THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE AND THE NEW FORM CRITICISM

SBL

Society of Biblical Literature

Ancient Near East Monographs

Number 10

THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE AND THE NEW FORM CRITICISM

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SBL Press

Atlanta

Printed on acid-free paper.

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Contents

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHQ	*Biblia Hebraica Quinta.* Edited by Adrian Schenker et al. Stuttgart: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–
Bib	*Biblica*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	Continental Commentaries
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
Colloq	*Colloquium*
COS	*The Context of Scripture.* Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002
CTR	*Criswell Theological Review*
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*

ExAud	*Ex Auditu*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
HBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBS	History of Biblical Studies
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTS	*HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
Int	*Interpretation*
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JSNT	*Journal of the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LBS	Linguistic Biblical Studies
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
MGWJ	*Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*

NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
OBO	Oribis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs
OTT	Old Testament Theology
RBL	*Review of Biblical Literature*
RBS	Resources for Biblical Studies
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RNBC	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
RSR	Recherches de science religieuse
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SGBC	The Story of God Commentary Series
SemeiaST	Semeia Studies
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SR	*Studies in Religion*
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
SymS	Symposium Series
TAD	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*. Edited by B. Porten and A. Yardeni. 4 vols. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1986–1999
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TUMSR	Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Reviews*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungenzum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die altestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction

Michael H. Floyd

This collection of essays addresses new developments in form criticism in relation to the Minor Prophets. Martin Buss and Robert Wilson, who were invited to give their responses to the collection, both trace many of these new developments, and the individual articles all touch on them in one way or another. It would therefore be redundant to recount here at the outset all that is new in these examples of form-critical method as it is currently being practiced. For present purposes suffice it to summarize the evolution of the discipline in terms of a major shift from treating prophetic books as a means of accessing the prophets for whom they were named to treating prophetic literature as the primary object of investigation in its own right. The main goal of interpretation is no longer to recover the original messages of the prophets from the heavily edited prophetic texts. Now the main goal is to discern the messages being sent by the scribes who wrote these texts long after the prophets for whom they are named.

The essays in the present collection explore the kinds of questions that arise when form criticism's ongoing concerns with genre, setting, and intention are recast in light of this methodological shift. Buss views the interpretive work done here from the perspective of intellectual history in general, and Wilson views it from the perspective of biblical studies in particular. In this introduction I will plot where the various contributions fit within the current scene and also identify the points at which the differences among them call for further discussion.

A "Book of the Twelve"?

The essays gathered here confine themselves to the corpus of prophetic literature that the title of this volume calls The Book of the Twelve. This nomenclature reflects the idea that the twelve Minor Prophets constitute an entity which is in

some sense unified. Some authors—particularly Mark Boda and Marvin Sweeney and to a lesser extent Paul Redditt—accept this assumption and base their work on it. However most of the authors use cases from one or more of the Minor Prophets as examples of issues germane to prophetic literature in general, without necessarily entailing any particular presuppositions about the Twelve as a whole. Some in this latter group—particularly James Nogalski—express their agreement with the hypothesis of a Book of the Twelve even though they do not depend upon it here. Thus this collection generally reflects the present state of affairs with regard to this still open question, which is to agree to disagree.[1]

The present strategy seems to be a pragmatic one. Rather than argue about the hypothesis itself—whether each of the twelve is to be read as a discrete prophetic book, or the twelve are to be read collectively as a single document—studies taking a holistic approach are conducted to see whether the hypothesis can generate interesting and plausible insights. "The proof is in the pudding." Boda's and Sweeney's articles are good examples of this trend. Both advocate reading the Twelve individually as well as collectively[2]—and they indeed do so in their articles—but they are mainly interested in the way each book contributes to a pattern that characterizes the Twelve as a whole.

Boda shows that, as one moves through the Masoretic order of the Twelve, direct address to God consistently decreases, reflecting a growing sense of the theological inappropriateness of complaint resulting from Israel's historical experience of defeat, exile, and restoration. The message which those who put together this form of the Book of the Twelve addressed to their postexilic contemporaries was thus, both in effect and literally (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:17), a call to silence before God. Such studies suggest that there is indeed some rhyme or reason in the way the Twelve have been edited and ordered in relation to one another.

Sweeney, using the example of eschatology, and calling attention to the fact that the Twelve are ordered differently in MT and LXX, shows that each book has its own take on the new future which YHWH has in store for his people and that these individual eschatological perspectives collectively take on different connotations when they are configured differently in the MT and LXX.

Sweeney's point is well taken because it grows out of observations regarding the distinctive form(s) of the Twelve. It points toward the need for further work on the genre of the Book of the Twelve. It is obviously not a single prophetic book in the same sense as Isaiah or Jeremiah. Nor is it just a collection of totally unrelated documents. Studies conducted thus far, such as Boda's and Sweeney's

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[1] Ehud Ben Zvi and James D. Nogalski, *Two Sides of A Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve/The Twelve Prophetic Books*, Analecta Gorgiana 201 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009).

[2] Nogalski takes the same position as Boda and Sweeney on this point, but his article is not mainly concerned with demonstrating it.

here as well as others elsewhere,[3] show various affinities and levels of affinity among the prophetic books that make up the collection. Could the results of these studies be synthesized in a way that would better describe the Twelve as prophetic literature *sui generis* and more closely define the possibilities and limits for reading the Twelve holistically?

GENRES IN PROPHETIC LITERATURE

When scholarly investigation was focused primarily on reconstructing the hypothetical original form of prophetic literature, rooted in the oral proclamations of the prophets themselves, much effort was expended—and considerable progress was made—in defining "the basic forms of prophetic speech."[4] Now that scholarly investigation focuses primarily on prophetic literature as we presently have it, rather than any hypothetical original form, questions arise about these formerly operative genre categories. Are they applicable to prophetic literature as well as prophetic speech? And if so, to what extent? Several articles in this collection reflect the range of opinion that is evident in recent scholarship.

At one end of the spectrum we might locate the work of Ehud Ben Zvi, who is not a contributor to this volume but has had a big influence on the approach that is represented here. He maintains that prophetic literature has its own genres, in which the genres of prophetic speech are occasionally echoed but largely effaced. For example, one of his main categories is the *prophetic reading*, a rhetorically distinct section of a prophetic book designed to be read and reread so as to evoke associations with other such readings.[5]

In the present collection the article of James Trotter reaches a conclusion that comes pretty close to Ben Zvi's position. From the earliest days of form criticism, the *prophetic lawsuit* was one of the staple genre categories used in the analysis of prophetic texts, thought to have originated from prophets confronting unfaithful Israelites in a way that imitated an offender being brought to trial. Trotter takes three texts that have been considered parade examples of this genre—Hos 2:3–25, Hos 4:1–3, and Mic 6:1–8—and asks whether those who produced and read these prophetic books in the Persian Period would have understood them in such legal terms. After surveying Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Achaemenid legal genres and practices, he reaches a negative

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[3] E.g., Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart, eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*, BZAW 325 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003); also James Nogalski, "Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for a Theological Reading," *Int* 61 (2007): 125–36.

[4] The classic work is Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh C. White (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

[5] Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah*, FOTL 21b (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); idem, *Hosea*, FOTL 21a.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

conclusion. These texts would not be understood as reflecting any particular legal procedure. Trotter only intends to show how one of "old" form criticism's classical genre categories can become unraveled when texts are read as writings about prophecies rather than speeches once made by prophets. Thus he does not venture any definition of the genres of literary prophecy to which his example texts might belong. He does say that Persian Period readers would have understood all three as having a common theme—YHWH and Israel having a dispute (*rîb*)—but not as belonging to the same genre.

At the other end of the spectrum we might locate Paul Redditt's essay. He recognizes that prophetic books are literary creations, but he affirms that recorded prophetic speeches were the raw material with which scribes worked to produce them. Readers of prophetic literature can thus still "hear the prophetic voices" that underlie the text. As he works through Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi he finds cases in which the standard forms of prophetic speech appear full-fledged and cases in which they have been transformed but not completely effaced by scribal editors, as well as one extended passage (Zech 9–14) which he believes to have had a largely literary origin. Even in this largely literary text, however, he finds echoes of oral prophetic speech. From Redditt's perspective the genres of prophetic speech are still evident in prophetic literature and still serviceable in its analysis, even when focusing primarily on prophetic literature as such.

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer takes a position similar to Redditt as she investigates a particular genre, the *vision report*, in terms of how its function as prophetic speech relates to its function as prophetic literature. Like earlier form critics, she argues that it is possible to distinguish earlier textual material rooted in prophetic proclamation from textual material resulting from later redactional additions. However, she does not assume—as earlier form critics tended to—that the earlier material was necessarily cast in a static and relatively pristine form.

Pericopes that contain vision reports usually have explanatory oracular speech accompanying the account of what was seen in the vision per se. Scholars have debated whether this oracular speech belonged to the original version of the report or whether it was a secondary addition. After examining closely the vision reports in Amos and Zechariah, Tiemeyer finds that there can be no hard and fast rule in this regard. The vision report genre cannot be defined in terms of a form that invariably includes or does not include oracular speech, and oracular speech cannot automatically be relegated to the status of primary or secondary material. One must consider the function of the oracular speech in relation to the account of what was seen. Does it provide an explanation of the image, without which its basic meaning would be incomprehensible? If so, it was probably part of the original form of the report. Or does it give a *re*interpretation of the image, modifying or adding to its basic meaning? If so, it was probably a redactional addition. Knowing the difference is useful for understanding whether the writers of prophetic literature transmitted the vision reports they inherited

without much modification, thus leaving their readers free to understand them in a variety of ways, or whether they intended to direct their readers' understanding through editorializing additions.

Carol Dempsey's essay falls somewhere between the extremes represented by Trotter and Redditt. She uses broad genre categories based on those of classical form criticism to analyze how the writers of prophetic books characterized the function of prophecy in the past, and thereby addressed theological messages to their postexilic readers. Within the category she calls *prophecies of woe* she subsumes various genres of prophetic speech used in connection with proclamations of divine judgment, including those that earlier form critics termed *oracles of doom*, *woe oracles*, *laments*, and *disputation speeches*, et cetera. Within the category that she calls *prophecies of weal*, she subsumes various genres of prophetic speech used in connection with proclamations of salvation, including those that earlier form critics termed *oracles of salvation*, *exhortations*, and *calls to rejoicing*, et cetera. She gives a book-by-book analysis, comparing passages that consist solely of prophecies of woe, passages that consist solely of prophecies of weal, and passages that mix the two. She sees these broad genre categories as a point of entry into each book, in order to see the distinctive ways in which the writers of each book used them to address their own particular messages of warning and hope to their contemporaries—and to subsequent readers as well.

Dempsey's approach resembles Redditt's in that she finds traces of prophetic speech forms in prophetic literature, but unlike him she does not assume that this necessarily reveals anything about whatever prophetic speech may have once underlain prophetic literature as it now stands. Instead, she sees the generic structures still evident in prophetic literature as evidence that its writers appropriated traditional prophetic rhetoric in addressing their readers. Dempsey's approach resembles Trotter's in that she keeps the focus on how readers would have understood the writers of prophetic literature, without venturing to consider how any earlier versions of prophecies might have been understood by earlier audiences. For Dempsey, however, this does not result in a radical questioning of any genres identified by earlier form critics, as it does for Trotter.

With regard to the basic forms of prophetic speech, the above-mentioned contributors to this volume affirm that they are still relevant to the form-critical analysis of prophetic literature. However, as we can see, there is a wide variety of working assumptions about the ways in which oral genres might have informed the writing of prophetic literature. This calls for further discussion, as well as interaction with the discussion—covered in the following group of essays—about how prophetic books were produced. How closely were they tied to earlier prophetic proclamation, and what was the nature of those ties?

THE FORMATION OF PROPHETIC BOOKS

Most scholars believe that prophetic books were not entirely invented by those who wrote them in their present form and that they were somehow related to previous prophetic activity. There are widely differing opinions, however, regarding the nature of that previous prophetic activity and how much we can know about it. Three of the essays in this collection address this issue.

Erhard Gerstenberger argues that our perspective has been anachronistically skewed by the modern assumption that books are written by authors for the edification of individual readers. He sees the prophetic books in the Twelve as the result of a different sort of process with a different end. The beginning of the process was prophetic proclamation, but that is no longer recoverable as such from prophetic literature. The earliest stage that can be detected is the recording and collection of anonymous prophecies, which were then augmented and adapted for liturgical use. The first of these two textual layers is evident in the short, pithy oracular sayings addressed to particular situations, which are now often found clustered together in series. The second layer is evident in accusatory, exhortative, and hymnic language that draws out the didactic implications of the oracles, generalizing and applying them to the common life of a community gathered for worship. Gerstenberger views a liturgical setting, in which prophetic writings are read in order to renew and strengthen the relationship between the community and YHWH, as the formative matrix for prophetic literature, and he emphasizes the anonymity of the overall process. The original oracular sayings themselves came from anonymous speakers of YHWH's word, and they were compiled and augmented for liturgical use by anonymous scribes and cultic functionaries. The identification of each book of the Twelve with a particular historical figure, by means of a superscription naming it after a supposedly great prophet from the past, was the last stage in the process of literary production, coincident with its being incorporated into the Book of the Twelve. The data in the superscriptions—including the names of the prophets themselves—thus have no real biographical implications, and no substantial bearing on either the contents or the formation of these books.

James Nogalski takes as his starting point the same anonymity emphasized by Gerstenberger, and ends up taking a position very similar to Gerstenberger's. Nogalski works in reaction to a theory of Karl Budde about the lack of biographical information concerning the prophets named among the Twelve. Budde argued that more biographical material, especially narrative material, had once been included, but most of it—except Amos 7:10–17, Hos 1 and 3, and Mic 3:1—was removed in a redaction of the entire Book of the Twelve, intended to make its contents more generally applicable to later readers. Nogalski finds little to commend this theory, but he finds the questions with which Budde wrestled still worthy of attention. What is the nature of the

redactional processes that shaped each of the books of the Twelve, as well as the collection as a whole? And why have the books in this collection included so little biographical information in their present form?

Nogalski accepts the traditional assumption that, at least in most cases, prophetic literature was ultimately rooted in prophetic proclamation, perhaps on the part of the prophets for whom the books in the Twelve were named. In any case, however, all that can now be recovered from prophetic literature are the rhetorical elements with which its writers worked. Like Gerstenberger, Nogalski attempts to identify these elements and describe the patterns of their interrelationships, but he gives a somewhat different inventory: headings, anthologies and small collections, source blocks, longer redactional compositions, and shorter editorial comments. Source blocks have a variety of functions: They can be used as building blocks for extended passages or entire books, as complementary enhancements of already existing anthologies and collections, and as intertwined textual threads. When one considers how such elements are interrelated in the formation of the various books that comprise the Twelve, a reason for the absence of biographical information becomes evident. The writers of these prophetic books were primarily interested in the liveliness of YHWH's word, not the lives of the prophets.

Nogalski does not say much about the setting of this redactional activity, but one of his general conclusions leaves him very much open to the kind of liturgical context described in detail by Gerstenberger:

> Significantly, the function of the source texts that are involved in the compilation and framing of the writings reflect more cultic associations than biographical material…. This cultic flavor has been underappreciated in prophetic studies and it requires more consideration in the development of the Twelve since it probably sheds more light upon the process of editing than the biographies of the prophets.[6]

Thus Gerstenberger and Nogalski come by different routes to much the same place, and I find myself in substantial agreement with much of what they say. In one particular respect, however, the position that I take in my essay is diametrically opposed to theirs. It is an obvious fact that the biographical information given in the Twelve is next to none. It is also evident that the writers of these prophetic books were more interested in the liveliness of YHWH's word than in the lives of the prophets. I question, though, whether this means that they had no biographical interest whatsoever. Gerstenberger and Nogalski are primarily concerned with the redactional process into which oral prophecies were incorporated after having been recorded and collected. They are certainly correct in noting that the scribes who were the agents of this redactional activity and thus also the creators of prophetic literature—and who also may have been

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[6] P. 182.

cultic functionaries, as Gerstenberger argues—were anonymous. I am more interested in the initial stage of the process, in which oral prophecies were recorded and collected. I would question whether these oracular sayings were also anonymous to begin with.

Although the original oral prophecies are no longer recoverable as such—and most scholars now seem to be pretty much agreed on this point—I would argue that in at least some cases we can nevertheless know something about them on the basis of external comparative evidence as well as internal textual evidence. First of all, comparative evidence does not altogether support the theory that scribes recorded anonymous prophetic sayings. In many examples of recorded prophecies from Mari, Nineveh, and elsewhere in the ancient world, the name of the prophet who received a revelation is often noted as an integral part of the record. With regard to the recorded prophecies on which biblical prophetic literature was based we might therefore suppose that they were not necessarily anonymous to begin with. Second, the writers of prophetic books often invite their readers to make typological connections with prophecies that were fulfilled long before these books were written. The word of YHWH articulated by the writers of prophetic literature had implications for readers in general, in their various situations, because it was rooted in the fulfillment of prophecies once addressed by particular prophets to particular audiences in particular crisis situations. The rhetorical persuasiveness of prophetic literature's message lies largely in its being warranted by previous prophecies already fulfilled. This is at least the case with regard to Mic 1:1–16, the example text that I have used in my essay, and this is arguably the case with regard to many other prophetic texts too.

As I see it, the main impetus for prophecies being written down and subjected to reinterpretation was the fact that they were spoken by a prophet whose prophecies had come to pass. Association with a known prophet from a particular time and place—however tentative—was an important aspect of the basis for assuming that a prophecy had general implications above and beyond its original circumstances. The attribution characteristic of the superscription that heads each book of the Twelve, which associates the contents of each book with a particular prophetic figure, is thus a key element in the formation of the book, indicative of a genuine—though obviously quite limited—historical interest on the part of its writer. Prophetic books do not pretend that they are, in their entirety, the work of the prophets for whom they are named; but they do claim to be ultimately based on the revelations once made to those prophets, however little may be additionally known about them. The writers of prophetic literature were indeed more interested in the liveliness of the word of YHWH than in the lives of the prophets, but they nevertheless wanted to affirm that the word of YHWH had originally been incarnate in the lives of particular prophets.

Nogalski recognizes that there may have been some underlying historical connection between the prophets for whom the Twelve were named and the

recorded oracles that were elaborated in the process of forming prophetic books, but he does not see this connection as the impetus for their formation. Gerstenberger seems to imply that the impetus for recording and collecting anonymous prophetic sayings would have been their potential for present liturgical use, not their connections with the past. I would argue that their connections with past prophets were precisely what made prophetic sayings adaptable for the uses to which their redactors may have wanted to put them. Gerstenberger believes that the ostensibly biographical connections of the Twelve with past prophets were late, superficial inventions because the superscriptions, in which the biographical connections are largely made, were added late in the redaction of the Twelve. But even if the superscriptions were added last—and Gerstenberger may well be right about this—it does not necessarily follow that the biographical connections came late in the development of the tradition. These sharp differences of opinion show the need for more discussion of the formation of prophetic books.

HOLISTIC SYNCHRONIC READINGS OF PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Along with new form criticism's insistence on beginning with the text in its present form comes the assumption that it is not a hodge-podge, but rather an entity whose writers gave it this form in order to communicate a particular, comprehensible message. The initial challenge is to discern on the basis of synchronic analysis what the writers of prophetic texts wanted to communicate to their contemporary readers, before considering whether there is any reason to believe that they drew on previously existing records or traditions, in which case it may also be appropriate to undertake diachronic analysis.

It is hard for biblical scholars to break the habit of giving priority to diachronic concerns, so two of the essays in the present volume set out to show the advantages of doing so. Anthony Petterson argues that major differences in the interpretation of Zech 6:9–15 stem from the methodologically mistaken approach of first considering diachronically what this prophecy might have meant for the prophet in relation to his contemporaries instead of first considering synchronically what it might mean for the writer in relation to his contemporaries. D. C. Timmer argues that ostensible discrepancies in Zephaniah are understandable if they are read synchronically in terms of the message of the book as a whole, rather than diachronically in terms of different redactional layers. Because Timmer draws on linguistic theory his essay will be treated below, along with others that similarly employ concepts from linguistic and literary theory. Here we will consider Petterson's thesis.

Does the prophecy concerning צמח in Zech 6:9–15 refer to Zerubbabel and the completion of the Second Temple, or does it refer to a future messianic figure and the completion of another more glorious, even eschatological temple? In addition to the problem of who צמח is, this text contains several cruxes that

must somehow be resolved in the course of its overall interpretation, all of which Petterson takes up in his survey of opinion. Here we are mainly interested in his argument about the central question—*a* messiah, Zerubbabel, or *the* Messiah? He says that the answer depends largely on two things: (1) Is the text read as if addressed to the prophet's contemporaries, or to the writer's contemporaries? (2) Is the text read as having a message that is coherent with the message of Zechariah as a whole, and also coherent with the royal ideology of the wider prophetic corpus? Those who regard Zech 6:9–15 as a prophecy addressed to the prophet's contemporaries tend to take it as a legitimation of Zerubbabel's messianic status because he completed the Second Temple. Such a reading raises the question of whether this is not then a failed prophecy—for Zerubbabel nevertheless failed to attain a kingly crown—and what ongoing significance it could possibly have as such. It also creates a discrepancy between the way צמח is used as royal terminology here and elsewhere in other prophetic literature (i.e., Jer 23:5; 33:15–18), as well as a discrepancy between the way kingship is conceived here and elsewhere in Zechariah (e.g., Zech 9:9–10). Those who regard Zech 6:9–15 as a prophecy addressed by the writers of Zechariah to their readers tend to take it as foretelling the advent of a future king—a prophecy yet to be fulfilled—in a way that is consistent with other messianic prophecies. Petterson prefers the latter alternative as less problematic.

Petterson's analysis raises the question of just what the synchronic reading of a prophetic book entails. Some advocates of new form criticism assume, as he does, that it means treating the text as temporally one-dimensional, as if it addresses its readers only with respect to their present circumstances and as if it projects the future only with respect to their time. It is correspondingly assumed that any diachronic analysis is an imposition of modern historical criticism that has no warrant in the text itself. But what if the text itself expresses a historical perspective on its own prophetic past? In that case, wouldn't a synchronic reading of the text involve a consideration of how the book as a whole reconstructs the past—as opposed to the historical-critical practice, often abetted by earlier form criticism, of dismembering the text in order to read it in relation to the way modern scholars reconstruct the past? Some unexplored issues seem to be lurking in the approach represented by Petterson.

FORM CRITICISM MEETS LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC THEORY

Earlier form critics had literary as well as historical interests. Hermann Gunkel, in particular, showed a profound aesthetic appreciation for as well as a historical interest in biblical texts. Because of the analytical practices that their historical interests entailed, however, the pioneers of form criticism often did not have an opportunity to take their literary interests very far. In the quest for original layers of material, the text had to be dissected in search of small, self-contained, conceptually homogenous, and historically datable units. The only literary

features taken seriously into account were those on which such dissection was based. With the text so dismembered, many of its other literary features were often lost from view. This state of affairs led James Muilenburg in 1969 to call for going beyond form criticism into what he called rhetorical criticism, making room in the analysis of texts for a fuller delineation of their aesthetic dimensions.[7] Newer form criticism makes it possible to take this call all the more seriously, particularly in its insistence that any type of analysis must begin with a comprehensive view of the text as a whole in its present state. This opens up the possibility of a fruitful cross-fertilization, in which the categories of literary and form-critical analysis are allowed to interact.

Just when form criticism began opening up to literary-critical concerns, literary criticism itself was taking a linguistic turn. Structuralism provided the theoretical framework for this trend, but the usefulness of linguistic categories for purposes of literary analysis has proved itself pragmatically without necessarily resorting to any particular ideological justification. It should thus be possible for form-critical concerns to be addressed in creative ways using analytical practices developed by linguists as well as literary critics.

Four of the essays in this collection illustrate the various ways in which form criticism can interact with literary and linguistic analysis. Beth Stovell allows the literary-critical concept of metaphor to interact with the form-critical concept of genre in order to better understand how similar metaphorical imagery can have different connotations in different generic contexts. Using Amos as an example, Tim Bulkeley seeks to refine the genre category of prophetic books by analyzing the rhetorical flow of the book as a whole in relation to its redactionally identifiable components, synthesizing the results in terms of the literary-critical distinction between fictionalized history and historicized fiction. D. C. Timmer uses the linguistic distinction between semantic coherence and semantic cohesion to resolve a long-standing crux in the form- and redaction-critical analysis of Zephaniah. And Colin Toffelmire draws upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to refine the conventional form-critical notion of *Sitz im Leben* or setting.

Stovell's starting point is the realization that the definition of generic and metaphorical structures is not an end in itself. The usefulness of identifying a recurring verbal generic structure, such as a prophetic lament, lies in noting the diverse and variable ways it can figure in particular instances. Similarly, the usefulness of identifying a recurring metaphor, such as God compared with a shepherd, lies in noting the diverse and variable ways it can figure in particular instances. Moreover, genres and metaphors—in all their diversity—are interactive. Stovell attempts to map out the ways in which particular genres and metaphors can vary in relation to their context, as well as the ways they can affect one another in the process.

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[7] James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969): 1–18.

Stovell focuses on the metaphor of Israel as adulterous wife in Hos 2 and Mic 1, and the metaphor of Israel as a woman in labor in Hos 9 and Mic 4. She devises an analytical grid consisting of four factors that condition the use of both genres and metaphors: (1) *Cultural and historical context.* Genre and metaphor have currency and meaning in relation to their own time and place. (2) *Partiality and blending.* The ideal forms of genres and metaphors are seldom fully realized, and in any given instance they are typically found in combination with (an)other genre(s) and metaphor(s). (3) *Linguistic context.* Genre and metaphor function within particular frames of both intra- and intertextual discourse. And (4) *theological context.* Biblical genres and metaphors are often used in the service of some particular theological position, such as the Deuteronomistic or Priestly perspective. The result of Stovell's analysis is a highly nuanced description of how these same metaphors express different ideas in different contexts, and how these four passages improvise with various genre forms, thus enabling the metaphors to have such diverse meanings.

Bulkeley begins by signaling the practical importance, from a literary-critical viewpoint, of understanding the genre of prophetic books as a whole—in contrast with the earlier form-critical goal of understanding only the genres of individual units of prophetic speech. He notes the attempts of Marvin Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi to define *prophetic book* as a literary genre, evaluating these as major steps forward but also identifying some shortcomings. In particular, he argues that these definitions do not do justice to the way prophetic books conjure up a literary world in which a prophetic character speaks with a distinctive voice—not to be confused with a biographical account of what any prophet may have once prophesied. A prophetic book presents a literary image of a prophetic speaker that was perhaps initially inspired by an actual prophet from the historical past, but this literary image no longer refers to things that this prophet may have actually done or said. Bulkeley searches for terminology that adequately captures this phenomenon and, drawing on Robert Alter's distinction between fictionalized history and historicized fiction, he settles on *prophetic fiction.*

Bulkeley's conclusion intersects with the issue left dangling by the essays concerning the formation of prophetic books. Like Gerstenberger and Nogalski, he emphasizes the extent to which the production of prophetic literature is removed from the prophetic proclamation that it imitates, thus losing historical referentiality to what a prophet from the past may have actually said. He does not go as far as Gerstenberger, who argues that any traces of prophetic proclamation still evident in prophetic literature must have originally come from anonymous mediators of YHWH's word. Like Nogalski, he recognizes that a prophetic book's presentation of its message may have been inspired by the example of the historical prophet for whom it is named, although it does not intend to give a systematic account of what he did and said. Bulkeley does not address the issue raised in my essay, whether a biographical connection with a

prophecy once spoken by the prophet for whom a book is named might substantially affect the way in which the admittedly non-biographical book—as a prophetic fiction—rhetorically functions.

D. C. Timmer starts with a tension in Zephaniah's description of the nations. Throughout that book they are generally portrayed in a negative light, as the object of YHWH's punishment. However there are two references, in Zeph 2:11 and 3:9, which portray them favorably as having become devotees of YHWH. Because of this tension scholars have long regarded these verses as the result of secondary additions and theorized about the kind of redactional process that might explain how they came to be where they presently are. Timmer proposes that instead of jumping immediately to such diachronic conclusions the text might be approached in line with the new form-critical principle of first attempting to read it as comprehensively as possible, on the assumption that the writer was attempting to communicate a comprehensible message to readers by shaping the text into whatever form it now has. Can inconsistencies like those that are evident in Zephaniah's description of the nations be understood as part of the total message of a text, rather than as incomprehensible disruptions? How can you tell the difference?

Timmer resorts to a distinction made in semantics between *coherence* and *cohesion*. Cohesion refers to the harmony of a text's surface features like vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, et cetera. Coherence refers to the infratextual conceptual system that informs readers' understanding of the text as a whole. In terms of this distinction it is not problematic if a single text includes more than one perspective on a subject, thus stretching its cohesiveness, as long as there exists a unifying conceptual basis that accommodates the particularities of the various occurrences of that subject in the text. In the case of Zephaniah, is there a unifying conceptual basis that coherently accommodates both the negative and the favorable perspectives on the nations? Or are these differences still best understood as incohesive inconsistencies indicating secondary redactional layers?

Timmer finds a unifying conceptual framework that encompasses Zephaniah's contrasting perspectives on the nations. The book opens with YHWH's cosmic judgment of the whole world, including Judah and the nations. This sets in motion a process in which contrasting perspectives on Judah also become readily apparent. First YHWH will destroy Judah, then he will save a faithful remnant, and finally he will use them to restore Judah. Within the context of worldwide judgment Timmer finds a similar progression in the destiny of the nations. First YHWH will destroy them, then he will save a righteous remnant, and finally he will use them to create a gentile community faithful to YHWH. The perspectives on the nations are different because they describe different stages in this process. Timmer's article thus provides a good example of how the new form-critical approach can draw on linguistic theory in a way that affects the interface between form and redaction criticism.

Petterson's essay, discussed above, also invokes the criterion of *coherence*. In contrast with Timmer, who defines coherence as capable of comprehending certain kinds of inconsistency, Petterson defines it as uniformity. In view of form criticism's present emphasis on reading the present form of the text as a coherent message, it would be helpful to clarify the difference between these two approaches in further discussion.

Colin Toffelmire's essay is concerned with the form-critical concept of *Sitz im Leben*, or setting. This was one of Hermann Gunkel's key concepts, which at first seemed very productive. He thought that certain types of social situations invariably called for certain fixed forms of expression, and that in the ancient world these forms of expression were primarily oral. Gunkel was hardly incorrect, and in many cases this hypothesis served well, but problems emerged in the attempt to apply this concept of setting across the board. As it turned out, all texts were not necessarily rooted in one of the typically recurring situations of ancient society, the forms of expression called forth by similar social situations were not invariably fixed, and all forms of expression did not necessarily originate as oral traditions. As form criticism has shifted its focus from a reconstruction of the oral traditions lying behind biblical literature to a better understanding of scripture as literature, the need for a more flexible concept of setting has become apparent. Attention has become focused on a cadre of scribes in early Persian Yehud as the setting in which biblical books as such began to be produced. But since we have no direct information about this group, we are limited to what is known about scribes in general, and to what can be inferred about them from the documents they created.[8]

The question is whether the attempt to infer the setting from the documents themselves can be systematized, and Toffelmire argues that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a promising possibility in this regard. SFL is a sub-field of linguistics distinguished by its inclusion of social context, along with phonology, grammar, and semantics, as one of the essential levels of language analysis. Using a wide range of variable factors it asks of texts what their patterns of language disclose about the possible settings in which they were used. As Toffelmire demonstrates, using Obadiah as an example, SFL analysis covers aspects of texts that have often been noted by biblical scholars, but it makes use of this and other data in a more purposeful and organized way. The result is a description of Obadiah's "context of situation" (in SFL jargon) that brings together the historical specificity of Edom's role in the overthrow of Jerusalem, the use of this historical memory by highly literate scribes to engender in their readers both a feeling of betrayal and a hope of vindication, and the wider applicability of the theme of brotherly betrayal to a variety of circumstances, et cetera.

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[8] For a *tour de force* in this regard, see Ehud Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud*, JSOTSup 367 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

As a result of the complications encountered by Gunkel's concept of setting form criticism might be tempted to downplay its interest in social context, but this would be counter to one of the main contemporary trends in linguistics, which places increasing emphasis on the need to understand language in its social context. If form criticism wishes to continue its historic concern with setting, and if it finds generalizations about scribes in ancient society less than totally satisfying in this regard, SFL would seem to offer a promising way forward.

As noted at the outset, the responses by Wilson and Buss put into larger perspectives the particular issues raised by comparison of the articles in this collection. Wilson emphasizes that many questions are still left unanswered in the shift from focusing on the original words of the prophets to focusing on prophetic literature in its present form. Not nearly enough is known about the scribal elite that produced this literature, and Wilson observes that describing these scribes and their ways is just as much a project of historical reconstruction as was the "old" form-critical project of supplying data for historical criticism's biographies of the prophets. Buss locates the genius of form criticism in its sometimes unrealized potential for relating particular expressions of language and thought in their sociohistorical contexts to general issues of human life and faith in similar sociohistorical contexts. He challenges those of us who continue to practice form criticism to stand firm in this stream of scholarly tradition descended from Gunkel.