sprau can't say anything good about the hermeneutics of its leaders:

[T]he church has permitted the Bible to fall into the hands of little-minded clergymen and has given the sanction of authority to their stupid and ignorant attempts at interpretive criticism. There is no dogmatism like the dogmatism of the ignorant, and when ignorance is invested with authority, its power is supreme. . . . Literature and religion are nearly related, both reflecting the highest order of human experience coming from the realm of thought, emotion, and imagination that exalts man above the beast and reveals his kinship with the divine. Literature and religion are so delicately and intricately woven together in the contents of the Bible that it transcends all other books in the richness of artistic and spiritual values.

(Sprau 14,21)

For other writers, there is less religious sympathy and greater affinity with historical-critical approaches. During the early years of the movement, a course in 'the Bible as Literature' meant, as often as not, a heavy dose of historical-critical study of the Bible. One finds that early 'literary' treatments of the Bible are frequently little more than warmed-over higher criticism. Such is The Bible as Literature: An Introduction (1914) by Irving Francis Wood, Professor Emeritus of Religion at Smith College, and Elihu Grant, Professor of Biblical Literature at Haverford College. These authors were thoroughly trained in historical biblical criticism—and it shows.

David Robertson illustrates this new 'literary' understanding of genre:

There is no a priori literary reason for preferring one context [for determining genre] over another. One critic may wish to study biblical hymns in the context of the ancient Near East, another may choose all hymns in the Western literary tradition from Moses to Harry Emerson Fosdick. To those who have approached the Bible from an historical perspective, the former may seem the obviously superior choice, but from a standpoint within literary criticism such a value judgment cannot be defended.

(Robertson 9-10)

Commenting on the Joseph story, Tolstoy discusses the universality of biblical art and comments on how biblical realism is implicit rather than explicit:
[The plot is] accessible alike to a Russian peasant, a Chinese, an African, a child, or an old man, educated or uneducated; and it is all written with such restraint, is so free from any superfluous detail, that the story may be told to any circle and will be equally comprehensible and touching to every one. . . .

The author of the novel of Joseph did not need to describe in detail, as would be done nowadays, the blood-stained coat of Joseph, the dwelling and dress of Jacob, the pose and attire of Potiphar's wife, and how, adjusting the bracelet on her left arm, she said, 'Come to me,' and so on...

("What is Art?" in Tolstoy 19:490-491)
WORKS CITED


Monopolies are never much interested in promoting their rivals. In literary history, dogmatic biblical interpretation had a near monopoly until well into the modern era. Similarly, throughout the relatively short history of the discipline known as biblical studies, 'biblical criticism' has invariably meant historical-critical study of the Bible. But alternative critical approaches have always existed alongside these dominant ones. When, in the latter part of the Enlightenment, historical criticism began to offer a serious challenge to dogmatism, the literary approach blossomed—but only temporarily. By the twentieth century, historicism itself had become dogmatic.

For such reasons, literary study of the Bible has been a discipline-in-waiting. By all appearances, it need wait no longer. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the intrinsic literary worth of the Bible has been widely noticed; scholarly articles on the Bible appear regularly in the standard literary journals.

Reflecting the diversity of opinion in the wider field of criticism, there is no single literary approach to the Bible that has been unanimously adopted. Many observers have commented on the apparently chaotic condition of contemporary criticism. It is true
that critical theory can no longer assume a unified, underlying worldview, as it has throughout the history of Western civilization. Yet what many perceive as chaos may be evidence of the fundamental vigor of a criticism that has for too long been suppressed by nonliterary paradigms.

If this is the case, it won't be the first time such a thing has happened. The Renaissance was essentially the rebirth of a strain of classicism that had been suppressed within medieval Christendom.

Ironically, criticism may have come full-circle. Since around 1960, literary theory has sought to go beyond historical and aesthetic concerns in an effort to consider larger questions about values. In this way, it has much in common with philosophy—and theological criticism of the Bible.

From 'Bible as Literature' to Literary Study of the Bible

The situation which presently characterizes criticism began around 1960. By that time, the implosion of twentieth-century historical criticism had left a critical vacuum within biblical studies (see Chapter Eight). What was needed, as Stephen Prickett would later point out, was "not greater technical or linguistic expertise, but a return to the sense of the complexity of the whole that gives meaning to the minutiae of scholarship" (Prickett 116).

The decade of the 1960's also ushered in the current fascination with critical theory. Those active in the 'Bible as Literature' movement saw no reason why newly developing critical approaches could not be applied to whole texts of the Bible.
Increasingly, secular critics agreed—even if, at first, few expressed personal interest in taking on the Bible. Part of their hesitancy may be explained by Harold Bloom: "How do you criticize the structures that set most of the terms for order that allow you to read coherently, or teach you to approach experience in the light of literature" (Bloom 25). In 1962, Stephen Neill speculated on what might happen "if a reader, trained in the art of literary criticism...were to come fresh to the gospels" (Neill 242).

Secular criticism soon had solid reasons for endorsing literary study of the Bible. To begin with, as biblical literacy declined among the general population, literary people became alarmed at what this might mean for the future of Western literature. In The Educated Imagination (1964), Northrop Frye pleaded that the Bible "should be taught so early and so thoroughly that it sinks straight to the bottom of the mind, where everything that comes along later can settle on it.... The Bible...should be the basis of literary training" (Frye 1964, 110-11).

The 'Bible as Literature' movement made it acceptable to teach the Bible in a secular environment. Once made available to students, courses in the Bible became extremely popular. In 1975, a survey by the National Council of Teachers of English disclosed that courses in the Bible as literature ranked in the top ten of 180 commonly offered high school English courses (Ryken 1990, 4). I can testify that during the 1980's, at the Fresno campus of the California State University, each of the two Bible courses (Old and New Testaments) consistently maintained higher enrollment than any other literature course on campus.
The term 'Bible as Literature' was never a very satisfactory one. It diminished the stature of literature as well as that of the Bible, suggesting something like 'the Bible as belles lettres.' Nevertheless, the 'Bible as Literature' movement served a crucial function in helping bring together biblical and secular criticism. During its lifespan, it became an arena within which literary study of the Bible could mature when there was as yet no consensus concerning its validity. The longstanding interest in biblical poetry and rhetorical tropes and figures was able to expand into appreciation of biblical imagery, symbolism, and finally narrative art. Once the literary and religious communities had (in their respective ways) acknowledged the Bible as literature, the 'movement' had served its purpose. The literary wing of biblical criticism converged with the biblical wing of secular criticism, absorbing the 'Bible as Literature' movement in the process. Thus was born modern 'literary study of the Bible.'

**The Literary Transformation of Modern Biblical Studies**

The 'historical quests' of nineteenth-century biblical criticism have, in this century, given way to the analysis of textual literary features. After 'source criticism' had shredded the books of the Bible, 'form' (genre) criticism was applied to individual passages. By the late 1950's, 'redaction criticism' had shifted critical interest back to entire books. In terms of our literary approach, this was a welcome development, for the fundamental task of the critic is to come to grips with the final form of any work of art. But there was an inherent contradiction
within redaction criticism which first became evident during the 1960's.

Redaction criticism, like earlier source and form criticism, assumes the existence of distinct literary source materials. The task of the redaction critic is to discern how the biblical 'redactor' (editor) went about combining his source documents into their final canonical shape. A good editor, of course, will produce a nearly seamless end product.

Suppose, for example, we observe that Genesis 2 follows naturally from Genesis 1. We will conclude that the redactor has done a commendable job. Yet the redaction critic cannot allow his 'redactor' to do an extremely fine job, for his assumption of distinct literary sources depends upon the visibility of such 'seams'! Too great an emphasis on redaction criticism would thus cast doubt upon the original hypothesis of distinct literary sources—in which case we're back to unitary authorship, whether we call him 'Moses' or not.

Fundamentalists, of course, love to point out this inconsistency within biblical criticism. Unitary authorship is what they have believed in all along. Some literary critics, likewise, complain that biblical critics are too quick to hypothesize multiple authorship:

One has only to scan the history of a recent literary genre, the novel, to see how rapidly formal conventions shift, and to realize that elements like disjunction, interpolation, repetition, contrastive styles, which in biblical scholarship were long deemed sure signs of a defective text, may be perfectly deliberate components of the literary artwork, and recognized as such by the audience for which it is intended.

(Alter 1987, 27)
Yet most biblical critics want to retain some version of Wellhausen's 'documentary hypothesis.' A modification of redaction criticism, into what is now called 'composition criticism,' has been one popular solution. The term ("kompositionsgeschichte") was first proposed by Ernst Haenchen in his 1966 work, Der Weg Jesu (Perrin 1969, 1). Composition criticism is less concerned with how the biblical redactor edited his sources than in what he ultimately made of them. The composition critic remains open to the possibility that the redactor may not have limited himself to his sources; it is more than likely that he created new material as well. The composition critic thus seeks the creative contribution of the redactor.

This seemingly small modification of redaction criticism marks the final stage in the literary evolution of historical biblical criticism. As Norman Perrin has pointed out, "This means we have to introduce a whole new category into our study...the category of general literary criticism. If the evangelists are authors, then they must be studied as other authors are studied" (Perrin 1972, 9-10). Perrin's complaint with regard to redaction criticism was that its historical orientation did not take seriously enough the "internal dynamics" of the finished product because redaction criticism "defines the literary activity of the Evangelist too narrowly" (Perrin 1976, 120).

Interestingly, some of the religiously orthodox studied the Bible as 'composition' before 'redaction criticism' or 'composition criticism' had even been developed. In How to Enjoy the Bible (1939), Howard Tillman Kuist, at that time a faculty member at the Biblical Seminary of New York, discusses the "laws of composition."
Kuist has taken these 'laws' (repetition, contrast, continuity, progression, proportion, etc.) from Letter Three of John Ruskin's *Elements of Drawing* (1857) and adapted them to Bible study. Ruskin, of course, was describing the visual arts. But the principles may be validly applied to any art form. Repetition and continuity unify the work of art—in this case, the text. Contrast breaks monotony by supplying variety. Progression creates forward movement by developing the material. The 'law of proportion' dictates that the amount of space devoted to a piece of material is indicative of its relative importance.

Even those branches of biblical studies which did not clearly move in a literary direction have been affected by the ongoing shift from a historical to a literary paradigm. 'Phenomenological' hermeneutics—which derived from Bultmann's existentialism—remained highly philosophical. Yet, after 1960, even this branch of biblical studies took a turn toward linguistics and the philosophy of language, culminating in the pronouncement by its theologians of the 'death of God.'

**Trends in Modern Criticism: An Overview**

Although contemporary literary study of the Bible has much in common with pre-critical dogmatic biblical interpretation, it is difficult for post-Enlightenment readers to revert to such a naive reading of the Bible. Critics such as Paul Ricoeur announce, "Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again." He therefore proposes that, by means of a literary approach to the Bible, we "go beyond criticism by means of criticism" to achieve a
"second naivete," which is "the best we children of criticism can hope for" (Ricoeur 349-51). Ricoeur seeks an objective analysis that will respect the existential tendency among both pre-critical and twentieth-century readers.

Formalism was such an attempt. The New Criticism sought to enter into the imaginative world of the text rather than into the historical milieu of its composition. The motto of formalism is 'the text itself.' Formalist critics believe that the meaning of texts is determined by genre and language, and is publicly accessible without reference to author, reader, or the historical context of either one. Structuralism, which followed in the wake of the New Criticism, was even more radically formalist than its predecessor.

The New Criticism invigorated literary studies during the first half of this century. But by 1960, it was coming to be seen as a reaction against the excesses of historicism. Moreover, the New Criticism was formulated around poetry and highly poetic forms of imaginative literature. It was less successful in handling narrative, myth, and legend. It could not even begin to accommodate prose nonfiction—which may explain why many English departments have disowned these writings.

Structuralism, in contrast, was not subject to such generic limitations. A formalistic approach deriving from the science of linguistics, structuralism had largely supplanted the New Criticism in literary circles by 1970. It claimed to penetrate beneath the surface structure of texts (which had been the object of new-critical 'close readings') in order to explore the 'deep' structures
A central hypothesis is that there is a 'grammar of narrative' governing the story-telling process which can be spelled out.

The linguistic paradigm of structuralism made a contribution to literary studies, chiefly through providing objective criteria for critical judgments. But such formalist 'synchronic' analysis, which necessarily excludes consideration of author, reader, and the socio-historical context of any given work, may now be deemed reductionistic. The early formalists were not guilty of this. Roman Jakobson, for one, believed that all communication involved six elements: an addresser, an addressee, a message passed between them, a shared code, a medium of communication, and a referential context within which the message is to be interpreted. Modern 'speech act' theory, which holds that language is more functional than informational, claims Jakobson's linguistic model as its own.

While the literary world was still coming to terms with structuralism, the French critic Jacques Derrida was already announcing the end of the formalist reign. Beginning with his *De la Grammatologie* (1967), Derrida and subsequent 'deconstructionists' pointed out that in the closed language system of structuralism, textual meaning is never certain. The reason is that the connection between any given 'sign' and its real world referent is purely arbitrary, and when such 'signs' can only be defined in terms of what they don't mean, one can never achieve certainty in interpretation.

Derrida and his followers deny to any text a fixed and stable meaning, for they maintain that this semantic 'slippage' permeates
all language. Some observers have concluded that deconstructionism heralds the end of 'modernism' (during which the rationality of the human mind is presupposed) and the arrival of 'postmodernism.' But deconstructionism has not (yet, anyway) brought about the death of literature or the impossibility of conveying messages. Rather, it simply points up the limitations of a formalist ('text only') understanding of communication. Indeed, deconstructionism is frequently referred to as "post-structuralism."

What, then, has replaced deconstructionism? It is not so much that deconstructionism (or any of the other approaches) has been replaced, for each critical methodology has, in its own way, incorporated valid conventions of reading and offered valuable insights into the working of language. From a literary perspective, deconstructionism rightly emphasizes that texts can mean different things to different people, ages, and cultures. But no one critical model can satisfactorily explain all usages of language.

In the wake of deconstructionism, a whole host of critical approaches are clamoring after scholarly attention. What many of them have in common is grounding in communication theory, and not linguistic formalism. The work of an early Soviet critic of formalism, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), is sometimes quoted. Bakhtin believed that all language was inherently 'dialogic' and could be grasped only in terms of its inevitable orientation towards another. All language was caught up in social relationships.

In the current post-formalist environment, then, critics are once again allowing 'extrinsic' considerations to have a bearing on interpretation. The author, the reader, and their respective socio-
historical contexts have re-entered critical discussion. Such approaches are discourse-oriented rather than purely text-oriented. Yet the influence of formalism remains; practically all contemporary critical approaches are still heavily text-oriented.

By once again allowing extrinsic considerations into literary discourse, the post-formalist era is broadening the boundaries of literature. The divisions which occurred within the humanities during the nineteenth century are narrowing at the conclusion of the twentieth. There seems to be a new openness to bridging disciplines. Hybrid approaches like 'socio-literary criticism' have begun to appear. Even the distinction between poetics and rhetoric, dating back to Aristotle, is now largely theoretical; during the 1960's, literary scholars interested in narrative were avidly reading works such as The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961) by Wayne Booth.

Booth revised Aristotle's categories to create a rhetorical criticism appropriate for the study of novels. Instead of examining arguments, Booth considers character types, plot development, and such rhetorical devices as irony and empathy. He is concerned with the "rhetorical resources available to the writer of epic, novel, or short story as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader" (Booth i).

Booth's categories have been attractive to students of literature, for they arise directly out of the text. According to Booth, authors create both an 'implied author' and an 'implied reader'—both of which must be reconstructed by the reader from the narrative itself. Knowledge of the socio-historical context of the actual author or intended reader is secondary. Furthermore, any
given narrative contains both 'narrator' and 'narratee.' Mark Allan Powell has helpfully diagrammed these relationships:

REAL AUTHOR

IMPLIRED AUTHOR

NARRATOR

TEXT

REAL READER

IMPLIED READER

NARRATIVE

STORY

NARRATEE

(Powell 27)

At the same time, then, that many literary critics have felt the need to anchor criticism in something beyond aestheticism, we see that rhetorical criticism has begun to take literature seriously.

**Modern Literary Study of the Bible**

Literary study of the Bible has lagged behind developments in literary criticism. The impact of the New Criticism was not felt in biblical studies until the late 1960's. Structuralism entered the field in the mid-1970's. By the 1980's, deconstructionist biblical studies were beginning to appear. In the 1990's, communication-based models are being challenged by post-modernist critical approaches.

But this is only a rough chronology. Within biblical studies, older critical approaches do not become obsolete as fast as they do in secular criticism. It is not at all unusual to come across avowedly New Critical biblical studies in the current journals. This is understandable. For one thing, it is hard enough to keep up-to-date with developments in one's own field, let alone within a related field. But, even more importantly, biblical scholars are
concerned with the results produced by the various critical approaches more than in their respective theoretical commitments.

A decade-by-decade summary of activity with regard to literary study of the Bible now follows.

The 1960's: Decade of Transition

It was during the 1960's that a literary approach to the Bible first became acceptable within mainline biblical criticism. What had made this possible was the realization, beginning with Auerbach, that the novel was not the only type of prose narrative art form. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, in *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), went on to explore the artistic dimension of a wide variety of narrative forms--myth, folktale, epic, romance, allegory, confession, and satire. They also provided a unified theory and history of narrative, briefly touching on characterization, plot, and point of view in biblical narrative.

By the end of the decade, serious interchange between biblical scholars and literary people was occurring. In 1968, a group of poets and theologians including Samuel Laechli, Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and Stephen Crites met in Washington, D.C. to discuss the interrelationships of poetry, myth, and the Bible. That same year, James Muilenburg delivered his Presidential Address (entitled "Form Criticism and Beyond") to the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, where he announced that the time had come for the historical paradigm of biblical criticism to be supplemented by the rhetorical:
What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism. (Muilenburg 8)

When biblical critics did begin adopting literary paradigms (such as the already ailing New Criticism) in the late 1960's, they did so partly out of a sense of urgency. They had become convinced that only a literary paradigm would be able to rescue criticism from the grip of historicism—and, at that time, the New Criticism was seen as the literary approach to the Bible.

A. HEBREW BIBLE.

The leading proponent of a literary approach to the Bible during the early 1960's was the Spanish Jesuit scholar, Luis Alonso Schokel, of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. In his works, Estudios de Poetica Hebraea (1963) and The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature (1965), Alonso Schokel asserts that the inspiration of the Bible is as much literary as theological, and shows how the Bible's literary features often make theological statements.

The first book-length study in English by a professional Bible scholar seeking to operate from a consciously literary orientation is Edwin M. Good's Irony in the Old Testament (1965). Like Alonso Schokel, Good was trained in conventional methods of biblical criticism. Literary sensitivity was essentially an adjunct consideration.
A more interesting (and ultimately more significant) development was already underway in Israel. In his book *Humanistic Values in the Bible* (1953), Zvi Adar, director of the School of Education at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, had discussed the standard approaches to the Bible within the newly-formed state of Israel: the "traditional religious," the "scientific," the "nationalistic," and the "socio-moralistic." Adar proposes a fifth option, which he calls the "humanistic-literary" approach. He develops this thesis in *The Biblical Narrative* (1959) by describing the five stages of Hebrew narrative. In ascending order, they are the short tale, the cycle of stories, the long story, the book, and the biblical narrative as a whole.

During the 1960's, Israel became a leading center for literary study of the Bible. Israeli scholarship was ripe for such a nontraditional approach to the Bible. The explanation for this may be found in Jon D. Levenson's "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology" (1987). Levenson, a practicing Jew who teaches at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, lays bare the Protestant bias of 'biblical theology,' where theology is derived directly from the Bible. For the Jew, this involves a tacit denial of Jewish tradition as encapsulated in such post-biblical writings as the Talmud. (Roman Catholics have had a similar difficulty, for in Catholicism the Bible is only one of several sources of authority.) Even the 'higher criticism,' which took a historical rather than a theological tack, did not appeal to a number of Jews because of "the intense anti-Semitism which is evident in many of the classic works" (Levenson 287)—an inevitable by-product of
nineteenth-century evolutionary presuppositions.

For such reasons, Jewish Bible students with literary ability frequently opted to write religious fiction. Jews who, in spite of the hurdles, chose to undertake serious biblical criticism frequently departed from the standard historical-critical approach in favor of a more literary orientation.

Modern Israeli literary-critical study of the Bible began with the publication of *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem, 1967; English 1984) by Meir Weiss. Such an application of New Critical formalism to the Bible rocked the Israeli religious community even as it excited the literary community.

Manaham Perry and Meir Sternberg took a more discourse-analytical approach. Sternberg would emerge in the 1980's as the leading spokesman for Israeli literary study of the Bible. His post-formalist emphasis on both authorial intention and the significance of the role of the reader remains a viable critical option for the twenty-first century.

In America, Indiana University became the first major institution to promote a literary approach to the Bible. The Indiana University Institute on Teaching the Bible in Literature Courses, launched in the late 1960's, assisted high school English teachers with all aspects of their 'Bible as Literature' courses. Indiana University Press continues to be a leading publisher of serious literary studies of the Bible.

B. NEW TESTAMENT.

Harvard Divinity School professor Amos N. Wilder complains
that "both scholars and general readers have failed to do justice to...the operations and imagination in the Scriptures--to the poetry, the imagery, and the symbolism" (Wilder 1982, 15). This assessment is all the more telling, coming as it does from someone inside the 'guild' of biblical interpretation. As early as 1933, Wilder was a harbinger of the coming rapprochement between biblical and literary studies. In his dissertation of that year, this poet-turned-theologian insisted that large portions of the Bible are "essentially symbolic and can best be understood by the analogy of myth" (cited in Morgan 245). In Chapter Three of his Theology and Modern Literature (1958), entitled "Theology and Aesthetic Judgment," Wilder elaborates on and refines Auerbach's generalizations concerning biblical style. In essence, Auerbach did not seriously address the textual compositeness of the Bible. In his comparison with Greek literature, Auerbach treated the Bible as a unity having a single 'spirit.'

Wilder's most enduring contribution, which has caused him to be called "the father of North American literary study of the New Testament" (Morgan 245), is The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric (1964). Here Wilder introduces a number of literary forms found in the New Testament, including drama ("the dialogue"), narrative ("the story"), parable ("an extended metaphor"), and "the poem." He concludes with a chapter on imagery, symbolism, and myth. Wilder explains how 'gospel' was a totally new genre fashioned by the early Christian community, Mark's gospel being most representative. Matthew adapted the genre into more of a manual, Luke into something like history, and John into a meditative
sacred drama.

Wilder's 'extrinsic' interests kept him from being completely swept up by the formalist tide. Unlike the New Critics, who attempted to seal off literature from all contact with faith or history, Wilder always maintained that the relevance of literature depended upon its relation to life, its capacity to illuminate the human condition. For this reason, his work remains current, and his approach is foundational for much of the rhetorical-critical biblical study of the 1990's.

The 1970's: Explosion of Interest

Once literary study of the Bible had obtained a measure of credibility among biblical critics during the 1960's, many of them could not resist entering the field. The results were often amateurish by literary standards, and most of these did not appear until the latter part of the decade. The opening sentence of Robert Alter's now-famous 1975 article was only slightly overstated: "It is a little astonishing that at this late date there exists virtually no serious literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible" (Alter 1975, 70).

The seventies was the decade when biblical scholarship experimented with every conceivable literary approach to the Bible. Such an unrestrained surge of interest was a necessary prelude to the maturing of the movement in the 1980's. The journal *Semeia* was begun by members of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1974 as a forum for such essays. In his explanation of the journal's purpose in the initial issue, Amos Wilder writes that it was created to "serve as a vehicle for innovative work in progress and for
communication among workers in all aspects of language running from literary criticism to linguistics" (Wilder 1974, 4).

During the 1970's, the formalist rage was in evidence; its text-centeredness lent it an aura of objectivity which greatly appealed to the innate conservatism of biblical scholars. Formalism's promoters openly rejoiced that the bastion of biblical studies was yielding to this literary trend. As the decade wore on, structuralism's comprehensive claims gained a hearing. By the end of the decade, deconstructionism had entered the field. Two notable studies of biblical language and some high-quality classroom textbooks and pedagogical aids also emerged during the decade.

In 1976, a trio of Old Testament scholars at the University of Sheffield launched the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, which soon acquired a reputation for scholarly literary studies of the Bible. The new movement proceeded to firmly establish itself in Britain; literary study of the Bible now had roots in Europe as well as in America and Israel.

Most literary studies of the Bible during the 1970's fall into at least one of two categories: (a) demonstrations of literary-critical method (New Criticism, structuralism, etc.) or (b) literary refutations of historical-critical dogma.

A. HEBREW BIBLE.

Studies of biblical characters (particularly Jonah, Ruth, Esther, Saul, Samson, and David) were very popular during the 1970's. Frequently, these studies sought to demonstrate thematic unity. For example, in Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored
James Crenshaw is careful to fit the Samson story within the larger literary context of the book of Judges and the prophetic writings. In other such character studies, the author is more interested in the application of critical method. David Jobling's "Jonathan: A Structural Study in 1 Samuel" (1976) argues that the significance of Jonathan, from a structuralist perspective, is to be found through his function in the narrative—he provides the only plausible affirmation of the legitimacy of David's kingship.


Feminist literary study of the Bible also made its debut during this decade. Its foremost spokesperson was Phyllis Trible, beginning with "De-Patriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" (1973). Here Trible insists that the biblical God is not on the side of patriarchy, but rather that the de-patriarchalizing principle exists within the Hebrew Bible itself—it is not imposed by exegetes. Similarly, in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978), she pays close attention to patterns of figurative language in the Hebrew Bible, concluding that the 'problem of patriarchy' is as often a result of our simplistic reading habits as it is of the
worldview of the biblical writers. The careful textual work of Cheryl Exum, in articles such as "A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs" (1973), also maintains a high literary standard. Later feminist critics of the Bible, such as Mieke Bal and Regina Schwartz, have been both less text-oriented and less sympathetic to the biblical worldview.

B. NEW TESTAMENT.

Whereas Israeli scholars were at the forefront of modern literary study of the Hebrew Bible, Americans led the way in New Testament literary criticism. In April, 1970, "The Pittsburgh Festival of the Gospels" was held on the campus of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. The one secular literary critic invited to attend was Roland M. Frye, a Renaissance expert and Professor English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania. Frye's presentation, "A Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospels," is perhaps the most eloquent apologia yet offered for literary study of the Bible, and particularly of the gospels.

Frye acknowledges the significance of historical-critical spadework within biblical studies, but summarizes recent efforts as "disintegrating criticism" (R. Frye 214). He seeks to reverse the Bultmannian trend toward demythologization by demonstrating that myth is not a primitive substitute for abstract thought, but rather an effective means of communication:

In view of Bultmann's explanation of myth as dispensable and pre-abstract, what are we to make of Dante and Milton? Both of these writers created vast mythological epics, and yet both demonstrated a capacity for abstract thought on the highest levels... Would Milton communicate more effectively to modern men if Paradise Lost were demythologized and its themes expressed in ab-
Pointing out that Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* treats many of the same themes as *Paradise Lost*, Frye asks, "But who, today, would read it? ... But literally thousands of people read *Paradise Lost* every year" (R. Frye 205).

Frye advocates that the gospels be regarded as 'dramatic history,' along the lines of Shakespeare's plays, Shaw's *Saint Joan*, or Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. This ought to solve the problem of historical discrepancies between the gospels, for "within the genre of dramatic history, such differences are to be expected. Chronology may be rearranged, incidents diversely selected, emphases shifted, and episodes presented in distinctive lights" (R. Frye 212).


Thus, at the very beginning of the decade, Frye's call for literary study of the New Testament and Beardslee's delineation of New Testament generic categories created space for full-fledged literary study of the New Testament. But critical attention was for
the moment directed toward the Hebrew Bible, where narrative is much more plentiful and where the literary-critical momentum was already underway. As a result, large-scale literary studies of the New Testament did not appear until the 1980's.

A tremendous stimulus to literary study of the New Testament, and of the Bible in general, occurred when Frank Kermode, King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge University, was invited to deliver the 1977 Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, subsequently published as The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative (1979). Although Kermode treats the gospels here chiefly in the interest of understanding the workings of narrative, the Gospel of Mark is his central text. Kermode had long since recognized the significance of biblical narrative. In The Sense of an Ending (1966), he had traced the sense of expectancy in modern narrative to the notion that history is progressing toward a climax--a belief which derives from biblical eschatology.

The 1980's: Decade of Maturity

A decade after Robert Alter's famous 1975 call for serious literary study of the Bible, Adele Berlin described a very different scene:

We are now in the aesthetic, or literary age. The most avant-garde books on the Bible are studies of narrative or poetry, or applications of literary theory to the biblical text. Even in more staid areas of research--commentaries, textual criticism--account is now taken of literary issues... (Berlin 273)

The example of Frank Kermode, and the experimentation of the
1970's, produced in the 1980's several works that are destined to become classics in the field of literary study of the Bible—all written by literary scholars whose primary areas of expertise were other than the Bible:


Why the sudden interest on the part of secular critics? For one thing, the interest of critics in narrative made them eager to take a close look at the great precursor of prose narrative. Mary Ann Radzinowicz mentions four additional properties of the Bible that tantalized secular critics: (1) indeterminacy; (2) the canonical management of generic disunity; (3) the politics of reading and the constitution of interpretive community; and (4) writing as transgression or subversion (Radzinowicz 79). But before taking up such 'postmodern' issues, the above-mentioned primary works deserve closer examination.

— The Idea of Biblical Poetry (1981) by James Kugel, Professor of Classical and Modern Jewish and Hebrew Literature at Harvard University. This is probably the most significant work on Hebrew poetics since Lowth. Kugel details the history of ideas concerning parallelism (and Hebrew poetry in general) from the ancient rabbis through the eighteenth century. According to Kugel, Lowth's presentation of parallelism was simplistic. There are, Kugel
insists, no two perfectly parallel statements in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, there will always be a subtle 'sharpening' or change of nuance in the second line—for example, 'A is so, and what's more, B.' There are quite a number of different possible logical permutations that can exist in the relations between A and B.

This leads to the more controversial aspect of Kugel's book. Having exploded now-conventional understandings of parallelism, he systematically dismantles all of the standard definitions of Hebrew poetry. According to Kugel, this narrative movement which characterizes parallelism is really an extension of biblical prose. Commentators prior to Kugel had acknowledged the existence of parallelism within prose writings, but Kugel shows how, in Hebrew, there is not the clear division between poetry and prose such as that to which we moderns are accustomed. Interestingly, Kugel's narrative reading of biblical poetry derives from the tradition of Jewish midrash.

This virtual elimination of Hebrew poetry as a literary category is what has created the storm of reaction from fellow critics. Robert Alter, for example, in The Art of Biblical Poetry (1985), claims that Hebrew poetry differs from prose in that a succeeding line "heightens," "focuses," or "pushes" actions and themes forward linguistically (Alter 1985, 4). Poetry can even create narrative as it moves from line to story. Yet such critics do not question Kugel's refinements of parallelism as much as what they perceive to be his diminishing of poetry.

---The Art of Biblical Narrative (1981) by Robert Alter, Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California,
Berkeley. This is probably the single most helpful introduction to
literary study of the Bible in print. It has also been the most
influential. The explanation for this lies in the book's avoidance
of literary jargon and in its detailed explication of specific
texts.

Alter takes an essentially formalist approach:

By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of
minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of
language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions,
tone, sound, imagery syntax, narrative viewpoint,
compositional units, and much else; the kind of
disciplined attention, in other words, which through a
whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated,
for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of
Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy.

(Alter 1981, 12-13)

Alter has no theoretical axe to grind. Although his approach
is thoroughly secular, he insists on "a complete interfusion of
literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision"
(Alter 1981, 19). Though heavily influenced by the New Criticism,
authorial intention is central in Alter's work. While he is seeking
an alternative to historical biblical criticism, his discussion of
"composite artistry" (131) leaves room for source criticism.
Finding the usefulness of the new narratology "limited" (x), Alter
has produced a highly readable, text-centered discussion of
narrative technique in the Bible.

Alter is convinced that the biblical writers were consciously
producing art. Calling biblical narrative "historicized prose
fiction" (24), Alter sees the biblical writers as preparing the way
for the complex acts of interpretation which have become normative
in more modern fiction. He is attempting to show that what has appeared primitive and simple is quite the opposite, and may be considered the true foundation of the novel.

In his review of this book, Frank Kermode concludes that "Mr. Alter is a true descendant of those midrashic exegetes he prefers to modern scholars." Kermode's only regret is that Alter has confined his attention to the Hebrew Bible: "It is possible that he [Alter] underestimates the degree to which the devices and techniques he so brilliantly investigates continued into the nar­ratives of the Jews who wrote the New Testament" (Kermode 1981, 6).

Alter's basic formalist approach is not the last word on biblical narrative. But it is hard to think of a better starting point. Alter's observations, anchored as they are to the biblical text, are difficult to dispute. In fact, Alter maintains that his literary data are more solid than the supposedly 'scientific' conclusions of the higher critics:

Attention to such [literary] features leads not to a more 'imaginative' reading of biblical narrative, but to a more precise one; and since all these features are linked to discernible details in the Hebrew text, the literary approach is actually a good deal less conjectural than the historical scholarship.

(Alter 1981, 21, emphasis his)

A full discussion of literary interpretation must necessarily accommodate the role of the reader. But for Alter, the major attribute of a reader is the capacity to appreciate the artistry of the author--to spot the allusions to other threads in the biblical fabric. Alter has little patience with deconstructionism, which he dismisses as a French sectarian fad that fell apart in America.
The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (1982) by Northrop Frye, late Professor at the University of Toronto. The title comes, appropriately, from Blake, Frye's master at system-building. Like Blake, Frye will be enslaved by no other man's system.

This long-awaited book by one of the most significant literary critics of the century provides the most original and comprehensive literary theory of the Bible yet published. I say 'theory' rather than 'criticism' because it is meta-criticism. The Bible, in Frye's estimation, is 'more' than literature—it is the 'mythological universe' which constitutes the supreme supertext of Western civilization. Frye forcefully seeks to reinstate the Romantic view that literature is a continuation of mythmaking.

The heart of the book is his delineation of the mythic structure of the Christian Bible, covering as it does all of history from creation to the end of the world:

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Flood | Egypt | Philistines | Babylon | Antiochus Epiphanes | Rome

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This repeated cycle of high points (seven of them!) and low points in Israel's history follows the traditional U-shaped pattern of comedy and makes the Bible truly a 'divine comedy.' Frye claims that editorial continuity through the generations produced such a unity of narrative that the entire biblical collection can now
properly be read as one book.

To Frye, a 'literal' reading of the Bible will mean neither a religious nor a historical reading, but a mythical one: "The present book takes myth and metaphor to be the true literal bases" (64). The myth itself is therefore the meaning. If myth is removed from the Bible, "there will be, quite simply, nothing left of the Gospels at all" (Frye 42).

One begins to comprehend biblical myth by means of the Bible's own typology, for each phase of the mythical cycle is the type of the phase that follows and the antitype of the one preceding it. Typology is a highly self-referential structural device, and the Bible's reliance upon it makes the Bible, as Frye puts it, a highly 'centripetal' work. Frye's archetypal approach thus manages to incorporate a structuralist dynamic.

Frye's metacritical approach sets him up for charges of philosophical or religious bias. His evolutionary framework, in particular, could be seen as the remnant of a Christian triumphalism. Frank Kermode's reaction to the book is that Frye "is in some ways more like the founder of a religion, a Swedenborg or a Marx, than a literary critic" (Kermode 1982, 33). Yet Frye never claims allegiance to the biblical myth; he seems content with description. This is most unlike his romantic forebear, Samuel T. Coleridge, who continually offered his own affirmative response to the Bible.

The basic weakness of The Great Code is the basic weakness of structuralist criticism: it tends to be more interested in how texts work than in what they mean. Frye's attention to the very largest
of literary patterns, which occur across broad swaths of the biblical literature, makes his treatment in some ways superficial. In literary criticism, something more than mere decoding is required. Nonetheless, Frye is attempting something unique, and his wide-angle perspective in the discussion is a needed one.

—The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (1985) by Meir Sternberg, Professor of Poetics and Comparative Literature at Tel Aviv University. The subtitle of the work indicates how Sternberg departs from the formalist tendency to regard the Bible as a work of 'imaginative' literature. His communicative approach is evident:

Contrary to what some recent attempts at 'literary' analysis seem to assume, form has no value or meaning apart from communicative (historical, ideological, aesthetic) function. . . . Since a sense of coherence entails a sense of purpose, it is not enough to trace a pattern; it must also be validated and justified in terms of communicative design. After all, the very question of whether that pattern exists in the text—whether it has any relevance and any claim to perceptibility—turns on the question of what it does in the text. Unless firmly anchored in the relations between narrator and audience, therefore, formalism degenerates into a new mode of atomism.

(Sternberg xii,2)

For this reason, Sternberg rejects the label 'literary approach' in favor of 'biblical poetics.' A decade earlier, Joel Rosenberg had similarly pointed out that the poetics of biblical narrative is something that needs to be recovered; it has "gone underground, to reappear in the interpretation of the text" (Rosenberg 70).

Sternberg's description of the Bible as 'ideological literature' yokes together terms that many modern literary critics,
under the notion that art must be 'purposeless' and 'disinterested,' have been schooled to dissociate. As Sternberg correctly notes, it is this dissociation of ideology from art that has made it difficult for biblical scholars adapting the prevailing formalist literary critical tools to examine the way biblical art is related to its truth claims. Sternberg thus turns the biblical text back on contemporary criticism at the same time that he utilizes the insights of modern criticism to illuminate the Bible.

Sternberg roundly condemns David Robertson's indifference concerning the literariness of the Bible. He also dismisses Alter, who described biblical narrative as 'prose fiction.' For Sternberg, biblical narrative is history, not fiction. Yet the two are not to be distinguished on the basis of 'what really happened,' but on the basis of literary purpose. History writing is not necessarily a record of what really happened; it is "a discourse that claims to be a record of fact." Similarly, fiction writing is not necessarily inventive; it is "a discourse that claims freedom of invention" (Sternberg 25).

--The Book of God: A Response to the Bible by Gabriel Josipovici, Professor of English at the University of Sussex, novelist, and theorist of the avant-garde. Josipovici is not out to promote critical methodology, nor does he present any comprehensive theory of biblical poetics. His is truly the kind of 'response' to the Bible one might expect from someone thoroughly grounded in the Western literary tradition.

In each chapter, Josipovici raises a question of interpretation, shows why it matters, disputes with his
predecessors, and then defends his own reading. For instance, in the chapter about the man in the field at Shechem (from Mark 14), Josipovici considers Thomas Mann's treatment of the same passage in *Joseph and His Brothers* before engaging in a friendly dispute with Frank Kermode, whose reading of the same episode is a central aspect of *The Genesis of Secrecy*.

Josipovici raises four main questions about the Bible: Is it a book or a 'ragbag'? In what respects do the Hebrew and Christian Bibles differ as literary works? Does the Bible contain secrets that need to be deciphered? Finally, what are the assumptions under which a reader ought to approach the Bible?

In short, Josipovici sees the Christian Bible as a literary unity: "Earlier ages had no difficulty in grasping this design, though our own, more bookish age, obsessed with both history and immediacy, has tended to lose sight of it. Neither theologians nor biblical scholars have stood back enough to see it as a whole" (Josipovici 42). The Hebrew Bible is also a unity, but a different one. The main difference between the two Bibles is one of eschatology. Whereas the Christian Bible satisfies "the profound need in each of us for closure" (47), the Hebrew Bible refuses such a pattern:

> It chose to stay not with the fulfillment of man's desires but with the reality of what happens to us in this life. We all long in our daily lives for an end to uncertainty... Yet we also know that life will not provide such an end, that we will always be enmeshed in uncertainty. What is extraordinary is that a sacred book should dramatize this, rather than be the one place where we are given what we desire. But that is precisely what the Hebrew Bible does.

(Josipovici 87)
According to Josipovici, we should not read the Bible as if it held secrets behind the words, waited to be deciphered. The best analogy for reading the Bible, Josipovici concludes, is that of coming to know a friend. "Let us turn to it," he urges, "not as to an object, but as to a person" (307).

Bible commentaries written from a literary orientation began appearing with regularity in the late 1980's. A compendium of such treatments appeared as The Literary Guide to the Bible (1987), edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. These essays, which cover all the books of the Bible, come from an international team of biblical and literary scholars. Reviewers have noted, however, that the strongest essays are the treatments of biblical narrative; many of the other writers "may yet need to go 'beyond form criticism'" (House 19). For a complete account of works published during the 1980's, Mark Minor's excellent Literary-Critical Approaches to the Bible: An Annotated Bibliography (1992) is a must. Minor actually covers the entire twentieth century, although the majority of citations are for the 1970's and 1980's.

Two parallel but opposing trends may be discerned during this decade. On the one hand, there is a movement toward holism. Interdisciplinary studies of the Bible, which combine literary with rhetorical, sociological, or even conventional historical exegeses, began to appear in growing number. On the other hand, there is a growing tendency toward fragmentation. Texts are deconstructed, various socio-political views contend with one another, and there is a lack of consensus not only concerning meaning, but concerning the possibility of such meaning.
Part of the difficulty is that a radically pluralist society has spawned a variety of understandings of literature and opinions about how it should be read. No one element of communication (author, text, reader, universe) is dominant in criticism today. Rhetorical criticism highlights the author, formalism highlights the text, reader-response criticism the reader, and historical criticism the universe referred to by the text.

Why such opposing trends? My hunch is that in a culture where the very existence of meaning is under attack, those critical approaches which still believe in the possibility of textual meaning will combine their efforts. Hence, we have begun to encounter 'dialogue' (Bakhtin's term) between disciplines and approaches. There is now Christian feminist criticism, Marxist historicism, Gay and Lesbian formalism, etc.

These trends were well underway by the end of the 1980's. "The Literary Approach to the Old Testament" (1987) by Anthony F. Campbell, S.J., regards Old Testament narrative as "reported narrative," thus combining literary with historical paradigms—and within the framework of religious faith. Volume 42 of Semeia (1988) is devoted to feminist biblical criticism utilizing "various literary, folkloristic, sociological or anthropological approaches" to biblical texts. Even once-competing literary approaches are teaming up. Susan Niditch's The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition (1983) combines diachronic and synchronic approaches. Perhaps the most successful hybrid approach has been Norman Gottwald's The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction (1985). Robert Gordis endorses this multidisciplinary approach:
In approaching this Everest of the human spirit, men have contented themselves with attempting to climb only one of its slopes. All too often the Bible has been treated by the historian as a collection of convenient source materials, the student of literature as an anthology of purple passages, and by the theologian and preacher as a corpus of edifying proof-texts. . . . If we divide the Scriptures into separate compartments of history, literature, and religion, each is impoverished. (Gordis vii)

In *The Bible and the Literary Critic* (1991), Amos Wilder expresses this conviction more positively:

If the literary analysis...is widened as it should be to include all that pertains to language—and therefore to the whole range of significations not only aesthetic but socio-cultural, attitudinal, moral, and ontological—and if these circumspections are built on and interwoven with the insights already so epochally achieved by historical criticism, then indeed the way is open for a new postdogmatic appropriation of our biblical classics and heritage.

(Wilder 1991, 10)

But disintegrating trends are, if anything, becoming even more prevalent. I mentioned that one reason literary scholars have been attracted to the Bible is out of an interest in the meaning and function of textual indeterminacy. They want to study the tension between unity and disunity which exists in a work whose authorship is multiple and whose composition spans centuries. Competing ideological commitments toward the Bible also mirror what is occurring in the larger literary world, which makes the Bible a fascinating critical laboratory.

Deconstructionists are often perceived as being bent on questioning, if not destroying, all structures of meaning. This is more true outside of biblical criticism; some highly 'constructive'
deconstructionist biblical studies took place during the 1980's. For example, Harold Fisch (1988) claims that the Bible is both literature and anti-literature, for its authors were conscious of needing to question (even condemn) all merely literary effects; the paradox is that biblical passages often gain tension and power from the very devices they renounce. Gerald Sheppard (1988) has pointed out that deconstruction allows us to see that our goal is not to control the biblical text. Steven Walker (1989) shows how multiple versions of the same event, dynamic characterization, and deliberate ambiguity all make deconstructive readings both fruitful and necessary.

The 1990's and Beyond: The Dawn of Postmodernism

The 'maturing' of formalist (text-oriented) literary study of the Bible during the 1980's was followed by numerous critiques of purely formalist approaches (cf. Poland, 1985). The formalist denial of the referential dimension of language has resulted in fragmentation and in the inevitable 1990's reaction against formalism. Thus far in the 1990's, the preponderance of studies are oriented toward either the author or the reader.

A. AUTHOR-ORIENTED STUDIES.

Author-oriented studies of the 1990's most commonly undertake rhetorical criticism. This is precisely what James Muilenburg had in mind when, in 1968, he suggested that it was time to move 'beyond' form criticism. He was seeking to take into account authorial accomplishment and creativity. Muilenburg was an Old Testament scholar; the book which extended rhetorical criticism to
the New Testament was *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984) by George A. Kennedy, Professor of Classics at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

What is 'rhetorical criticism,' and how is it different from literary criticism? 'Rhetoric' originally meant the study of argumentation and persuasion. But once the civic institutions of the Roman world ceased to provide a forum for meaningful public debate, attention was devoted more to written texts, and rhetoric became mainly a matter of stylistic ornamentation. The 'tropes-and-figures' approach to the Bible, which for centuries was one of the only avenues for appreciating biblical art, is an example of this stylistic dimension of rhetorical criticism.

In recent decades, as literary criticism has taken up many of these traditionally 'rhetorical' concerns, rhetoric has been returning to its roots. Whether in dealing with oral or written texts,

> Rhetorical criticism takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author's or editor's intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries. (Kennedy 4)

The historical dimension therefore remains an integral part of rhetorical criticism.

The rhetorical critic will seek to read the New Testament as it would have been read by an early Christian. But twentieth-century interest in narrative has directed the attention of recent critics less to the New Testament than to the
narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible. This is a bit odd, considering that the majority of the New Testament is narrative, whereas the narrative proportion of the Hebrew Bible is much less than half. Perhaps the best explanation is that the size and the literary quality of the Hebrew Bible provide a greater potential for literary approaches than does the New Testament.

But an additional factor is that questions of historicity are harder to shake off in the New Testament. The issue of historical reference is not posed by the Hebrew Bible with the urgency that Christian doctrine and general interest alike demand when reading the gospels. As a result, rhetorical approaches may well be key in uncovering New Testament art—particularly with regard to the genre of 'epistle,' which does not appear in the Hebrew Bible.

Three significant rhetorical-critical treatments have appeared thusfar in the 1990's:


--- Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah (1994) by Phyllis Trible. This is a conscious attempt to introduce rhetorical criticism to texts from the Hebrew Bible.

B. READER-ORIENTED STUDIES.

Being sensitive as it is to both history and aesthetics, rhetorical criticism has the capability of serving as a bridge between traditional historical biblical criticism and modern literary study of the Bible. But the larger trends of this century
favor reader-oriented, not author-oriented, methodologies. Bultmann's existentialist interpretation of the Bible, which predominated within scholarly circles for decades, was very much a reader-response type of criticism. It may even turn out that nineteenth-century source criticism, long considered a paragon of objectivity, was essentially an exercise whereby 'readers' (modern critics) have 'created' authors. Such a possibility must be considered after a careful reading of Harold Bloom's *The Book of J* (1990).

In *The Book of J*, Bloom surprisingly accepts the source-critical consensus regarding the origins of Hebrew narrative. But he reverses their evolutionary framework by arguing that (what is purported to be) the earliest source, the 'J' ("Jahwist") text, was the most brilliant of them all, and that succeeding editors and exegetes have only managed to censor and distort it. Bloom suggests that the author of J is a woman ("a sophisticated, highly placed member of the Solomonic elite") and that she wrote in friendly competition with her only strong rival (the male court historian who wrote 2 Samuel). Neither of these ideas is original; Richard Friedman has raised the possibility of the former in *Who Wrote the Bible?* (1987) and Joel Rosenberg that of the latter in *King and Kin* (1986). Yet Bloom is the first to bring to life this hypothetical creator. *The Book of J* is thus a brilliant, although anachronistic, reader-oriented response to the Bible.

This recent 'turn to the reader' and the recognition in modern literary theory of different 'interpretive communities' are both reflections of a modern pluralism in which neither the author nor
the text can control meaning, and where social authority is hard to locate. Here is the beginning of what is being called 'postmodernism.'

Until the twentieth century, literary criticism concentrated on value. The meaning of a work of literature was assumed, and so critics asked whether it was good and what made it so. In the twentieth century, attention shifted toward interpretation. Assuming the value of literature, critics have asked what it means. Stanley Fish ended an influential 1979 essay: "Like it or not, interpretation is the only game in town" (Fish 354). But now, at the close of the century, critics are questioning both the value and the meaning of literature—and not only literature! Postmodernism questions the very existence of objective value or meaning.

Robert Alter's insistence on moving from the analysis of formal structures "to a deeper understanding of the values, the moral vision embodied in a particular kind of narrative" (Alter 1981, x) places him firmly within modernist, humanistic literary criticism. Most literary study of the Bible is still 'modern' and 'humanistic.' It asks aesthetic questions about literary form and rhetorical devices without pursuing more theoretical questions about the meaning of meaning. But such criticism is under attack:

Telling stories is functionally equivalent to believing in God (Sam Keen). Both entail organization of experience into some kind of trustworthy order. Some such order has traditionally been presupposed... At the present time this presupposition confronts a challenge apparently more searching than any which has preceded it. The crisis of faith and the crisis of the coherent narrative in our time are closely related.

(Beardslee ix)
Some are predicting that the result of postmodernist biblical criticism will be a return to pre-critical approaches. Indeterminacy of meaning was a basic element of medieval exegesis with its different levels of significance. David Steinmetz, for one, writes of "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis" (1980). Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, in Midrash and Literature (1986), see Jewish midrashic interpretation as the way of the future in biblical studies.

Not only is the rationality of modernism being questioned. So is the value of literary classics such as the Bible. Regina Schwartz does not see modern historical biblical criticism as all that different from traditional dogmatic exegesis. She asserts that while historicism initially posed a challenge to the authority of the Bible, it was not a serious challenge:

[Biblical] authority was reinscribed, albeit in a disguised fashion. Whether the approach was historical or philological, the Bible was the focus of sustained, loving attention. [Such efforts] did not so much pose a challenge to the Bible's authority as they presupposed that authority, for only a commitment to the centrality of the Bible could authorize that exhaustive activity. (Schwartz 13)

Another critic who, like Schwartz, is sensitive to the special honor accorded the Bible in Western culture is Mieke Bal of the National University of Utrecht:

I do not claim the Bible to be either a feminist resource or a sexist manifesto. That kind of assumption can be an issue only for those who attribute moral, religious, or political authority to these texts, which is precisely the opposite of what I am interested in. (Bal 1)
Does literary study of the Bible have a future? I believe so. It has weathered tough times throughout its long history, and now that it has come into general acceptance, it will not easily fade. Literary study of the Bible may, for the first time, enable us to see the true worth (rather than the ascribed worth) of the Bible:

Shakespeare is a more rewarding poet to read than Drayton, but the more obvious this becomes the less time will one want to spend trying to prove it. And the same is true of the Bible. It may be that it is only in our predominantly secular age, an age where religious authority has lost its hold on all but a very few, that this truth can become evident. (Josipovici 27)

The interests of religion would also seem to support a literary approach. "Because no language is completely transparent upon reality, providing unambiguous 'names' for clear-cut 'things,' the indirect mode of reference employed in literature constitutes some of the most effective theology" (T. Wright 10). Historical reconstruction and literary inspiration are both of interest to the Church, but any faith community interested in using the Bible as scripture will want to request help with the latter from its biblical scholars. Even debates over literary theory ultimately serve the cause of true religion:

Literary critics' concern for theory since the 1960's is particularly important for theological interpreters of the Bible. Anyone who makes a universal claim for the message of the Bible must go beyond historical and aesthetic categories and restore biblical interpretation to the larger debate about the true meanings and goals of human life. (Morgan 262)

Who will undertake literary study of the Bible in the coming years? The requisite training in both biblical and literary fields
is enormous, is no guarantee of success, yet remains absolutely necessary:

It is already clear that such [biblical] training has not produced experts sensitive to biblical literature precisely as literature but it is not at all clear to me that such sensitivity can be developed without this basic training. In other words, I would suggest that ... sustained excellence in the literary structuralism of biblical texts will necessitate linguistic and historical competencies as well as literary and structural sophistication. (Crossan 281-82, emphasis his)

Consequently, it would seem to me that sustained literary study of the Bible will likely be carried out by people of faith. Frank Kermode is undoubtedly right:

For the most part the practitioners [of biblical criticism] have had some prior commitment to Christianity, some 'doctrinal adhesion'... Few would undertake the ardors of the training held necessary for serious work in biblical criticism without some such prior commitment...

(Kermode 1979, viii)

Who will be the Bible readers of the future? Probably people of faith. As Austin Farrer puts it, "They say that the Bible makes good reading, but unless you are concerned for the salvation of mankind, you will prefer to look for your reading elsewhere" (Farrer 9). It is true that the biblical canon has now become part of the larger canon of the literary classics. But the number of people who will want to study it for this reason will likely be few. The situation has not changed much since C.S. Lewis surveyed the field in 1950:

It may be asked whether now, when only a minority of Englishmen regard the Bible as a sacred book, we may anticipate an increase of its literary influence. I
think we might if it continued to be widely read. But this is not very likely. Our age has, indeed, coined the expression 'the Bible as literature'. It is generally implied that those who have rejected its theological pretensions nevertheless continue to enjoy it as a treasure house of English prose. It may be so. There may be people who, not having been forced upon familiarity with it by believing parents, have yet been drawn to it by its literary charms and remained as constant readers. But I never happen to meet them. Perhaps it is because I live in the provinces. (Lewis 144)

What direction will literary study of the Bible take? With regard to critical methodology, the title of Edgar McKnight's most recent book seems to say it all: Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism (1988). Yet rhetoric's longstanding interest in the effect of discourse upon a listener (or reader) suggests a role for rhetorical criticism in a postmodern society. One leading rhetorical biblical critic actually attributes the modern revival of rhetoric to contemporary emphases upon the centrality of the reader:

Postmodern reader-oriented approaches to the Bible have had a singular purpose, namely, to position a literary performance at some juncture of social history and assess its effectiveness as a moment of communication and significant human exchange. That quest was the intellectual circumstance that called for modern rhetorical criticism of the Bible. (Mack 14)

With regard to the subject matter of future literary study of the Bible, there remains considerable unexplored territory. Biblical poetry and, more recently, biblical apocalyptic and narrative have now come to be recognized for what they are—carefully wrought works of literary art. But there remain whole sections of prophecy, proverbs, law, and epistle that have barely
begun to receive attention from literary critics. Perhaps in
dialogue with other disciplines (such as rhetorical criticism) and
with its own competing methodologies (e.g. diachronic vs.
synchronous), literary criticism can make headway:

The heterogeneous textuality of the Bible, where narrative
segments are juxtaposed with one another and interspersed
with other verbal forms like genealogies, laws, oracles,
proverbs, and songs, is better served by a model of
dialogue, of question and answer, of story and counter-
story, of statement and response. (Reed 13, emphasis his)
POSTSCRIPT

In the Western tradition, our entire discipline of literature derives, in large measure, from early handling of the Bible:

The techniques and conventions of commentary and gloss, of textual recension and annotation, developed by the scholiasts of late antiquity were taken up by the Church Fathers, on the one hand, and by the Talmudists, on the other. These, in turn, underwrote the disciplines of analytic reading and systematic elucidation practiced by the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages and the scriptural translators and commentators of the Renaissance. This history of high reading is central to the Western tradition. Our secular universities spring from it. Our book world is, in plain fact, its mundane descendant.  
(Steiner 10)

Today, the child repays the parent.
NOTES

1 The historical novels of Sholem Asch are prime examples. They include *The Nazarene* (1939), *The Apostle* (1943), *Mary* (1949), *Moses* (1951), and *The Prophet* (1955)—a portrait of Jeremiah. Maurice Samuel, who translated much of Asch's work, tried his own hand in works such as *Certain People of the Book* (1955).

2 One such scholar is Nahum Sarna, whose commentary, *Understanding Genesis* (1966), set a high standard for subsequent critics.

3 Weiss defined "total interpretation" as reading "what is written in the text, all that is written there, and only what is written there" (cited in Minor 51).

4 Beginning in 1968, these two young scholars co-authored, in the Israeli periodical Ha-Sifrut, a series of four articles which have proven to be highly influential among subsequent critics. The first of these, "The King through Ironic Eyes" (Summer, 1968), demonstrates that the biblical writer of the story of David and Bathsheba contrived an elaborate system of gaps between what is told and what must be inferred. The reader is left with two conflicting options for evaluating the characters involved.

5 On Teaching the Bible as Literature: A Guide to Selected Biblical Narratives for Secondary Schools (Indiana UP, 1967) by James S. Ackerman with Jane Strouder Hawley was a key resource in this training. It supplies brief literary analyses of seven narratives from the Hebrew Bible. Even more significant work would come out of Indiana University during the 1970's and 80's.

6 One such work is the new-critical collection of studies, *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis (Indiana UP, 1974). Yet this collection was itself dismissed as lightweight by a leading literary critic:

> What happens when literary scholars do not know Hebrew is vividly illustrated by a recent volume, *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narrative*. . . . The contributions—more than half are the editor's—by well-meaning professors of English rarely go beyond rhapsodic paraphrase or the delineation of recurrent patterns, real and imagined. The one exception in the volume is an intelligent analysis of Exodus 1–2 by James S. Ackerman, a professional Bible scholar. (Alter 1975, 71)

7 Claude Levi-Strauss had successfully applied concepts from structural linguistics within anthropology, but steadfastly refused to consider biblical mythology. Edmund Leach responded in his pioneering essay, "Levi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden" (1961), which pioneered structuralist biblical exegesis. Leach's article
demonstrated how structuralism could synthesize such apparently contradictory mythological narratives as Genesis 1 and 2. He followed this up with a more ambitious study of the books of Samuel and Kings in "The Legitimacy of Solomon" (1966).


8 John Dominic Crossan's In Parables (1973) presents the parables as fundamentally disorienting, undermining their hearers' expectations. Parables shatter "the deep structure of our accepted world" (Crossan 1973, 121-22). Similarly, Herbert Schneidau's Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition (1978) argues that the Bible deliberately encourages a 'sacred discontent' with the conventions and myths that comprise our culture. The Bible's own internal demythologizing tendency is thereby deconstructionistic, and this is what most sets it apart from writings of other ancient cultures.

9 The Dark Interval (1975) by John D. Crossan juxtaposes Ruth, Jonah, Jesus, Kafka, and Borges to enable us to see that myth and parable are opposites. Myth mediates irreducible contraries from the real world in the interest of stability, whereas parables are fictitious agents of change. Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country (1978) by Leonard L. Thompson is a grand tour of biblical symbolism, highlighting recurring patterns of relationships among disparate passages.


11 A good example of the former is The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer by Sean E. McEvenue, S.J. (1971). This application of the New Criticism to the work of the 'priestly' writer assumes the results of historical exegesis, but attempts to carry it further by means of a literary approach.

The findings of literary-critical works appearing later in the decade would be more at odds with the findings of the 'higher criticism.' These literary studies would generally find a coherence and unity that had escaped the notice of source-oriented historical critics. The book of Genesis (and the entire Pentateuch), for example, are regarded by historical critics as a patchwork of conflicting source materials. But, during the latter half of the 1970's, there appeared "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative" by
G.J. Wenham (1978), "Theme in Genesis 1-11" by David J.A. Clines (1976), "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis" by Bruce T. Dahlberg (1976), and The Theme of the Pentateuch by David J.A. Clines (1976), where the author combats the tendencies toward 'atomism' and 'geneticism' within biblical studies.

Similar kinds of unity were detected by other writers in other portions of the Bible. Occasionally, these critics questioned the underlying 'documentary hypothesis' of source criticism. Most commonly, they accepted the assumption of distinct sources--but discovered a 'higher' unity that is only possible if one takes into consideration the entirety of the received (final) text.

12 This is an elegant apologetic for and introduction to literary study of the Hebrew Bible. It claims that we need to deepen our emotional response to the Bible--something historical criticism cannot help us with. Sandmel admits that many biblical passages are nonliterary and pedestrian at best.

13 Here is the first published collection of studies that have heeded Muilenburg's 1968 call to move 'beyond form criticism' by means of rhetorical criticism. Most of its articles would be deemed by literary critics 'stylistic' criticism--dealing primarily with surface details of the text. Yet they are genuine responses to the Bible's literary art.

14 This Dutch scholar, who was heavily influenced by the Swiss-German 'Werkinterpretation' school of literary criticism (a rough analogue to the American New Criticism), seeks to discern the formal patterns of Hebrew prose, and how these patterns function thematically in Genesis. Fokkelman has since done extensive work in the books of Samuel.

15 This Professor of English at the University of California, Davis, is one of those rare species who has formal training in both literary and biblical studies. Robertson's thesis is that a literary approach to the Bible needs no justification. We need not belabor the question of the 'literariness' of the Bible; we can simply choose to carry out a literary analysis "because literary criticism can yield exciting and meaningful results" (Robertson 4). Robertson demonstrates his approach by comparing Exodus 1-15 with Euripedes' The Bacchae and Psalm 90 with Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." He also offers a New Critical reading of the book of Job.

16 After carrying out stylistic-structural studies of passages from the Hebrew Bible, Fishbane discusses the theological significance of his literary findings.

17 Here is "the first serious book-length introduction in any language to the distinctive poetics of biblical narrative" (Alter 16).

18 In The Genesis of Secrecy, Kermode declares that authors wish to create narratives that will be laden with inexhaustible, elusive
meaning. Consequently, they adopt strategies that simultaneously engage and put off the reader, suggesting a hidden meaning while at the same time refusing to disclose what it is. Kermode illustrates his thesis with examples from the New Testament.

This significant book is the first major work on the Bible by a secular critic of the stature of Kermode. In his preface, Kermode shows an awareness of this fact:

The ecclesiastical institution has general control over biblical exegesis, though it is not uniformly powerful, and does not rule out bold speculations; historically, indeed, it has not inhibited work that it has had no choice but to condemn. But for the most part the practitioners have had some prior commitment to Christianity, some 'doctrinal adhesion'. . . . For a secular critic to work on the reserved sacred texts, as I have chosen to do, is rarer.... I think the gospels need to be talked about by critics of a quite unecclesiastical formation. (Kermode 1979, vii-ix)

Kermode maintains that the doctrinal commitments of most New Testament scholars are part of the reason why literary study of the New Testament lags behind similar work in the Hebrew Bible, and that Christian interpreters have enjoyed less hermeneutical freedom than Jewish interpreters because the Church "in some ways stood to the New Testament as the New Testament did to the Old" (Kermode 1979, 187).
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