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PREFACE

The Bible From Within — The Method of Total Interpretation is a revised, enlarged, and fully up-dated English version of my Hebrew book *HaMiqrā Kidemuto* [“The Bible and Modern Literary Theory”] which appeared in Jerusalem in 1962. The aim of the work, now as then, is to present an approach to the critical study of the Bible. Even when it first appeared, it was not the first work in recent Biblical scholarship to concern itself primarily with methodology, and the large number of such works which have since appeared is sufficient evidence that the crisis in the field — and in the study of literature in general — has not abated, and is, perhaps, even more acute. For as the old adage has it, the less one understands the material, the more one speaks of methods. When paths of inquiry no longer lead to the desired goal and perplexed scholars sense that they have perforce stumbled and taken wrong turns along the way it is then that they begin to concern themselves with questions of methodology. *The Bible From Within*, as was the Hebrew work that preceded it, is an attempt to set the perplexed student of the Bible firmly and securely on the right path to understanding.

While the aim of the work is methodological rather than exegetical, it is devoted, for the most part, to the detailed treatment of selected Biblical passages. These are adduced not for their own sake but in order to illustrate the method, through weighing and evaluating the plethora of critical, historical and exegetical suggestions made by scholars, accepting and rejecting them (even such as have already been accepted or rejected by scholarly consensus), and, more than occasionally, offering a new interpretation, in accord with the hermeneutic principles here advanced. The extensive reference made to existing opinion is intended not merely to inform but to exemplify and clarify the methodological issues raised, and in this regard the notes are as essential as the text.

In the years following publication of *HaMiqrā Kidemuto*, I was fortunate enough to share what I had written with colleagues and students, whose comments — in particular those critical of my positions — were

helpful in bringing my own views into clearer focus. Books and articles which appeared shed light on numerous issues and pointed up flaws in the approach. It was immediately evident that a revised edition was required, one which would include not only stylistic improvements but also greater precision in the elucidation of the method and clearer formulation of certain hermeneutic principles (such as my approach to textual criticism). Lacking also were thorough investigations of problematic issues (such as the *Gattungs-* and *Formgeschichtliche* approach), a current survey of the state of Biblical research, discussion of previously neglected features of Biblical stylistics and structure, and the inclusion of additional passages to illustrate the Literary Work in its Entirety, most importantly, examples of Biblical narrative. For technical reasons, however, only changes of a typographical nature were made, and, with the exception of a few appended notes and the addition of my analysis of Psalm 46, the second edition, published in Jerusalem in 1967, is identical to the first.

Since that time, Biblical exegesis and historical-critical research have continued apace. The literary study of the Bible, in its infancy when *HaMiqrā Kidemuto* first appeared, has expanded steadily, and a vast amount of scholarly publication has come into being. Moreover, the developments in general literary theory have been so far-reaching that the Biblical scholar cannot help but acknowledge their implications for his own branch of research. And so, the full revision here provided in the English version, the need for which was felt more than fifteen years ago, far exceeds, in scope and depth, what was initially intended. All of the changes which were originally decided upon have been included, others have been introduced, and the entire work has been brought up to date. I have made every effort to take into account the full range of scholarly activity surrounding the passages and issues discussed, up to and including the year 1981. It is my fervent hope that in *The Bible From Within* I have succeeded in adequately presenting to the English reader the method of Biblical study which, I believe, is even more urgently needed today than when first proposed.

I am grateful to the Almighty for enabling me to see the task of translation and revision to its completion, and to all those who, as His emissaries, provided their assistance, sparing no effort and expecting no recompense.

To two of these I can express my thanks only by remembrance, since their acts of kindness have already accompanied them to their eternal rest: to my son Rafi (from whom, of all my pupils, I learned most),

who contributed the firstfruits of his own early studies to my book, and to Professor Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, who, as head of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University, prompted the decision of the Research Committee of the University's Faculty of Humanities to undertake the publication of *HaMiqra Kidemuto* in English. May their memories be for a blessing.

I am indebted to the Committee for its decision to translate the work, and to Professor Jacob Sussman for seeing to the execution of the task. The translation of the original Hebrew text was faithfully carried out by Dr. Raphael Levy. The English text was thoroughly revised and edited, and the additional material was translated by Mr. Baruch Schwartz, who gave tirelessly of his time, knowledge and perseverance throughout every stage of the book's publication. Professor Alan Cooper was kind enough to read the manuscript, providing numerous suggestions concerning both style and content. The final form of the work owes much to his erudition. Mr. J. Frank scrutinized the final draft and made significant improvements in its form. The index was painstakingly compiled by Mrs. Sema Schwartz. I was fortunate to receive the assistance of Mr. S. Reem, who, with his usual artistic expertise and attention to detail, made helpful comments concerning typographical aspects of the text. It is a distinct pleasure to thankfully acknowledge them all.

Finally, I thank the Perry Foundation and the Magnes Press for agreeing to take upon themselves the publication of this work. Professor Haim Beinart, chairman of the Magnes Press, and Mr. Ben Zion Yehoshua, its director, spared no efforts in bringing the work of publication to a successful conclusion.

May they all be blessed with abundant reward for their kindness and generosity.

The Hebrew edition of the present work was dedicated to my two sons, Rafi, now of blessed memory, and Gabi — may he be blessed with long life. The English edition I lovingly dedicate to their mother, Ili. In days of joy and in nights of terror and sorrow, she gave of herself without stint to our home, our sons, and their families. I offer to her the fruits of a labour — one among many — that she enabled me to complete.

Jerusalem
Rosh Hashanah 5744

M.W.

INTRODUCTION

A

Changing Approaches to the Understanding of the Literary Text

Historicism was the "Copernican discovery in the cultural sciences"¹ and it had enormous influence. Dogmatic truths were undermined, the horizon was extended in every direction. Research into cultural phenomena was based on historical understanding, and the comprehension of any spiritual reality was held to be contingent upon a knowledge of circumstances of time and place.

Philology began to use history as an auxiliary in ascertaining the correct interpretation of written documents.² In the study of literature in the nineteenth century, the emphasis gradually shifted to the historical aspect; poetics was neglected, every attempt to establish norms in the study of literature disappeared. A science of literature analogous to the

1. E. Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (transl. by R. Manheim), London 1965, p. 10.
2. For the survey which follows, see Wellek & Warren, Wehrli, Kayser and the literature cited by them. Also: K. Viëtor, "Deutsche Literaturgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte", *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, LX(1945), pp. 899ff; P. Böckmann, *Formgeschichte der deutschen Dichtung*, I, Hamburg 1949, pp. 7-69; W. Milch, *Über Aufgaben und Grenzen der Literaturgeschichte*, Wiesbaden 1950; H. O. Burger, "Methodische Probleme der Interpretation", *GRM*, XXXII (1950-51), pp. 81-92 [=H. Enders (ed.), *Die Werkinterpretation (Wege der Forschung*, XXXVI), Darmstadt 1967, pp. 198-213]; A. Mulot, "Zur Neubesinnung der Literaturwissenschaft", *ibid.*, pp. 172-177; E. Lunding, *Strömungen und Strebungen der modernen Literaturwissenschaft*, Kopenhagen 1952; W. Rasch, "Probleme der Lyrik-Interpretation", *GRM*, XXXV (1954), pp. 282-298; H. Oppel, "Methodenlehre der Literaturwissenschaft", in: W. Stammer (ed.), *Deutsche Philologie im Aufriß*², Berlin 1957, pp. 39-82; F. Martini, "Poetik", *ibid.*, pp. 223-280; K. May (-W. Höllener), "Zu Fragen der Interpretation", *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und*

natural sciences was created.³ Since human behaviour is conditioned by heredity, education, and life experience⁴ it follows that we should interpret the artistic creation on the basis of what the poet derived from his heredity, his studies and his experiences. The whole function of historical research into literature was therefore considered to be to investigate the genesis of the art-work in terms of “influences” and “sources”; to search for similar or analogous motifs and themes in earlier literature; to probe the origins of the political, cultural, and social background of the period or the biographical background of the author — all in order to give a causal explanation of how the work came into being.⁵

Geistesgeschichte, XXXIII (1959), pp. 608-644; R. Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, New Haven and London 1963; idem, “Poetics, Interpretation and Criticism”, *The Modern Language Review*, LXIX (1974), pp. xxi-xxx; *The Critical Moment — Essays on the Nature of Literature*, London 1963, 1964; F. Hermand, *Synthetisches Interpretieren — Zur Methodik der Literaturwissenschaft*², München 1969; M. Maren-Grisebach, *Methoden der Literaturwissenschaft*, Bern and München 1970; L. Pollmann, *Literaturwissenschaft und Methode*, I., *Theoretischer Teil und Methodengeschichtlicher Überblick*, Frankfurt a/M 1971; A. Preminger et al. (eds.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged edition, Princeton, New Jersey [1974], s.v. “Criticism, Types”, pp. 163-174; “Explication”, pp. 265-266; “Modern Poetics — II. 20th C.”, pp. 514-527 (with selected bibliographies following each entry); B. Hrushovski, “Poetics, Criticism, Science — Remarks on the Fields and Responsibilities of the Study of Literature”, *PTL*, I (1976), pp. iii-xxxv; D. W. Fokkema & E. Kunne-Ibsch, *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century: Structuralism, Marxism, Aesthetics of Reception, Semiotics*, London [c.1977].

3. See, for example, W. Scherer: “The same power which brought to life railroads and telegraphs, the same power which called forth an unheard-of flowering of industry, increased the comforts of life, shortened wars, in a word, advanced man’s dominion over nature by a colossal step — this same power also rules our intellectual lives: it makes a clean sweep of dogmas, it transforms the sciences, it puts its stamp on literature. Natural science rides triumphantly on its chariot of victory to which we are all shackled” (*Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Geschichte des geistigen Lebens in Deutschland und Österreich*, Berlin 1874, p. 411).
4. “Erehtes, Erlebtes, Erlerntes”; Scherer’s well-known formula, reminiscent of Hippolyte Taine’s: “race, milieu, moments” (P. Salm, *Three Modes of Criticism*, Cleveland 1968, p. 18; Hermand, *op. cit.* [note 2, above], p. 24; Pollmann, *op. cit.* [note 2, above], I, p. 105; Maren-Grisebach, *op. cit.* [note 2, above], p. 12).
5. According to Scherer “the exploitation of source materials and of biographical details, for literature like all other intellectual disciplines, is subject to the principles of ‘determinacy of the will and of strict causality in the exploration of spiritual life’” (Salm, *loc. cit.* [note 4, above]).

However, by the end of the last century there arose opposition to this approach to the study of literature. Criticism came from different grounds: some was directed against the manner in which the historical method was applied, some against the specific methods used, and there were even basic rejections of the whole method and its very goal.

In this dispute about literature, philosophers played a major role, making the first inroads into the fortress of "historicism". We shall not, however, speak of them here, nor of Nietzsche's opposition to historicism,⁶ nor of the influence of phenomenology on anti-historical attitudes.⁷ We shall limit ourselves to the criticism of the historical approach in the field of literature, and even in this field we shall not attempt a thorough and all-inclusive description. For the purpose of our work is to clarify the exegetical principles by which literature is interpreted in this century from the standpoint of their suitability in Biblical scholarship. We shall therefore choose from the claims and assertions made by those representing the various currents in modern literary study only those which seem to us applicable to the study of the Bible. Even from the accepted conclusions we shall adduce only those which, in our opinion, can be profitably employed in Biblical research.

The first practical step against the genetic theory was Dilthey's demand, at the very height of positivism (in 1883), that the humanities be freed from their subjection to the methods of the natural sciences. His argument was that whereas the natural sciences seek to discover the laws of recurring natural phenomena, cultural research is not concerned with recurrent phenomena but rather with the individual concrete instance, the original and non-repeated reality. The subject matter of the humanities is the creation and expression of man, the value of which lies in its individuality, and to interpret such works we need categories different from those appropriate to the natural sciences. Spiritual relationships can only be understood; they cannot be explained causally or investigated analytically. Poetry is "an instrument for the appreciation of life . . . which is better adapted to probing the unfathomable depths of experience

6. F. Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben", *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, 1874 (*Nietzsche's Werke*, II, Leipzig 1906).

7. L. Landgrebe, *Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt a/M 1958, pp. 112-125; especially the bibliography on pp. 172-173.

than any rational inquiry or explanation".⁸ As Dilthey asserts, "Nature we can explain, the life of the spirit we understand".⁹ Wellek elaborates further: "The scientist 'explains', looks for causes, the humanist 'understands', enters another man's mind. Dilthey [Wellek adds] later modified his psychological approach. Understanding, he argued, means not merely entering another man's mind but rather interpretation of man's expressions, of the shapes and forms in a tradition of documents and monuments, which he designates with a Hegelian term, the 'objective spirit'. Here is the source of German *Geistesgeschichte*, which must rely on the concept of *Zeitgeist* and emphasize the differences between periods and man's attitudes and conceptions in different ages".¹⁰

We find, then, that even the school of *Geistesgeschichte* in its literary study — according to Dilthey's definition, *Literaturgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* (the history of literature as the history of the spirit) — falls victim to those dangers that threatened the historical method. It too gets bogged down in historicism, and it too neglects the main subject of inquiry, the poem itself, considering it through categories foreign to its spirit and failing to view the literary phenomenon from appropriate literary perspectives.

Since the second decade of this century, it has been demanded that the study of poetry should concentrate on the poem itself, and should see it as an end and not a means. Russian "formalists" put forth this demand after World War I, in reaction to the one-sided consideration of literature, whether sociological or ideological, and held their ground for a while in the face of Marxist literary criticism.¹¹ Such ideas and theories of the interpretation of poetry as the "art of the word" spread to the study of

8. Viëtor, *art. cit.* (note 2, above), p. 900.

9. W. Dilthey, "Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie", *Gesammelte Schriften*, V. Leipzig-Berlin 1924, p. 144.

10. R. Wellek, "Poetics, Interpretation, and Criticism" (note 2, above), p. xxvi. See also idem, "Wilhelm Diltheys Poetik und literarische Theorie", *Merkur*, XIV (1960), pp. 426-436.

11. See recently V. E[hrlich], "Russian Formalism" in: *Princeton Encyclopedia* (note 2, above), pp. 726-727. On external factors which influenced Russian formalism and similar schools to be mentioned below, see Hrushovski, *art. cit.* (note 2, above), pp. ix-xi. See also W. H. Bruford, *Literary Interpretation in Germany*, Cambridge 1952, pp. 6-10.

literature in Europe and beyond, and some began to flourish independently. They began to be heard in different places in widely differing ideological contexts, their proponents often being unaware of each other. The best-known schools in this new method of literary study — which is best called “intrinsic criticism” — are the Swiss-German School’s *Werkinterpretation* (or simply *Interpretation*) which embraces several trends, and the Anglo-Saxon School with its many tributaries, known by the all-inclusive name New Criticism.¹² Members of these schools are opposed to the methods of their predecessors and wish to substitute new demands and approaches in literary research. They are opposed not only to the historic-genetic method¹³ but also to all methods that treat a poetic creation through alien categories, and make it a mere stepping-stone to other disciplines such as philosophy, the history of thought, the social sciences and similar studies. The Anglo-Saxon School does indeed include scholars who have come from diverse disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology), but they do not attempt to divert the study of literature from its legitimate confines and make it solely subservient to other sciences. For our purposes, the most important aspect is the criticism directed against *Geistesgeschichte*. Here, New Critics argue not only against determining the nature of the written work by searching for its sources, but also against the idea that the main function of literary

12. F. C. Ransom is the one chiefly responsible for popularizing this term in his book *The New Criticism*, Norfolk, Connecticut 1941. Others call it: Modern Criticism, Scientific Criticism, Working Criticism (S. E. Hyman, *The Armed Vision*, New York 1955, p. 3). On American and British intrinsic criticism see J. F[raser] in: *Princeton Encyclopedia* (note 2, above), pp. 514-518. On a similar method in France, “explication des textes”, see W. Blechmann, “Probleme der Explication Française”, *GRM*, XXXVII (1957), pp. 383-392; also Wehrli, p. 23; P. de M[an] in: *Princeton Encyclopedia*, pp. 518-523 (there also on this method in Germany). See also *ibid.*, pp. 523-524 on such an approach in Italian literary study by A.S[caglione]; pp. 524-525 on Spanish by A. W.P[hillips]; pp. 526-527 on Slavic by V. S[etchkarer]. [In the following pages, we shall use the all-inclusive “New Critical schools” to refer to New Criticism, *Werkinterpretation*, “explication des textes” and related schools and their approaches to the study of literature.]
13. So argues, for example, Staiger, against the positivists who apply the law of causality of natural science to the artistic creation, and ignore the fact that creativity, because it is creative, cannot be derived from something else (Staiger, pp. 9-10 [=Die *Werkinterpretation*, p. 147]).

research is the discovery of the historical background of the author's period and his biography. In their view, a literary creation is not only a reflection of its time, not merely a document testifying to something external to itself, "no longer a commentary on life or reality, but containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationship . . . existing in its own universe".¹⁴ This view of literature leads to the conception: "Literary study differs from historical study in having to deal not with documents but with monuments".¹⁵ "Literature will yield to the sociologist, or anyone else, what it has to give only if it is approached as literature".¹⁶

Thus, while *Geistesgeschichte* scholars opposed the genetic explanation borrowed from the natural sciences, proponents of *Werkinterpretation* and New Criticism are opposed to the historical, social or philosophic explanation of a literary creation. Dilthey and his school saw the literary creation as a function of psychological, spiritual, social and economic processes or conditions, and as long as they saw it as primarily an expression of something, they considered the "experience" expressed in it, the historical-spiritual "content" communicated through it, or the "problem" revealed by it to be the kernel and essence of the work, the artistic "shell" of which was to be broken and then disregarded.¹⁷ However in the New Critical schools of literary study the creation is considered a unique entity which should be therefore contemplated for its own sake. "Only one who will explain without looking to the right or left, above all without inquiring what is before and what after, only he will fulfill his obligation to the creation, and only he will refrain from undermining the sovereignty of literary study".¹⁸

Truly the importance of these schools is in literary analyses that strive to uncover, beneath thick dusty layers of historical, cultural and linguistic researches, investigation of influences, etc., the work itself with all its hidden wonders. In contrast to the situation that existed up until a few

14. N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton 1957, pp. 122, 124.

15. Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, pp. 14-15.

16. F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, London 1952, p. 193.

17. "No less does *Geistesgeschichte* go astray in that it delivers the literary artistic creation to the philosophers and sees only what any thinker knows better than any poet" (Staiger, p. 9 [= *Die Werkinterpretation*, p. 146]).

18. Staiger, p. 10 (= *Die Werkinterpretation*, p. 147).