

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Lecture 3

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Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism

Beyond Form Criticism

We were looking at 2 in the outline, “Concessionary Evangelicalism” in the last class hour. I want to back up this afternoon to 1. c just prior to that and go over that handout I gave also in the last class hour. I think what I’ll do is something I don’t like to do but in the interest in time, I’m going to read through this with you and make some comments here and there. So this is from that handout I gave out in the last class hour. “Beyond Form Criticism” is the heading, and there are three sub-points under that.

“In recent years dissatisfaction with the fragmentation of the biblical text produced by source and form criticism has given rise to the development of a variety of new approaches to analysis of the text which focus more on the unity of its present form rather than on the history of its development.” Now, if you just think back a minute, in this history of analysis of text that we’ve been looking at, well now we’re most interested in the documentary sources. With form criticism we’re trying to get beyond those sources to the individual units that were combined in the sources.

“The tendency of both source and form criticism is to fragment the text, and if you look at the literature that went to such an extreme, it becomes a very tedious kind of work with not a lot of positive results that comes from it. There’s a reaction that has set in the last 15 years or so for that kind of work, and now the interest is more on the final form of the text. That’s not necessarily to say all this other kind of work is illegitimate, *per se*. It’s not to deny the methodologies, but to say, well look, let’s look at the final form of the text rather than put all of our attention on all these preliminaries and what ultimately yielded the final form. So the last decade or so we’ve seen the rise of the closely related methodologies of

redaction criticism, canonical criticism, and what for lack of a better label I will term “the literary approach” to the Old Testament text.

1. Redaction Criticism

So first redaction criticism. What we’ll do is just look at these three categories of approach and try to get some very small idea of what is involved. Redaction criticism: This movement had its roots in the work of Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad, but has tended to move much beyond them in its focus on the final form of the text. Both literary criticism and form criticism tended to fragment the text either into documentary strands or into independent literary units. From the beginning, literary critics spoke of redactors” [we talked about that, it’s hard to combine the sources] “who were responsible for combining the literary strands into its present form. These redactors, however, received little or no attention because the focus of interest was on isolating the literary documents, or independent story units, with which these anonymous redactors worked. Marked in your bibliography on the bottom of page two is J. Barton’s in *The Old Testament Method and Biblical Study*. If you want to get a recent survey of all these methodologies, then Barton’s is a good book to read, although Barton does not present you that survey from an evangelical, conservative basis. He utilizes most of these methodologies himself and sees nothing wrong with them. But he does trace the history of the methodological approach to reading the Old Testament. As Barton says on page 45, ‘It was probably felt that the redactors could hardly have been people of much originality, or even intelligence, or they would have made a better job of their work and not let the tell-tale traces of inconsistency and meandering narrative trend that has enabled modern scholarship to reconstruct the raw materials with which they applied their tedious trade.’”

But as Franz Rosenswhite pointed out long ago “R,” a symbol for redactors, should be regarded as standing for *Rabenu*, which is a Hebrew term meaning “our master,” since it is from the redactor that we receive the scriptures. And see, if you

grant their theories, it's really true: It's the redactor who has put Scripture into the form as you have it, and it is from the redactor that you receive the Scripture. He becomes your master--the redactor--not all the J author, D author, P author, or whatever.

This insight is reflected in Gerhard von Rad's endeavor to move beyond an attempt to explain the margining growth of the biblical text to its present form to interest in how the redactor intended us to understand the text in the form in which it is cast. See, there you move towards the final form. Even though they don't deny the legitimacy of all this other preliminary kind of work, they focus on the final form. That's where we'll get our significance remaining. This development is certainly a welcomed one in the field of biblical studies since it yields much more positive and useful results than the literary and historical criticism of earlier times.

Barton says that with redaction criticism, we come to what the student trained in other literatures would mean by literary criticism. It's the attempt to give what is sometimes called the close reading of the text, analyzing how the author/editor achieves his effects. Why he arranges his material as he does, and above all, what devices he uses to give units the incoherence of his work.

There is, however an irony in all this. E.J. Young pointed out long ago that there is a unity in the plenitude which the documentary hypothesis does not satisfactorily explain. If the first five books of the Bible were put together in a manner which this hypothesis demands, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand how the result could be the unity that the Pentateuch actually does exhibit.

a. Barton's Danger of Redaction Criticism

Barton, page 56, in fact speaks of the danger in redaction criticism, and this I find very interesting, undermining its own foundations. In performing what he terms the biblical critics conjuring trait which may be called "the disappearing redactor," he says, page 57, "The trick is simply this: The more impressive the

critic makes the redactor's work appear, the more he succeeds in showing that the redactor has, by subtle and delicate artistry, produced a simple and coherent text out of the diverse materials before him. The more also he reduces the evidence on which the *existence* of those sources was established in the first place. Thus, if redaction criticism plays its hand too confidently, we end up with a piece of writing so coherent that no division in the sources is warranted any more, and the sources and redactor vanish together in a puff of smoke, leaving a single, freely composed narrative with, no doubt, a single author." He goes on to say that, "it is not difficult to imagine that the trick we have just described is particularly dear to the hearts of fundamentalist opponents of non-conservative biblical criticism. And in their hands it can well become a convenient means of showing that the critics are hoist with their own petard." Now, that's an expression I don't know if you know of. What it means is blown up by his own bomb – or to give our analogy, when the magic box that contained the redactor is opened, not only is the redactor gone, but Moses himself has stepped into his shoes. A very frightening prospect indeed for a higher critic of any kind.

You see, it's an interesting twist that things have taken. You have all this source criticism and form criticism, and then you get the interest in the final form and the interest in redactors who have unified all this, but as soon as you start emphasizing the redactor and the unity of things too much, you've gone full circle, in fact: Why not just let the redactor be the author? And why even talk about the sources? So there's a lot of fluctuation back and forth right now in literary criticism on these issues. But the redaction critics are interested in the final redactor and how he welded all these sources into a unity of sorts in the final form of the text. These critics are interested in the final form, although most practitioners of redaction criticism do not reject traditional source and form criticism. Notice I say most.

b. Evangelicals and Redaction Criticism

There are evangelicals who have bought into redaction criticism to a degree who wouldn't endorse all the conclusions of form and source criticism, although most of them do. Though most practitioners of redaction criticism do not reject traditional source criticism, it is possible to utilize this method in a legitimate and useful manner as a means of attempting to discern the purpose behind the author's selection, arrangement, and presentation of his material. I think to that extent you can say there is some legitimacy to this method. For example, why in Matthew's gospel as apposed to Luke's, are certain events recorded? Why are they described in certain ways? You know, you often have the Jewish character of Matthew's gospel as opposed to the Greek character of Luke's. Why? Is it different audiences? That is, in a sense, redaction criticism because you see, you're trying to understand why he selected material as he did. What was the purpose behind that? Why did he arrange it in the way he arranged it? What's the purpose behind that? Why did he present it with the language and vocabulary that he did? What was the purpose behind that? That is all involved in what is known as redaction criticism.

c. Historical Trustworthiness Still Undermined

It should be understood, however, that generally the application of this method has done little to increase confidence in the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament. In fact, historical trustworthiness is seriously undermined when it is claimed, as is often the case in actual practice, that the redactor has distorted historical material in order to make a theological point. Now, that is often what will be said. Here is a redactor who is more interested in making some sort of theological point than he is in presenting accurate facts of history. Therefore, he will bend, or manipulate, his sources of information to fit into some sort of preconceived theological scheme. You see, that's pretty conjectural; here is his purpose and here's what he did to achieve it. There is a lot of work that goes on

under the name of redaction criticism that does that kind of thing with the text.

d. Gundry on Matthew using Redaction Criticism

Note the controversy (this is in Old Testament) surrounding the commentary on Matthew by Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982, who utilized this method and concluded that many events relayed in the Gospel of Matthew are not to be taken as historical. Gundry resigned under pressure from the Evangelical Theological Society in 1983 I believe, maybe '84. There's an article about that in *Christianity Today*, February 3, 1984. I might say that members of the Evangelical Theological Society, every year, when they pay their membership dues, sign a statement that says they believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. I don't know how it's worded exactly, but that's in essence what it says. Gundry continued to sign that. Yet, he said, in his commentary that he felt that there were theological purposes being served by the arrangement of materials that really jeopardized any historical reliability.

Let me just give you an illustration, Gundry argued that Matthew has freely changed stories that are related more historically by Luke. Gundry says, for example, Matthew changed the shepherds in the fields into the wise men from the East because he wants to foreshadow and emphasize the mission of Jesus to the Gentiles. He does not believe wise men visited Jesus. See, what he's really saying is that those are two stories about the same thing and that wise men never really visited Jesus, they were shepherds. But see, the theological purpose of Matthew was served better with wise men rather than with shepherds so Matthew manipulated his sources in that way. I think you can see with that kind of thing why he was under pressure and forced to resign from the ETS. [See further, if you're interested in this, the article "Redaction Criticism: Is it Worth the Risk?" Christianity Today Institute, *Christianity Today*, October 18, 1985, pages 1-10 of this Institute section of the magazine; and then Kenneth Kantzer, "Redaction

Criticism: Handle with Care,” Christianity Today Institute, also in the same issue of *Christianity Today*. Those are two good summary, popularly written articles that give you an idea about how evangelicals have been wrestling with this whole area of redaction criticism. Most evangelicals will grant a degree of legitimacy to it but not to let it go to the extremes that are often and usually utilized by the critical scholars, generally.]

e. Rogers and McKim and Inerrancy

This has nothing to do *per se* with redaction criticism, but we were discussing this whole thing of inerrancy in the last class hour, and some questions were asked about Rogers and McKim’s book, along with a number of others. This is just a list of recent books and articles on this issue of inerrancy and in using the literary critical method for studying Scripture. If you’re interested in reading further in this area, I think you can find some useful material here.

Right in the middle of the sheet is the Rogers and McKim book, and with it see the review by John Woodbridge, “Biblical Authority: Towards An Evaluation Of Rogers And McKim,” *Trinity Journal*, 1980. I would say that that review by Woodbridge, as well as the book by Woodbridge that’s listed further down the page and several articles by Woodbridge, are probably the best thing you could read on some of these issues that are right up to date. Okay, any questions on redaction criticism?

2. Canonical Criticism and B. Childs (Yale)

Let’s go on to canonical criticism. Canonical criticism is closely aligned with redaction criticism in its method of literary analysis. The important difference, however, is that the practitioners of canonical criticism do not treat the Bible merely as literature, but rather as Scripture. Brevard Childs of Yale Divinity School is father and most prominent advocate of canonical criticism. He has written *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. That’s this volume. It’s

an introduction to the Old Testament. The title, I think, gives you the perspective of the work; the Old Testament as Scripture; it's not just the Old Testament as ancient literature. That was often the way in which the Old Testament was treated by source critics and by form critics. He says in this volume that he wants to "take seriously the significance of the canon as a crucial element in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures." He goes on to say that the canonical approach is concerned to understand the nature of the theological shape of the text rather than to recover an original literary or aesthetic unity.

This means that the focus of study is on the final form; that is the canonical form of the text. Childs says that he wants to do justice to the integrity of the text itself apart from "diachronistic reconstruction." Now, diachronistic reconstruction is this attempt to go back and ascertain exactly what steps were involved in the text coming to its present form. That is a diachronistic reconstruction. The terms diachronistic and synchronistic are terms that are used a lot right now. He is more interested in the synchronistic aspect of Scripture in its final form, not in the whole history of its development. Again, he is not going to deny entirely the legitimacy of the study of that whole history, but that's not where his focus is.

This, of course, is a welcome change from the source informed critical focus of much of the scholarly study of the Old Testament in the past century. There is much of a positive nature that can be gleaned from Childs' writing. He's not only written this introduction, he's written a commentary of Exodus and a number of other things. Childs can be read with profit in many instances, but you have to read him very carefully because he is not someone with a high view of Scripture even though he talks about the canonical shape of Scripture and the importance of that.

Nevertheless, Childs does not reject the legitimacy of the source informed critical analysis of biblical literature as historical disciplines. He says on page 76, "The purpose of insisting on the authority of the final canonical form is to defend its role of providing this critical norm. The work with the final stage of the text is

not to lose its historical dimension, but it is, rather, to make a critical theological judgment concerning the process. The depth dimension aids in understanding the interpreted text and does not function independently of it. To distinguish the Yahwist source from the Priestly and the Pentateuch often allows the interpreter to hear the combined text with imprecision.

“But it is the full combined text which has rendered a judgment on the shape of the tradition which continues to exercise authority on the community of faith. Of course, it is legitimate and fully necessary for the historians of Ancient Near East to use as written evidence in a different manner, often reading his text obliquely, but his enterprise is a different order from the interpretation of sacred scripture which we are seeking to describe.”

Now, I think that statement is revealing because I think here Childs, and I read my next statement, as refreshing and helpful as his canonical perspective is when compared with the traditional source and form criticism, he does not avoid falling into the dichotomy between history and faith. He speaks of this diachronistic reconstruction, that’s a historical discipline he is interested in a theological discipline and immediately wrenches those two apart. So he doesn’t avoid falling into the dichotomy between history and faith, between scientific analysis and theological significance, much as is the case with von Rad and others before him. Von Rad may push that further than Childs does, but it’s still there with Childs because he still accepts the belief, still accepts the historical critical method, but you will hear a lot about canonical criticism, and increasingly you will see in a lot of evangelical writing citations of Childs because of his insights into a lot of things and his focus on the final form of the text which, after all, is the same thing we focus on: the final form of the text.

3. Rhetorical Criticism and Robert Alter

Alright, third, the literary approach of “rhetorical criticism.” You might even call this literary criticism, but then the terms become so confusing because

literary criticism has been used in such a different way over the years, or in many different ways, so this literary approach we'll call rhetorical criticism.

The precise definition of this literary approach is difficult because of the diversity within this latest trend in analysis of biblical literature. Nevertheless, the general emphasis clearly involves a shift from a primarily historical to a primarily literary interest in the analysis of the text. Two of the most influential books written from this perspective are Robert Alter's, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, in 1981, and James Kugel's, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, also in 1981.

Since our interest is in the historical writings of the Old Testament, let me give a brief synopsis of the emphasis of Alter's book. Now this book has had a great influence. There have been a lot of spin-offs of application and methods that have been played out off Robert Alter's book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. In this book Alter, who is a professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at the University of California at Berkley, reacts against traditional literary form criticism, although he does not reject their legitimacy and value. He proposes a literary analysis of the biblical text that he defines as, "the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tones, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units and much else. It's 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 and the novels of Tolstoy."

Now that is literary criticism in the traditional sense of trying to see all of these rhetorical devices and so forth that the author uses in the text. And, of course, again, if you do that kind of thing with biblical material, you are focusing on the final form; you are not interested in how it got to that final form so much as you're looking at the characteristics of literature as it is in the Scripture. Unfortunately, in developing his approach he rejects any notion that the Bible as divine revelation (page 20) and characterizes the narrative material of the Old Testament as historicized prose fiction. He says, "What the Bible offers us is an

uneven continuum and a constant interweaving of actual historical detail, especially, but by no means exclusively, for the later periods, with purely legendary folk history, occasional enigmatic vestiges of mythological lore, etiological stories, patriarchal fictions of the founding fathers of the nation, coat tails of heroes, wonder-working men of God, very similar invention of wholly fictional personages attached to the progress of national history and fictionalized versions of known historical figures. All of these narratives are presented as history; that is, as things that really happened and that have some significant consequence for human or Israelite destiny,” (end of quote page 33).

Nevertheless, he says that the ancient Hebrew writers sought to utilize narrative to speak of the “enactment of God’s purposes in historical events.” Fiction is the principle means of doing this. He says that the David stories may have a historical basis, but nevertheless these stories are not strictly speaking historiography but rather the imaginative reenactment of history by a gifted writer who organizes his materials along certain thematic biases and according to his own remarkable intuition of the psychology of the characters. The author of the David stories stands in basically the same relation to Israelite history as Shakespeare stands to English history in his history plays. So what he’s saying is, he plays with both these terms: historicized fiction and fictionalized history, and depending on which narrative he is looking at, he’ll put the stress on one or the other, fictionalized history or historicized fiction. But he is not going to say it’s history writing in the true sense of the word. He goes on to suggest a variety of perspectives from which the prose-fiction of the biblical narrative should be read and analyzed. Among other things, he speaks of the techniques of repetition, the art of reticence (that is the sort of gaps in a story that you wonder about; a certain piece of information that’s not included and sort of makes you think about the story), the use of type scenes. He often speaks of the omniscient stance taken by the biblical narrators. He says, “Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the role played by the narrator in the biblical tales is the way in which omniscience and

inobtrusiveness are combined. He is all knowing and also perfectly reliable.”
The narrator is all knowing.

a. Omniscient Narrator

Now, we would have a certain agreement with that from the perspective of inspiration, that the writer has an insight into things by direction of the Holy Spirit, that he can know things that an ordinary human wouldn't know. That's really not what he is saying here. The omniscient narrator is the one who creates the story and he is omniscient simply because he is the one who created the story. Therefore he can place thoughts in the minds of people and tell you what they are because he is the writer, not because he's been inspired to have that kind of insight into some real historical person. And in fact, in a book I'll mention later, a fellow named Lyle Esslinger wrote *Kingship of God in Crisis: Readings from 1 Samuel 1-12*), and he talks about the omniscient narrator all through his book as Alter does. The omniscient narrator in 1 Samuel is the one who creates not only the stories that he tells and the plots that are involved in the stories and the characters...He creates the characters and one of the characters is Yahweh. In Esslinger's analysis of 1 Samuel, the omniscient narrator creates Yahweh, as any writer would speak about any heathen deity and make up a story about. So see, you are really in a totally different world of thought when you talk about the omniscient narrator than we are when we talk about an inspired writer, even though that inspired writer might have an element of omniscience because of the work of the Holy Spirit. You don't want to be confused by that.

The trait of the omniscient narrator is something that comes out in the stories. For example, like in Esslinger with Samuel, if you look at the first chapter in Samuel, Hannah's parents didn't have a child and verse 5 in chapter 1 of 1 Samuel says the Lord had closed her womb. Now see, there is the omniscient narrator speaking. The Lord had closed her womb. Who can know that the Lord had closed her womb? Well, the omniscient narrator has that kind of insight. Of

course, he has created the story. It's true literature, not historically, necessarily true. Esslinger is simply not interested in what actually happened in that period of transition from the Judges to the Kings, which is this time of the kingship of God and crisis. He's not really so much interested in what actually happened historically. He's interested in the plot and narrative techniques of the storyteller, the narrator, who has given us these materials. He comes up with an incredible plot which really helps out David and Samuel to be manipulators and deceivers who tricked and told both Saul and the people to accept Saul as King. How he gets that out of these narratives would take too long to explain. But, you see, he has gotten so far away and so far removed from what was actually said in these narratives, as well as what actually happened historically. He's not really interested in what happened historically. He's interested in analyzing this as a piece of literature and trying to understand the techniques, devices, the author's view, and so forth.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the role played by the narrator in the biblical tales is the way in which omniscience and inobtrusiveness are combined. He is all knowing and also perfectly reliable. Esslinger also calls attention to the use of key words in the development of thematic arguments. After an analysis of the Joseph story in Genesis, he says, "The consummate artistry of the story involves an elaborate and inventive use of most of the major techniques of biblical narrative that we have considered in the course of this study: the employment of thematic key words, the reiteration of motifs, the subtle definition of character, relations and motives mainly through dialogue, the exploitation especially in dialogue and verbatim repetitions with minute but significant changes introduced, the narrator's discriminating shifts from strategic and suggestive withholding of comment to the occasional flaunting of an omniscient overview, the use of points of a montage of sources to catch the multifaceted nature of the fictional subject."

b. Other Rhetorical Criticis

Now, that kind of analysis of biblical narrative materials is receiving increasing intelligence in recent years with names of these people prominent: Adele Berlin, *Poetic Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 1983. Lyle Esslinger, this book *Kingship of God and Crisis*, 1985. J.P. Fockelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 1981. E.M. Gunn, two books, *Story of King David, Genre and Interpretation*, 1978, and *Fate of King Saul*, 1980. P. Mishcal *I Samuel Literary Reading*, 1986. Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 1985, among the most prominent. Now that's just a short list, but you can see the kind of material that's coming out, all of it within the past five years. It's a whole new thrust looking at rhetorical features, you might say, like biblical narrative.

The insights yielded by these studies are for the most part a welcome change from the stern results of the older critical methodologies. A number of studies have utilized plot and discourse analysis to refute long held source critical divisions of text into originally separate documents. This tends to stress again, you see, the unity of the narrative. You see the techniques of the author in composing his story.

c. Evangelicals and Rhetorical Criticism

Among Evangelicals utilizing this method see your bibliography, Longacre and Wenham. Longacre, page three, two thirds of the way down, the work "Joseph, a study in divine providence, text theoretical and text linguistic, analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48." Now that is not yet published, but is to be released within a matter of months by Eisenbrauns, in Indiana. Longacre, however, did write "Who sold Joseph into Egypt" in the volume that Harris and I edited to honor Dr. MacRae, published a couple years ago, or a year ago, 1986, "Who sold Joseph into Egypt." What he does there is use this kind of an approach to show that the documentary source analysis of that Joseph story really doesn't hold together. There's unity across these sources, you see, that hold the thing together, and it's really utilizing this kind of a method to show that. Wenham, which is on

the next page, 4, the third entry there. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” 1978, uses this kind of an approach to show with the Noah story of the flood, Genesis 6-9, which has also been traditionally divided into J and pieced up, is a unity that refutes that kind of source critical division. So among Evangelicals utilizing this kind of a method, those are some examples.

d. Non-Evangelicals Supporting the Unity of the Text contra Source Criticism

For similar opposition to source criticism by non-Evangelicals, and this is interesting see Lyle Esslinger’s book I mentioned before in which, you know, there is no high view of Scripture; quite the contrary. Yet he argues in the face of the consistent consensus of critical scholars that Samuel 1-12 is a unity, a literary unity, instead of a number of sources. So that’s interesting. You can utilize some of his insights, without buying into his whole approach. So see Lyle Esslinger who argues for literary unity in 1 Samuel 1-12.

Also see Keith Kawada and Quinn, which is on your bibliography, page 3, about the middle of the page: *Before Abraham was: the Unity of Genesis 1-11*; that’s this little book. By this kind of a literary, rhetorical analysis, he argues for the unity of Genesis 1-11 according to literary features. He doesn’t argue for historicity. He’s not interested in that. But he does argue for unity.

The words of most non-Evangelical practitioners of the literary approach suffer greatly from their denial of biblical historicity. And at times, especially with Fockelman, who is listed on page 3 of your bibliography, fall into such an excess in the search for narrative techniques that it seems that many of the structures said to be found are to be attributed more to the imagination of the analyst than to the inherent qualities of the narrative itself. Some of this really gets mind boggling. One review of Fockkelman’s book says, “There may well be some revealing narrative patterns, but sorting them out from the morass of trivia is virtually impossible. For most of the time I was reminded of Dr. Johnson’s comment on a critic of Shakespeare that, not only had he explained what no man had ever

thought needed explanation, but what is more, he explained it wrong.”

No consensus

Today there is no consensus, I would say. There’s just an awful lot of different directions that different people are going in. There certainly is a new emphasis on this rhetorical kind of criticism, literary approach, particularly with narrative materials; that is the big thing. That is what seems to be generating the most writing and interest right now, but among non-Evangelicals. Evangelicals haven’t done a whole lot with that, there’s been a little bit, but among non-Evangelicals, and that’s usually combined with the complete denial of historicity.

Also with some of the people involved in this, there is antagonism for the source critical kind of approach. There’s debate going on in that some of these people want to maintain the legitimacy of all this source critical kind of stuff and work with the final form, not denying the legitimacy. Other people want to say that all of that source critical, form critical kind of stuff really is not the way to approach it. Just no consensus, but a lot of debate.

“Structuralism” would be a spinoff of this last literary approach that gets much more complex and philosophically involved in the dynamics of language, and I don’t know enough about structuralism really to speak about it intelligently, but we’ll put it under that category.

Question: Are other religious writings treated the same way as the Bible?

Answer: I would think so but, you know, my experiences are within the circles of people concerned with the Bible, and I live in a western civilization which is basically Judeo-Christian. If I lived in the Arab world in the Middle East, or if you lived in the Far East, we might know about what kind of literary analysis of say, the Koran or Confucius, or whatever is going on. I don’t know but I suspect there is a lot more criticism being done with the Bible than with other works.

I don't think you could say there is any other piece of literature--if you just look at it as a piece of literature--I don't think there's any other piece of literature that has had such an impact and influence on world culture as the Bible has. Now if you think about Shakespeare, somebody like that has a certain amount of influence, but not anywhere near the influence of the scriptures. Of course, it's not just literature; and even if you stand off and look at it from a secular viewpoint, it's religious literature, so you've entered a whole third dimension of religion into the discussion. I think the point is, you can't just look at the Bible as literature. The Bible is literature but it's more than that because God has spoken in and through it, and that's sensitive work.

C.S. Lewis, History Writing and Literary Reviewers missing it

Let's talk a little more about the history writing of the Old Testament. Let me start that; we've got a few more minutes. Maybe before I do that, let me just share this with you, then I'll stop with this. This whole area of literary criticism – I was trying to place my hand just before I came into class on an article written by C.S. Lewis that I thought was in *Christianity Today* maybe back in the late 50's, with theme of life I always found helpful. C.S. Lewis says that a lot of people would write reviews of his books and make certain assumptions about what the circumstances were under which he wrote: what influenced him to do this, you know, all those kinds of conjectures. Maybe you're aware of his addressing this issue. He says, "Critics of *Piers Plowman* and the *Faerie Queen* make gigantic constructions about the history of those compositions. Of course, we should all admit such constructions to be conjectural. And as conjectures, you may ask, are they not, some of them, probable? Perhaps they are. But the experience of being reviewed has lowered my estimate of their probability. Because, when you start by knowing the facts, you find that the constructions are very often wholly wrong. Apparently the chances of their being right are low, even when they are made along quite sensible lines. Of course I am not forgetting that the reviewer has,

quite rightly, devoted less study to my book than the scholar is devoted to Langland or Spenser. But I should have expected that to be compensated for by other advantages which he has and the scholar lacks. After all, he lives in the same period as I, subjected to the same currents of taste and opinion, has undergone the same kind of education. He can hardly help knowing--reviewers are good at this sort of thing and take an interest in it--quite a lot about my generation, my period, and the circles in which I probably move. He and I may have common acquaintances. Surely, he is at least as well placed for guessing about me as any scholar is for guessing about the dead. Yet he seldom guesses right.

Hence, I cannot resist the conviction that similar guesses about the dead seem plausible, only because the dead are not there to refute them; and that a five minute conversation with the real Spenser and the real Langland might blow the whole laborious fabric into smithereens. And notice that in all these conjectures the reviewer's error has been quite gratuitous. He has been neglecting the thing he is paid to do, and perhaps could do, in order to do something different. His business was to give information about the book and to pass judgment on it. These guesses about its history are quite beside the mark. And on this point, I feel pretty sure that I write without bias. The imaginary histories written about my books, are by no means always offensive. Sometimes they are even complimentary. There is nothing against them, except that they are not true and it would be rather irrelevant if they were."

Now, I think the point he is making is that if literary critics can't, by their means of hypothetically reconstructing what was going on that influenced him in the writing of his book and how that came to pass, if they can't do that accurately in Lewis's own time, how can you do it for someone who lived 100 years ago, or 1,000 years ago, 3,000 years ago and do it with any assurance that what you're saying is actually the way things were. It becomes so speculative. I think that just, you know, 90-95% of this kind of work is precisely that. It is extremely speculative and hypothetical.

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