
BOOK REVIEWS / BOEK RESENSIES

Danna Nolan Fewell (editor). *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, xi + 644 pages, hard cover, £112.50 ISBN 978-0-19-996772-8. (Paperback 2018 £33.00 ISBN 978-0-19-091576-6).

During the past decades much attention has been given to biblical narratives and responsible methods and approaches for their academic study. The original quest following the insights of the “new criticism” and applying them to the Bible is now subdivided into a number of complex clusters of quests. Therefore, an up-to-date survey of the current debate, issues and methodological approaches is most appreciated.

Part one, “Overtures”, introduces the methodological issues involved in appreciating biblical narrative and in relating it to other issues in the wider field of literary criticism and biblical criticism in particular. In her introductory essay, “The Work of Biblical Narrative” (3–26), Danna Nolan Fewell first addresses the relationships between knowledge and narrative, based on the insight that “narrative is integral to self-perception and social orientation, indeed, is essential to our very survival” (3). She observes that this oft-labelled “narrative turn” attempts to effect a rethink of the results of structuralist and formalist narrative analyses – namely, the taxonomies of narrative components, discursive mechanics, and rhetorical strategies – and to reinscribe these into a more comprehensive vision of the roles narratives play in cognition, sociality, and identity formation. The field of biblical studies has in recent years also given much attention to narrative and is beginning to expand its understanding of the relationships between the poetics of biblical narrative and the kinds of cognitive, social, and identity-constructing work that biblical narratives do (3).

She also notes a number of changes from the initial New Critical emphasis on the Bible’s narrative art and poetics:

Final-form studies eager to reveal the Bible’s narrative artistry, demonstrate its structural coherence, prove its ideological consistency and reliability, and protect its literary (and theological) integrity are giving way to post-structural and postclassical acknowledgment of textual instability and undecidability, opening biblical poetics to the realms of the personal and the sociopolitical. Biblical narrative critics now commonly reach across unexpected disciplinary lines for new analytical concepts to illuminate textual detail. We witness biblical narratives shifting their points of gravity under the weight of different kinds of interpretive questions, exposing their innate historical, political, and social biases while simultaneously being strangely hospitable to other, often incongruent, political and social visions (3–4).

The current emphasis is on the communicative strategies, which biblical narratives employ and on the social impulses and political agenda behind biblical storytelling. Scholars also seek to understand how biblical story worlds reflect the material realities and social constructions of the ancient world (4). Fewell also notes a growing interest in how contemporary readers relate to biblical narratives. The lasting impact of the Bible raises several questions, “What work do biblical narratives continue to do? How do readerly desires and concerns affect that work? What happens to these stories as they cross cultural and temporal boundaries? Do they serve the functions for which they were originally co-opted, or do they gravitate towards expressing other cultural realities? What are our responsibilities as historically and culturally distant readers, hearers, conveyors, and conversation partners to evaluate the ‘truths’ that the Bible seems to offer?” (4). Fewell also addresses issues of narrative identity, the sociality of narrative (narrated experience is inevitably social; narratives are inherently social and shared), the relationships between trauma, memory and narrative (how memory and its articulations in narrative form, convey and fail to convey traumatic events) and the nature and function of stories as intertextual performances.

Other essays in this section are Stephen D. Moore, “Biblical Narrative Analysis from the New Criticism to the New Narratology” (27–50; including sketches of postclassical narrative criticism); Robert S. Kawashima, “Biblical Narrative and the Birth of Prose Literature” (52–60); Austin Busch, “New Testament Narrative and Greco-Roman Literature” (61–72); Raymond F. Person, “Biblical Historiography as Traditional History” (73–83; “epic” and “history” as narrative genres in ancient literature, ancient historiography as performance, biblical historiography as traditional historiography, reading Samuel – Kings and Chronicles as faithful performances of traditional history) and Tod Linafelt on the relationship between “Poetry and Biblical Narrative” (84–92).

Part two offers surveys of the various biblical narratives, their characteristics and particular features. It contains the following essays on *Old Testament* narratives: David M. Gunn, “Telling and Retelling the Bible’s First Story” (95–108); Danna Nolan Fewell and R. Christopher Heard, “The Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World” (109–124); Kenneth Ngwa, “The Story of Exodus and Its Literary Kinships” (125–136; kinship in and out of Egypt, kinships and memories in the wilderness, kinships at the mountain); Bryan D. Bibb, “Blood, Death, and the Holy in the Leviticus Narrative” (137–146); Adriane Leveen, “Becoming Israel in the Wilderness of Numbers” (147–156, the Book of Numbers, notable narrative-critical works on Num, becoming Israel in the wilderness of numbers); Brian M. Britt, “Remembering Narrative in Deuteronomy” (157–167; Deut and biblical narrative, biblical history and narrative, narrative studies and Deut, time and memory in Deut); Ovidiu Creanga, “The Conquest of Memory in the Book of Joshua” (168–179; the

narratives of Josh, narrative readings in Josh, narrative and spatial theory: the land as “thirdspace” in Josh 1–12); Deryn Guest, “Judging YHWH in the Book of Judges” (180–191); Rachelle Gilmour, “(Hi)story Telling in the Books of Samuel” (192–203); Keith Bodner, “The Rule of Death and Signs of Life in the Book of Kings” (204–214); Patricia K. Tull, “Narrative Among the Latter Prophets” (215–225; the narrative arc of the prophets, prophetic narratives, narratives shared with “Kings, narratives in various prophetic books; Jonah turns the conventions of prophetic stories upside down: “an uncompassionate prophet; a pliable king, a willing community, and a lesson turned not on the hearers but on Jonah himself, and upon all who hastily identify with the righteousness of Israel’s prophets”, 224); Chesung Justin Ryu, “Divine Rhetoric and Prophetic Silence in the Book of Jonah” (226–235; survey of literary critical readings of Jonah and a proposal for a postcolonial reading of Jonah); Carol A. Newsom, “Plural Versions and the Challenge of Narrative Coherence in the Story of Job” (236–244; Job in cultural memory, paradoxical coherence and narrative art of canonical Job); Stephanie Day Powell, Amy Beth Jones and Dung Sung Kim, “Reading Ruth, Reading Desire” (245–254); Anne-Mareike Wetter, “Bodies, Boundaries, and Belonging in the Book of Esther” (255–265; summary of narrative approaches to Esther, bringing margins to the centre, ritualising Esther, gender and the politics of representation); Terry Ann Smith, “Warring Words in the Book of Daniel” (266–275); Donna J. Laird, “Political Strategy in the Narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah” (276–285; the textured mosaic of Ezra-Nehemiah’s narrative, the rise of Jerusalem and the fall of Jericho as Nehemiah’s rhetorical strategy) and Julie Kelso on “The Patrilineal Narrative Machinery of Chronicles” (286–295). The other essays in this section are devoted to the various New Testament narratives (296–386).

Part three addresses questions of body/bodies as they appear in biblical narrative: Jeremy Schipper, “Plotting Bodies in Biblical Narrative” (389–397); Judith E. McKinlay, “Reading Biblical Women Matters” (398–410); Eric Thurman, “Adam and the Making of Masculinity” (411–421); Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, “Children in Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation” (422–433); Robert D. Maldonado, “Reading Others as the Subject(s) of Biblical Narrative” (434–443); Ken Stone, “Animating the Bible’s Animals” (444–455); Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, “Sex and Sexuality in Biblical Narrative” (456–464) and Stuart Lasine, “Characterizing God in His/Our Own Image” (465–477).

The essays of *part four* examine the natural, social, and conceptual landscapes of biblical story worlds. Norman C. Habel, “Reading the Landscape in Biblical Narrative” (481–488; suggesting how biblical narrators have read the landscapes of Canaan, Egypt and the wilderness in relation to the land promised as the place for the people of God); Jennifer L. Koosed, “Sustenance and Survival in Biblical Narrative” (489–497); Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, “Displacement and Diaspora in Biblical Narrative” (498–506, including the

Book of Esther and fictional histories of diaspora and Joseph and the Israelites in a foreign land); Theodore W. Jennings and Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Narrativizing Empire in the Biblical World” (507–516; ambivalence toward Empire in the Hebrew Bible, Christianity and Empire, metaphorising Empire, Empire and contemporary discourse); Linda A. Dietch, “The Social Worlds of Biblical Narrative” (517–528, a survey of the emergence and different waves of social-scientific criticism followed by proposals of judging Ehud’s role as judge with Durkheim and Bourdieu); Roland Boer, “The Economic Politics of Biblical Narrative” (529–539; the estate of Eden, textual mediation of socioeconomic contradictions in the struggle between Joseph and Moses in Gen 41–Exod 15, formal and ethical codes in Job and Proverbs; the ways in which texts respond, politically and ideologically, to socioeconomic tensions are as varied as the texts themselves, 536); Mark G. Brett, “Narrative Deliberation in Biblical Politics” (540–549) and Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Biblical Lamentations and Singing the Blues” (550–560; narrating trauma, biblical texts as “narrative repair” and posttraumatic literature, Lamentations as a narrative repair of the Hebrew assumptive world). Smith-Christopher aims at proposing

a new level of dialogue among social theorists interested in narratives (socially shared as well as individually constructed) as a means of understanding processes of recovery and resilience in the aftermath of trauma, historians of the blues, historians of the TRC processes, and scholars interested in a contemporary analysis of the creative social, political, and theological role of lament in the Bible. Lament leads to a repaired social narrative because it refuses to accept that the communal narrative no longer exists (rather, God is still there to be appealed to), but also because it refuses to accept an imposed imperial narrative. The book of Lamentations creatively contributes to a revised narrative of Hebrew identity that will not accept subordination, oppression, and violence as the final “story” (558–559).

Part five contains three essays on reading biblical narratives. Jione Havea and Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon address “Culture Tricks in Biblical Narrative” (563–572; biblical narratives and their readers are inherently cross-cultural, the case studies is on the Gibeonites of Josh 9). Gerald West draws attention to “Global Thefts of Biblical Narrative” (573–584). He describes the entrance of the Bible to the African cultures in South Africa and African biblical scholarships and its characteristics. This is followed by a description of the contextual Bible study approach as developed by the Ujamaa Centre in which West is involved; see <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx>. West argues that

Long before postcolonial discourse was constructed by academics, ordinary Africans were interpreting the Bible from their various places in the postcolonial continuum. Central to their postcolonial appropriations was a contrapuntal movement between their own

stories and biblical narrative. But unlike most academic appropriations of postcolonial discourse, ordinary Africans (and Asians, and Latin Americans, etc.) do not stop at contrapuntal proliferation. They connect their own “other” narratives with reconfigured biblical narratives for particular emancipatory projects. While African biblical scholarship can offer potential insight into this process, it should respect and not obstruct the ordinary African agenda of reading for social transformation. Indeed, ordinary African readers are calling upon African biblical scholars to work with them in placing local African narratives alongside biblical narratives . . . , so that contrapuntal postcolonial readings might make a difference (582).

Gary A. Phillips writes on “The Commanding Faces of Biblical Stories” (585–597). He discusses the “ethical turn”, narrative turn and cultural crisis; virtue ethics, rhetoric, and Wayne Booth, and phenomenology, hermeneutics and Ricoeur, and Levinas and narrative ethics). Phillips argues that biblical ethical criticism as currently performed “in a host of interruptive ways recognises the intrinsic power of story and storytelling to fashion persons and world for the better but also for the worse” (593). The volume closes with an index of subjects and names (599–626) and an index of references.

The editor and fifty contributors, almost exclusively from the United States, offer helpful surveys of the current state of study of biblical narratives in all their variety, many instructive case studies and some fresh proposals worth pondering. Some essays indicate that the move from classical narrative criticism to the present approaches surveyed here was not only to the advantage of the biblical narratives and their own intentions. While biblical narratives can be used as a playground for all kinds of agendas, this is hardly their purpose. In short, the volume is a helpful travel companion for all who engage biblical narratives and want to note how they are read these days in the North American academic space.

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Stephan Anthony Cummins & Jens Zimmermann (editors), *Acts of Interpretation: Scripture, Theology and Culture*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2018, paperback, xii + 252 pages, \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7500-6.

The Roman-numbered pages cover a table of contents, acknowledgments a list of 11 contributors (1 of whom is a woman) with their professional positions and academic affiliations - all in North America, and a list of abbreviations. This is followed by 10 chapters divided into an Introduction and then three parts on, firstly, interpretative frameworks, secondly, interpreting in accord with doctrine, canon and literary form, and, thirdly, interpreting by reading in faithful company (meaning the church). Chapters 4 to 9 deal with specific biblical books, 3 from the Old and 3 from the New Testament. Chapter 10 is about the Old Testament from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's perspective. The book concludes with 32 pages consisting of a Bibliography (for all the chapters), an Author Index, a Subject Index and a Scripture and Other Ancient Literature Index. From the latter it is clear that 16 out of the 39 Old Testament and 22 out of the 27 New Testament books have been referred to. This shows that the book tends to be a Christian gravitation to the New Testament, despite the chapters being equally balanced between the two testaments.

Some chapters end up as rather vague and difficult reading, such as that by Robert W. Hall on the "Catholic" Epistles, partially due to the often long sentences and long footnotes which include further text, rather than just references, giving the impression of tangential thinking. Similar is the chapter by Edith M Humphrey on the Apocalypse, leaving a somewhat messy impression.

Three questions arise from the title of the book: to which scripture, theology/culture is reference actually made? From the biblical books dealt with in the chapters and from those listed in the index, suggesting the canon which is underlying this theology, it is clear that a Protestant, and from indications in the chapters, more specifically an evangelical (cf. pp. 66-70), theology is meant, despite a few references to some apocryphal and pseudepigraphical sources and the final chapter on an important Lutheran leader. One can therefore assume that the cultural context is also that of the evangelical part of Christianity.

That theology should be the norm for a correct understanding of a text results in the inference that doctrines and the tradition of which they are part are read into the text, a problem never dealt with. That means that biblical books are read with church fathers or famous theologians as guides, in order to stay within the "church" and "tradition", two concepts with obviously meaning restricted to certain denominations. That these two concepts can have contradictory meanings never seem to occur in this kind of hermeneutics. One even wonders whether the chapter by Charles Raith II on Romans is really an exegetical rather a systematic-theological chapter. Amongst these guiding leaders from church history there is

a further hidden competition in the comparisons made, as Craig G. Bartholomew's chapter on Genesis 1:2 shows.

Despite an acknowledgement that historical-critical exegesis has been an important contributor to understanding the Bible, there is a subtle denigration of it in the hierarchy where theological exegesis is superior and the ultimate goal of exegesis. This is put in a modern context where evolution is accepted for instance, to prove that evangelical theology is not conservative and fundamental in Chapter 3, forming a comfortable bridge to the next chapter about the doctrine of creation in Genesis 1:2.

In fact, theological exegesis jumps onto the *post*-modern bandwagon, where there is suddenly space again for alternatives to the restrictive rational mind of modernism. Where the postmodern mind, however, opens up potentially infinite possible interpretations, theological exegesis would narrow it down to specific interest-groups defending their own doctrines, if not dogmas.

In general, this book showcases theological exegesis over against the historical-critical "tradition" and leaves the reader with the realisation that no interpretation is value-free. This is particularly well illustrated in the chapter by Hans Boersma on Exodus read with two church fathers. Yet, underlying this approach is the competitive battle for supremacy and ownership of the Bible.

Theological exegesis as it is presented in this book does not really resolve the predicament of the historical-critical method due to its lack of unanimous results. The same problem confronts readers from different doctrinal and canonical traditions, complicating precisely what the historical-critical approach originally set out to solve. It may be significant that no call to non-denominational or ecumenical theology is heard in this book. In this way this kind of theological exegesis has the potential to be a regression to a pre-scientific stage, even when there is lip-service to the inclusion of the preceding historical, literary "post-modern" approaches. The book is valuable as it is informative about what theological exegesis is, but not convincing.

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Hemchand Gossai (editor), *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*. London: T & T Clark, 2019, hardcover, xi + 332 pages, £108.00. ISBN: HB: 978-0-5676-8095-2.

The Roman-numbered pages cover a table of contents, a list of abbreviations and a list of 19 contributors (four of whom are women) with their professional positions and academic affiliations, of which 11 are in the United States of America, two in Australia, two in South Africa, one in Canada, one in Norway and one in Finland. Only one is in a non-western country, India. This clustering and gravitation towards a northern-hemispheric dominance already raises questions about how postcolonial this book really is, even when some of the USA scholars clearly stem from Third World countries. It would therefore seem that these postcolonial readings of the Old Testament are done from an imperialist perspective, unless the colonising culture is at times also the colonised, as Israel has been regarded in different chapters (cf. the chapter by Jione Havea, for instance). This suspicion is further reinforced by the high level of representation of western, especially European, theories applied to explain postcolonial readings and the fact that four times more male than female authors have been selected. Only one deuterocanonical book, the Wisdom of Solomon, has been dealt with (by Daniel C. Timmer), suggesting a definite, but unacknowledged Calvinist base and perhaps bias. Yet, the sometimes obvious need for linguistic editing such as in the last chapter by Wilhelm Wessels on Nahum – which is nevertheless very clear in its exposition - could be responded to by justifying it as disrupting the colonial language standards. While the background to which is reacted sometimes remains unexplained, it can be deduced from the selective relevance attributed to some biblical texts, with others even being rejected in this regard.

Although psychological dimensions shimmer through at times, as in the excellent chapter by D.N. Premnath on First Isaiah, such an explicit approach would have added greatly to a postcolonial rainbow, especially a psychoanalytic interpretation of postcolonialism. Other such critical approaches have fortunately been included, as is the case with the feminist chapter by Diandra Chretain Erickson (with her creative language!) on Judges and the Marxian chapter by Roland Boer on Nehemiah. This showcases how the book interweaves and combines interdisciplinary and multi-perspectival approaches to the Old Testament, all under the common denominator of postcolonial readings.

The 20 chapters of which the first two are used for a valuable, philosophical introduction followed by a two-page foreword remain ungrouped, as this is yet another challenge to order, according to the editor. Although the chapters have the same formats, they reveal the freedom which the editor has allowed but also the different levels of scholarship. The chapter by Wafula on Exodus, for instance, leaves the reader with a sense of a forced interpretation, which is not always convincing, while that by Alice Laffey presents more a

commentary rather than an interpretation of Leviticus, working through the whole book, with unnecessary repetitions. This makes for a somewhat boring chapter which could have been much shorter. The chapter by Gerrie Snyman about Saul's portrayal in Chronicles, on the other hand, is well-rooted and anchored in theory allowing for neat argumentation.

Particularly enriching, however, is the wide range of postcolonial approaches and interpretations. This is further underscored by the different perspectives on the same biblical books of Numbers and Judges (even overlapping with the same chapters attended to), which are dealt with in two chapters each. This renders the book into a kind of dialogue, with Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, for example, "correcting" the preceding chapter by Jione Havea on the issues of census and women as heirs. Positive is also the courage to read against the grain without loyalty to interpretations previously assumed. At times, the reader wonders if this does not go too far, as with the chapter by Cristina Garcia-Alfonso on the subaltern women in Judges, where a minimalist extremity of life as the ultimate survival is advocated over against the chapter by Kåre Berge on Deuteronomy who plays – almost luxuriously – with the fascinating notions of spatiality, (non-)place and presence.

A relative commonality, perhaps due to the nature of the overarching research theme, postcolonial readings, is a constant play with the tension between the poles of different dualities: centre and periphery or place and utopia in Berge's chapter on Deuteronomy, male and female in Erickson's chapter on Judges, the self and the other in the Wisdom of Solomon, the tribal versus the imperial in Kari Latvus' chapter on 1 Kings 3-11, the two economic regimes in Nehemiah, to name but a few.

In general, this collection of essays adds up to an impressive survey of the range and richness of postcolonial readings of the Old Testament resulting in both an introduction for the novice and an opportunity for in-depth study for the specialist.

The book concludes with a six-page index of authors referred to in the course of the book. Indices of biblical references and of key concepts could have added to the referential use of the book.

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