



Form Criticism and beyond

Author(s): James Muilenburg

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 1969), pp. 1-18

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3262829>

Accessed: 06/04/2012 12:12

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

FORM CRITICISM AND BEYOND*

JAMES MUILENBURG

SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE impact of form criticism upon biblical studies has been profound, comparable only to the subsequent influence of historical criticism as it was classically formulated by Julius Wellhausen about a century ago. Its pioneer and spiritual progenitor was Hermann Gunkel, for many years professor of Old Testament at the University of Halle. The magnitude of his contribution to biblical scholarship is to be explained in part by the fact that historical criticism had come to an impasse, chiefly because of the excesses of source analysis; in part, too, by Gunkel's extraordinary literary insight and sensitivity, and, not least of all, by the influence which diverse academic disciplines exerted upon him.¹ At an early age he had read Johann Gottfried Herder's work, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (1782–83), with ever-growing excitement, and it kindled within him an appreciation not only of the quality of the ancient Oriental mentality, so characteristic of Herder's work, but also and more particularly of the manifold and varying ways in which it came to expression throughout the sacred records of the Old and New Testaments. Then there were his great contemporaries: Eduard Meyer and Leopold von Ranke, the historians; Heinrich Zimmern, the Assyriologist; Adolf Erman, the Egyptologist; and perhaps most important of all Eduard Norden, whose *Antike Kunstprosa* (1898) and *Agnostos Theos* (1913) anticipated Gunkel's own work in its recognition of the categories of style and their application to the NT records. Mention must also be made of his intimate friend and associate, Hugo Gressmann, who in his detailed studies of the Mosaic traditions pursued much the same methods as Gunkel,² and, more significantly, produced two monumental volumes on *Altorientalische Texte und Bilder* (1909¹, 1927²), surpassed today only by the companion volumes of James B. Pritchard (1950; 1954). Gunkel possessed for his time an extraordinary knowledge of the other literatures of the ancient Near East, and availed himself of their forms and types, their modes of discourse, and their rhetorical features in his delineation and elucidation of the biblical

* The Presidential Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature on December 18, 1968, at the University of California, Berkeley, California.

¹ W. Baumgartner, "Zum 100 Geburtstag von Hermann Gunkel," *Supplements to VetT*, 1962, pp. 1–18.

² *Mose und seine Zeit* (1913).

texts. What is more — and this is a matter of some consequence — he had profound psychological insight, influenced to a considerable degree by W. Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, which stood him in good stead as he sought to portray the cast and temper of the minds of the biblical narrators and poets, but also of the ordinary Israelite to whom their words were addressed. It is not too much to say that Gunkel has never been excelled in his ability to portray the spirit which animated the biblical writers, and he did not hesitate either in his lectures or in his seminars to draw upon the events of contemporary history or the experiences of the common man to explicate the interior meaning of a pericope.

One need not labor the benefits and merits of form-critical methodology. It is well to be reminded, however, not only of its distinctive features, but also of the many important contributions in monograph, commentary, and theology, in order that we may the better assess its rôle in contemporary biblical research. Professor Albright, writing in 1940, remarked that "the student of the ancient Near East finds that the methods of Norden and Gunkel are not only applicable, but are the only ones that can be applied."³ The first and most obvious achievement of *Gattungsforschung* is that it supplied a much-needed corrective to literary and historical criticism. In the light of recent developments, it is important to recall that Gunkel never repudiated this method, as his commentary on the Book of Genesis demonstrates, but rather averred that it was insufficient for answering the most pressing and natural queries of the reader. It was unable, for one thing, to compose a literary history of Israel because the data requisite for such a task were either wanting or, at best, meager. Again, it isolated Israel too sharply from its ethnic and cultural environment as it was reflected in the literary monuments of the peoples of the Near East. Further, the delineation of Israel's faith which emerged from the regnant historico-critical methodology was too simply construed and too unilinearly conceived. Not least of all, its exegesis and hermeneutics failed to penetrate deeply into the relevant texts. The second advantage of the form-critical methodology was that it addressed itself to the question of the literary genre represented by a pericope. In his programmatic essay on the literature of Israel in the second volume of Paul Hinneberg's *Die Kultur der Gegenwart* Gunkel provided an admirable sketch of the numerous literary types represented in the OT, and many of the contributions to the first and second editions of *Die Religion in die Geschichte und Gegenwart* bore the stamp and impress of his critical methodology. It is here where his influence has been greatest and most salutary because the student must know what kind of literature it is that he is reading, to what literary category it belongs, and what its characteristic features are. The third merit of the method is its concern to discover

³ *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 44.

the function that the literary genre was designed to serve in the life of the community or of the individual, to learn how it was employed and on what occasions, and to implement it, so far as possible, into its precise social or cultural milieu. Of special importance, especially in the light of later developments in OT scholarship, was its stress upon the oral provenance of the original genres in Israel, and beyond Israel, among the other peoples of the Near East. Finally, related to our foregoing discussion, is the comparison of the literary types with other exemplars within the OT and then, significantly, with representatives of the same type in the cognate literatures. Such an enterprise in comparison releases the Scriptures from the bondage to parochialism.

The reflections of form-critical methodology are to be discerned all along the horizons of OT studies since the turn of the century, although it must be added that it has also been consistently ignored by substantial segments of OT scholarship. Thus R. H. Pfeiffer in his *magnum opus* on the *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1941) scarcely gives it a passing nod, in sharp contrast to the introductions of Otto Eissfeldt (1934¹; Engl. transl. 1965), George Fohrer (1965; Engl. transl. 1968), Aage Bentzen (1948), and Artur Weiser (1948; Engl. transl. 1961), all of whom devote a large part of their works to the subject. In many commentaries, too, the literary types and forms are seldom mentioned. On the other hand, there have been many commentaries, such as those in the *Biblischer Kommentar* series, where they are discussed at some length. Equally significant is the important rôle that form criticism has played in hermeneutics. In theology, too, it has influenced not only the form and structure of the exposition, but also the understanding of the nature of biblical theology, as in the work of Gerhard von Rad, which is based upon form-critical presuppositions. Many works have been devoted to detailed studies of the particular literary genres, such as Israelite law,⁴ the lament and dirge,⁵ historical narrative,⁶ the various types of Hebrew prophecy,⁷ and wisdom.⁸ In quite a different fashion, the method is

⁴ G. von Rad, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (1948; Engl. transl. 1953); A. Alt, *Die Ursprünge des israelitischen Rechts in Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, I (1959), pp. 278–332; Engl. transl. in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (1966), pp. 79–132; Karlheinz Rabast, *Das apodiktische Recht im Deuteronomium und im Heiligkeitgesetz* (1949).

⁵ Hedwig Jahnow, *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung*, BZAW, 36 (1923).

⁶ R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* (1964).

⁷ J. Lindblom, *Die literarische Gattung der prophetischen Literatur* (1924); and *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (1962); C. Westermann, *Grundformen prophetischer Rede* (1960), Engl. transl., *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (1967).

⁸ W. Baumgartner, *Israelitische und altorientalische Weisheit* (1933); J. Fichtner, "Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung," BZAW, 62 (1933); J. Hempel, *Die althebräische Literatur und ihr hellenistisch-jüdisches Nachleben* (1930).

reflected in recent studies of the covenant formulations,⁹ the covenantal lawsuits,¹⁰ and the covenant curses.¹¹

Now, having attempted to do justice to the substantial gains made by the study of literary types, I should like to point to what seem to me to be some of its inadequacies, its occasional exaggerations, and especially its tendency to be too exclusive in its application of the method. In these reservations I do not stand alone, for signs are not wanting, both here and abroad, of discontent with the prevailing state of affairs, of a sense that the method has outrun its course. Thus its most thoroughgoing exponent, H. G. Reventlow, in a recent study of Psalm 8, comments: "One gets the impression that a definite method, precisely because it has demonstrated itself to be so uncommonly fruitful, has arrived at its limits."¹² It would be unfortunate if this were taken to mean that we have done with form criticism or that we should forfeit its manifest contributions to an understanding of the Scriptures. To be sure there are clamant voices being raised today against the methodology, and we are told that it is founded on an illusion, that it is too much influenced by classical and Germanic philology and therefore alien to the Semitic literary consciousness, and that it must be regarded as an aberration in the history of biblical scholarship.¹³ If we are faced with such a stark either-or, my allegiance is completely on the side of the form critics, among whom, in any case, I should wish to be counted. Such criticisms as I now propose to make do not imply a rejection so much as an appeal to venture beyond the confines of form criticism into an inquiry into other literary features which are all too frequently ignored today. The first of these is the one that is most frequently launched against the method. The basic contention of Gunkel is that the ancient men of Israel, like their Near Eastern neighbors, were influenced in their speech and their literary compositions by convention and custom. We therefore encounter in a particular genre or *Gattung* the same structural forms, the same terminology and style, and the same *Sitz im Leben*.

⁹ V. Kurošec, *Helhitische Staatsverträge in Leipziger rechtswissenschaftliche Studien* (1931); G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955); K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum alten Testament* (1960); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant, Analecta Biblica*, 21 (1963).

¹⁰ H. B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL*, 78 (1959), pp. 285-95; G. E. Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: a Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* (1962), pp. 26-67; Julien Harvey, S.J., "Le 'Ribpattern,' requisiatoire prophetique sur le rupture de l'alliance," *Biblica*, 45 (1962), pp. 172-96.

¹¹ Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, in *Biblica et Orientalia*, 16 (1964); H. J. Franken, "The vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon and the dating of Deuteronomy," *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, 14 (1965), pp. 122-54.

¹² H. G. Reventlow, "Der Psalm 8" in *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, 1, 1967, pp. 304-32.

¹³ Meir Weiss, "Wege der neuen Dichtungswissenschaft in ihrer Anwendung auf die Psalmenforschung," *Biblica*, 42 (1961), pp. 255-302.

Surely this cannot be gainsaid. But there has been a proclivity among scholars in recent years to lay such stress upon the typical and representative that the individual, personal, and unique features of the particular pericope are all but lost to view. It is true, as Klaus Koch says in his book, *Was ist Formgeschichte?* (1964), that the criticism has force more for the prophetic books than for the laws and wisdom utterances; and I should add for the hymns and laments of the Psalter too, as a study of *Die Einleitung in die Psalmen* by Gunkel-Begrich will plainly show, although the formulations exhibit diversity and versatility here too. Let me attempt to illustrate my point. In the first major section of the Book of Jeremiah (2 1-4 4*) we have an impressive sequence of literary units of essentially the same *Gattung*, i. e., the *rib* or lawsuit or legal proceeding, and the *Sitz im Leben* is the court of law. Yet the literary formulation of these pericopes shows great variety, and very few of them are in any way a complete reproduction of the lawsuit as it was actually carried on at the gate of the city.¹⁴ What we have here, for the most part, are excerpts or extracts, each complete in itself, to be sure, but refashioned into the conventional structures of metrical verse and animated by profuse images. Only the first (2 1-13) and final pericopes (3 1-4 4*) are preserved with any degree of completeness. But what is more, precisely because the forms and styles are so diverse and are composed with such consummate skill, it is clear that we are dealing with imitations of a *Gattung*. Even when we compare such well-known exemplars of the type as Deut 32 and Mic 6 1-8, the stylistic and rhetorical differences outweigh the similarities. The conventional elements of the lawsuit genre are certainly present, and their recognition is basic to an understanding of the passage; but this is only the beginning of the story. To state our criticism in another way, form criticism by its very nature is bound to generalize because it is concerned with what is common to all the representatives of a genre, and therefore applies an external measure to the individual pericopes.¹⁵ It does not focus sufficient attention upon what is unique and unrepeatable, upon the particularity of the formulation. Moreover, form and content are inextricably related. They form an integral whole. The two are one. Exclusive attention to the *Gattung* may actually obscure the thought and intention of the writer or speaker. The passage must be read and heard precisely as it is spoken. It is the creative synthesis of the particular formulation of the pericope with the content that makes it the distinctive composition that it is.

Another objection that has often been made of the criticism of literary types is its aversion to biographical or psychological interpretations and its resistance to historical commentary. This is to be explained

¹⁴ Ludwig Köhler, "Justice in the Gate," in *Hebrew Man* (1956), pp. 148-75.

¹⁵ H. G. Reventlow, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

only in part as a natural, even inevitable, consequence of its disregard of literary criticism. One has only to recall the rather extreme stress upon the nature of the prophetic experience of former times. The question is whether the specific text or passage gives any warrant for such ventures. There are cases, to be sure, as with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where it is difficult to see how one can cavalierly omit psychological commentary of some kind. The call of Jeremiah, for example, is something more than the recitation of a conventional and inherited liturgy within the precincts of the temple,¹⁶ and the so-called confessions of the prophet are more than the repetition and reproduction of fixed stereotypes, despite all the parallels that one may adduce from the OT and the Near Eastern texts for such a position. Perhaps more serious is the skepticism of all attempts to read a pericope in its historical context. The truth is that in a vast number of instances we are indeed left completely in the dark as to the occasion in which the words were spoken, and it is reasonable to assume that it was not of primary interest to the compilers of the traditions. This is notably the case with numerous passages in the prophetic writings. In Jeremiah, for example, more often than not, we are simply left to conjecture. Nevertheless, we have every reason to assume that there were situations which elicited particular utterances, and we are sufficiently informed about the history of the times to make conjecture perfectly legitimate. The prophets do not speak *in abstracto*, but concretely. Their formulations may reflect a cultic provenance as on the occasion of celebration of a national festival, although one must be on his guard against exaggeration here, especially against subsuming too many texts under the rubric of the covenant renewal festival, as in the case of Artur Weiser in his commentaries on Jeremiah and the Book of Psalms, or of the festival of the New Year, as in the case of Sigmund Mowinckel in his *Psalmenstudien*.

The foregoing observations have been designed to call attention to the perils involved in a too exclusive employment of form-critical methods, to warn against extremes in their application, and particularly to stress that there are other features in the literary compositions which lie beyond the province of the *Gattungsforscher*. It is important to emphasize that many scholars have used the method with great skill, sound judgment and proper restraint, and, what is more, have taken account of literary features other than those revealed by the *Gattung*, such as H. W. Wolff's commentary on Hosea in the *Biblischer Kommentar* series. Further, we should recognize that there are numerous texts where the literary genre appears in pure form, and here the exclusive application of form-critical techniques has its justification, although one must be quick to add that even here there are differences in formulation. But there are many other passages where the literary genres are being

¹⁶ H. G. Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia* (1963), pp. 24-77.

imitated, not only among the prophets, but among the historians and lawgivers. Witness, for example, the radical transformation of the early Elohist laws by the deuteronomists, or, perhaps equally impressively, the appropriation by the prophets of the curse formulae, not only within the OT, but also in the vassal treaties of the Near Eastern peoples.¹⁷ Let me repeat: in numerous contexts old literary types and forms are imitated, and, precisely because they are imitated, they are employed with considerable fluidity, versatility, and, if one may venture the term, artistry. The upshot of this circumstance is that the circumspect scholar will not fail to supplement his form-critical analysis with a careful inspection of the literary unit in its precise and unique formulation. He will not be completely bound by the traditional elements and motifs of the literary genre; his task will not be completed until he has taken full account of the features which lie beyond the spectrum of the genre. If the exemplars of the *Gattung* were all identical in their formulations, the OT would be quite a different corpus from what it actually is.

It is often said that the Hebrew writers were not motivated by distinctively literary considerations, that aesthetics lay beyond the domain of their interests, and that a preoccupation with what has come to be described as stylistics only turns the exegete along bypaths unrelated to his central task. It may well be true that aesthetic concerns were never primary with them and that the conception of *belles lettres*, current in ancient Hellas, was alien to the men of Israel. But surely this must not be taken to mean that the OT does not offer us literature of a very high quality. For the more deeply one penetrates the formulations as they have been transmitted to us, the more sensitive he is to the rôles which words and motifs play in a composition; the more he concentrates on the ways in which thought has been woven into linguistic patterns, the better able he is to think the thoughts of the biblical writer after him. And this leads me to formulate a canon which should be obvious to us all: a responsible and proper articulation of the words in their linguistic patterns and in their precise formulations will reveal to us the texture and fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it.

The field of stylistics or aesthetic criticism is flourishing today, and the literature that has gathered about it is impressive. Perhaps its foremost representative is Alonzo Schökel, whose work, *Estudios de Poetica Hebraea* (1963), offers us not only an ample bibliography of the important works in the field, but also a detailed discussion of the stylistic phenomenology of the literature of the OT. In this respect it is a better work than Ed. König's *Stilistik, Rhetorik, und Poetik* (1900), an encyclopedic compendium of linguistic and rhetorical phenomena, which nevertheless has the merit of providing many illuminating parallels

¹⁷ See n. 11.

drawn from classical literature and of availing itself of the many stylistic studies from the earliest times and throughout the nineteenth century. It would be an error, therefore, to regard the modern school in isolation from the history of OT scholarship because from the time of Jerome and before and continuing on with the rabbis and until modern times there have been those who have occupied themselves with matters of style. One thinks of Bishop Lowth's influential work, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum praelectiones academicae* (1753), and of Herder's work on Hebrew poetry (1772–83), but also of the many metrical studies, most notably Ed. Sievers' *Metrische Studien* (I, 1901; II, 1904–05; III, 1907).¹⁸ Noteworthy, too, are the contributions of Heinrich Ewald, Karl Budde, and Bernhard Duhm, and more recently and above all of Umberto Cassuto. W. F. Albright has devoted himself to subjects which are to all intents and purposes stylistic, as *inter alia* his studies on the Song of Deborah and his most recent work on *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (1968). His students too have occupied themselves with stylistic matters, notably Frank M. Cross and D. N. Freedman in their doctoral dissertation on *Studies in Yahwistic Poetry* (1950) and in their studies of biblical poems.¹⁹ Among the many others who have applied stylistic criteria to their examination of OT passages are Gerlis Gerleman in his study on the Song of Deborah,²⁰ L. Krinetski in his work on the Song of Songs,²¹ Edwin Good in his analysis of the composition of the Book of Hosea,²² R. A. Carlson in his scrutiny of the historical narratives of II Samuel in *David, the Chosen King* (1964), and William L. Holladay in his studies on Jeremiah.²³ The aspect of all these works which seems to me most fruitful and rewarding I should prefer to designate by a term other than stylistics. What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.

The first concern of the rhetorical critic, it goes without saying, is to

¹⁸ For literature on the subject see Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: an Introduction* (1967), p. 57.

¹⁹ "A Royal Song of Thanksgiving — II Samuel 22=Psalm 18," *JBL*, 62 (1953), pp. 15–34; "The Song of Miriam," *JNES*, 14 (1955), pp. 237–50; "The Blessing of Moses," *JBL*, 67 (1948), pp. 191–210. See also Freedman's "Archaic Forms in Early Hebrew Poetry," *ZAW*, 72 (1960), pp. 101–07.

²⁰ "The Song of Deborah in the Light of Stylistics," *VetT*, 1 (1951), pp. 168–80.

²¹ *Das Hohelied* (1964).

²² "The Composition of Hosea," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok*, 31 (1966), pp. 211–63.

²³ "Prototype and Copies, a New Approach to the Poetry-Prose Problem in the Book of Jeremiah," *JBL*, 79 (1960), 351–67; "The Recovery of Poetic Passages of Jeremiah," *JBL*, 85 (1966), pp. 401–35.

define the limits or scope of the literary unit, to recognize precisely where and how it begins and where and how it ends. He will be quick to observe the formal rhetorical devices that are employed, but more important, the substance or content of these most strategic loci. An examination of the commentaries will reveal that there is great disagreement on this matter, and, what is more, more often than not, no defence is offered for the isolation of the pericope. It has even been averred that it does not really matter. On the contrary, it seems to me to be of considerable consequence, not only for an understanding of how the *Gattung* is being fashioned and designed, but also and more especially for a grasp of the writer's intent and meaning. The literary unit is in any event an indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation. The delimitation of the passage is essential if we are to learn how its major motif, usually stated at the beginning, is resolved. The latter point is of special importance because no rhetorical feature is more conspicuous and frequent among the poets and narrators of ancient Israel than the proclivity to bring the successive predications to their culmination. One must admit that the problem is not always simple because within a single literary unit we may have and often do have several points of climax. But to construe each of these as a conclusion to the poem is to disregard its structure, to resolve it into fragments, and to obscure the relation of the successive strophes to each other. This mistaken procedure has been followed by many scholars, and with unfortunate consequences.

Now the objection that has been most frequently raised to our contention is that too much subjectivity is involved in determining where the accents of the composition really lie. The objection has some force, to be sure, but in matters of this sort there is no substitute for literary sensitivity. Moreover, we need constantly to be reminded that we are dealing with an ancient Semitic literature and that we have at our disposal today abundant parallel materials from the peoples of the ancient Near East for comparison. But we need not dispose of our problem so, for there are many marks of composition which indicate where the finale has been reached. To the first of these I have already alluded, the presence of climactic or ballast lines, which may indeed appear at several junctures within a pericope, but at the close have an emphasis which bears the burden of the entire unit. A second clue for determining the scope of a pericope is to discern the relation of beginning and end, where the opening words are repeated or paraphrased at the close, what is known as ring composition, or, to employ the term already used by Ed. König many years ago and frequently employed by Dahood in his commentary on the Psalter, the *inclusio*. There are scores of illustrations of this phenomenon in all parts of the OT, beginning with the opening literary unit of the Book of Genesis. An impressive illustration is the literary complex of Jer 3 1-4 4, with deletion of the generally recognized

prose insertions. While most scholars see more than one unit here, what we actually have before us is a superbly composed and beautifully ordered poem of three series of strophes of three strophes each. The major motif of turning or repentance is sounded in the opening casuistic legal formulation and is followed at once by the indictment:

If a man sends his wife away,
 and she goes from him,
 and becomes another man's wife,
 will she return to him [with the corrected text]?
 Would not that land
 be utterly polluted?
 But you have played the harlot with many lovers,
 and would you return to me? (Jer 3 1).

The word *שׁוּב* appears in diverse syntactical constructions and in diverse stylistic contexts, and always in strategic collocations.²⁴ The poem has of course been influenced by the lawsuit, but it also contains a confessional lament and comes to a dramatic climax in the final strophe and in the form of the covenant conditional:

If you do return, O Israel, Yahweh's Word!
 to me you should return (Jer 4 1 a).

The whole poem is an Exhibit A of ancient Hebrew rhetoric, but it could easily be paralleled by numerous other exemplars quite as impressive.

The second major concern of the rhetorical critic is to recognize the structure of a composition and to discern the configuration of its component parts, to delineate the warp and woof out of which the literary fabric is woven, and to note the various rhetorical devices that are employed for marking, on the one hand, the sequence and movement of the pericope, and on the other, the shifts or breaks in the development of the writer's thought. It is our contention that the narrators and poets of ancient Israel and her Near Eastern neighbors were dominated not only by the formal and traditional modes of speech of the literary genres or types, but also by the techniques of narrative and poetic composition. Now the basic and most elemental of the structural features of the poetry of Israel, as of that of the other peoples of the ancient Near East, is the parallelism of its successive cola or stichoi. Our concern here is not with the different types of parallelism — synonymous, complementary, antithetic, or stairlike, etc. — but rather with the diversities of sequence of the several units within the successive cola, or within the successive and related bicola or tricola. It is precisely these diversities which give the poetry its distinctive and artistic character. It is always tantalizing to the translator that so often they cannot be reproduced into English or, for that matter, into the other Western tongues. In recent years much attention has been given to

²⁴ William L. Holladay, *The Root ŠŪBH in the Old Testament* (1958).

the repetitive tricola, which is amply illustrated in Ugaritic poetry.²⁵ But this repetitive style appears in numerous other types of formulation, and, what is more, is profusely illustrated in our earliest poetic precipitates:

The kings came, they fought;
 then fought the kings of Canaan,
 at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
 they got no spoils of silver.
 From heaven fought the stars,
 from their courses they fought against Sisera.
 The torrent Kishon swept them away,
 the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.
 March on, my soul with might (Judg 5 19–21).

Within so small a compass we have two instances of chiasmus, the fourfold repetition of the verb *וַיִּלָּחֶמוּ*, the threefold repetition of *וַיִּגְהַל*, and a concluding climactic shout. There are numerous cases of anaphora, the repetition of key words or lines at the beginning of successive predications, as in the series of curses in Deut 27 15–26 or of blessings in the following chapter (Deut 28 3–6), or the prophetic oracles of woe (Isa 5 8–22), or the repeated summons to praise (Ps 150), or the lamenting “How long” of Psalm 3. Jeremiah’s vision of the return to primeval chaos is a classic instance of anaphora (Jer 4 23–26). In the oracle on the sword against Babylon as Yahweh’s hammer and weapon, the line “with you I shatter in pieces” is repeated nine times (Jer 50 35–38). Examples of a different kind are Job’s oaths of clearance (Job 31) and Wisdom’s autobiography (Prov 8 22–31). These iterative features are much more profuse and elaborate in the ancient Near Eastern texts, but also more stereotyped.²⁶

The second structural feature of Israel’s poetic compositions is closely related to our foregoing observations concerning parallel structures and is particularly germane to responsible hermeneutical inquiry and exegetical exposition. The bicola or tricola appear in well-defined clusters or groups, which possess their own identity, integrity, and structure. They are most easily recognized in those instances where they close with a refrain, as in the prophetic castigations of Amos 4 6–11 or in Isaiah’s stirring poem on the divine fury (9 7–20, 5 25–30) or the personal lament of Pss 42–43 or the song of trust of Psalm 46 in its original form, or, most impressively in the liturgy of thanksgiving of Psalm 107. They

²⁵ H. L. Ginsberg, “The Rebellion and Death of Ba’lu,” *Orientalia*, 5 (1936), pp. 161–98; W. F. Albright, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. by H. H. Rowley (1950), pp. 1–18; *idem*, *Yahweh and the God of Canaan* (1968), pp. 4–27; J. H. Patton, *Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms* (1944), pp. 5–11.

²⁶ S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (1963), pp. 174 ff., 254, 256, 263; A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete*, pp. 59 ff., 67 f.; J. B. Pritchard, *ANET*, pp. 385b–86a, 390, 391b–92.

are readily identified, too, in the alphabetic acrostics of Psalms 9–10, 25, and 119 and in the first three chapters of Lamentations. But, as we shall have occasion to observe, there are many other ways to define their limits. In the literatures of the other peoples of the ancient Near East the same structural phenomena are present.²⁷ But how shall we name such clusters? The most common designation is the *strophe*, but some scholars have raised objections to it because they aver that it is drawn from the models of Greek lyrical verse and that they cannot apply to Semitic poetic forms. It is true that in an earlier period of rhetorical study scholars were too much dominated by Greek prototypes and sought to relate the strophes to each other in a fashion for which there was little warrant in the biblical text. If we must confine our understanding to the Greek conception of a strophe, then it is better not to employ it, and to use the word *stanza* instead. The second objection to the term is that a strophe is to be understood as a metrical unit, i. e., by a consistent metrical scheme. There is also some force in this objection. Many poems do indeed have metrical uniformity, but often this is not the case. Indeed, I should contend that the Hebrew poet frequently avoids metrical consistency. It is precisely the break in the meter that gives the colon or bicolon its designed stress and importance. But we can say with some confidence that strophes have prevailingly consistent meters. My chief defense for employing the word *strophe* is that it has become acclimated to current terminology, not only by biblical scholars, but also by those whose province is Near Eastern literature. By a strophe we mean a series of bicola or tricola with a beginning and ending, possessing unity of thought and structure. The prosody group must coincide with the sense. But there is still another observation to be made which is of the first importance for our understanding of Hebrew poetry. While very many poems have the same number of lines in each strophe, it is by no means necessary that they be of the same length, although in the majority of cases they are indeed so. Where we have variety in the number of lines in successive strophes, a pattern is usually discernible. In any event, the time has not yet passed when scholars resort to the precarious practice of emendation in order to produce regularity. Just as we have outlived the practice of deleting words *metri causa* for the sake of consistency, so it is to be hoped that we refuse to produce strophic uniformity by excision of lines unless there is textual support for the alteration.

Perhaps there is no enterprise more revealing for our understanding of the nature of biblical rhetoric than an intensive scrutiny of the composition of the strophes, the manifold technical devices employed for

²⁷ See A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *op. cit.*, for full discussion, especially pp. 37 ff.

their construction, and the stylistic phenomena which give them their unity. Such a study is obviously beyond the province of our present investigation. We may call attention, however, to a number of features which occur with such frequency and in such widely diverse contexts that they may be said to characterize Hebrew and to a considerable extent ancient Near Eastern modes of literary composition. We have already mentioned the refrains which appear at the close of the strophes. There are not a few examples of where they open in the same fashion. Thus the succession of oracles against the nations in Amos 1 3-2 16 are all wrought in essentially the same mold, and the stylistically related sequence of oracles in Ezek 25 3-17 follows precisely the same pattern. Psalm 29 is, of course, a familiar example with its iteration of *קול יהוה* in five of the seven strophes. In the opening poem of Second Isaiah (40 1-11) the proem comes to a climax in the cry, *קראו אֵלַיָּהּ*. This now serves as a key to the structure of the lines that follow: *קול יקרא* (3a), *קול אמר קרא* (6a), and *הֲרִימִי בְּכֶחַךְ קוֹלְךָ* (9b). The poem which follows is a superb specimen of Hebrew literary craft and exhibits the same sense of form by the repetition of key words at the beginning of each strophe, and the succession of interrogatives couched in almost identical fashion reach their climax in the awesome *וְרָאוּ מִי-בְּרָא אֵלֶּהָ*, which is answered in the final strophe by the words to which all the lines have been pointing:

Yahweh is an everlasting God,
Creator of the ends of the earth (40 28b).

Perhaps the most convincing argument for the existence of strophes in Hebrew poetry as in the poetry of the other ancient Near Eastern peoples is the presence within a composition of turning points or breaks or shifts, whether of the speaker or the one addressed or of motif and theme. While this feature is common to a number of literary genres, they are especially striking in the personal and communal laments. Psalm 22, which fairly teems with illuminating rhetorical features, will illustrate. We cite the opening lines of each strophe:

My God, my God, why hast thou abandoned me? (1-2)
But Thou art holy (3-5)
But I am a worm and no man (6-8)
Yet thou art he who took me from my mother's womb (9-11)
I am poured out like water (14-15)
Yea, dogs are round about me (16-18)
But thou, O Yahweh, be not far off (19-21)
I will tell of thy name to my brethren (22-24)
From thee comes my praise in the great congregation (25-28)
Yea to him shall all the proud of the earth bow down (29-31)
(emended text. See B. H. *ad loc.*).

Particles play a major rôle in all Hebrew poetry and reveal the rhetorical cast of Semitic literary mentality in a striking way. Chief

among them is the deictic and emphatic particle **וְ**, which performs a vast variety of functions and is susceptible of many different renderings, above all, perhaps, the function of motivation where it is understood causally.²⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that it should appear in strategic collocations, such as the beginnings and endings of the strophes. For the former we may cite Isaiah 34:

For Yahweh is enraged against all the nations (32 2a)
 For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens (34 5a)
 For Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah (34 6c)
 For Yahweh has a day of vengeance (34 8a).

The particle appears frequently in the hymns of the Psalter immediately following the invocation to praise, as in Psalm 95:

For Yahweh is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods (95 3),

or later in the same hymn:

For he is our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture (95 7).

The motivations also conclude a strophe or poem:

For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked shall perish (Ps 1 6);

or, as frequently in Jeremiah:

For I bring evil from the north,
 and great destruction (Jer. 4 6b);
 For the fierce anger of Yahweh
 has not turned away from us (Jer 4 8b);
 For their transgressions are many,
 their apostasies great (Jer 5 6c).

Significantly, in the closing poem of Second Isaiah's eschatological "drama" (Isa 55) the particle is employed with extraordinary force, both at the opening and closing bicola of the strophes, and goes far to explain the impact that the poem has upon the reader. As the poems open with the threefold use of the particle in the opening strophe, so they close with a fivefold repetition of the word.

A second particle, frequently associated with **וְ** is **הִנֵּה** or **הִנְּן**, the word which calls for our attention. Characteristically it appears in striking contexts, either by introducing a poem or strophe or by bringing it to its culmination. Thus the third and climatic strophe of the long and well-structured poem of Isa 40 12-31 begins dramatically after the long series of interrogatives:

Behold (**הִנֵּה**), the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
 and are accounted as dust on the scales;
 Behold, he takes up the isles like fine dust (40 15).

²⁸ James Muilenburg, "The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle in the Old Testament," *HUCA*, 32 (1961), pp. 135-60.

The poem which follows is composed of three series of three strophes each, and the climax falls in each case upon the third strophe. The "behold" always appears in crucial or climactic contexts. The judgment of the nations appears at the close of two strophes:

Behold, you are nothing,
and your work is nought;
an abomination is he who chooses you (Isa 41 24);

Behold, they are all a delusion
their works are nothing;
their molten images are empty wind (Isa 41 29).

It is at this point that the Servant of Yahweh is now introduced:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom I delight;
I have put my spirit upon him,
he will bring forth justice to the nations (42 1).

The last of the so-called Servant poems begins in the same way:

Behold, my servant yet shall prosper,
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high (Isa 52 13).

The particle may appear in series, as in Isa 65 13-14:

Therefore thus says Yahweh God:
"Behold, my servants shall eat,
but you shall be hungry;
behold, my servants shall drink,
but you shall be thirsty;
behold, my servants shall rejoice,
but you shall be put to shame;
behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,
but you shall cry out for pain of heart,
and shall wail for anguish of spirit.

Frequently it brings the strophe or poem to a climax:

Behold your God!
Behold, the Lord Yahweh comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him (Isa 40 9-10).

The particle appears in many other modes and guises in the OT, as, for example, in introducing oracles of judgment where הִנֵּנִי is followed by the active participle.²⁹

There are other particles which would reward our study, among which we may mention לִכְּנֹן , which characteristically introduces the threat or verdict in the oracles of judgment, or לְמַה , with which the laments so frequently open, or וְעַתָּה , so central to the covenant formulations, but perpetuated in the prophets and singers of Israel.

²⁹ Paul Humbert, *Opuscles d'un Hébraïsant* (1958), pp. 54-59.

Numerous other stylistic features delineate the form and structure of the strophes. Most frequent are the vocatives addressed to God in the invocations. Take the opening cola of the successive strophes in Psalm 7:

O Yahweh, my God, in thee do I take refuge. 7 1 a (Heb. 2a);
 O Yahweh, my God, if I have done this 7 3 a (Heb. 4a);
 Arise, O Yahweh, in thy anger 7 6 a (Heb. 7a).

Or the inclusio of Psalm 8:

O Yahweh, my Lord,
 how spacious is thy name in all the earth (8 1, 9 [Heb. 2, 10]);

or the entrance liturgy:

O Yahweh, who shall sojourn in thy tent?
 Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? (15 1).³⁰

Rhetorical questions of different kinds and in different literary types appear in strategic collocations. As we should expect, they are quite characteristic in the legal encounters:

What wrong was it then that your fathers found in me
 that they went far from me? (Jer 2 5);
 Why do you bring a suit against me? (Jer 2 29).³¹

The questions often provide the climatic line of the strophe:

How long must I see the standard,
 and hear the sound of the trumpet? (Jer 4 21),

or in the moving outcry of the prophet:

Is there no balm in Gilead?
 Is there no physician there?
 Why then has the health of the daughter, my people, not been restored? (Jer 8 22).

Especially striking is the threefold repetition of a keyword within a single strophe. This phenomenon is so frequent and the words are so strategically placed that it cannot be said to be fortuitous. We have observed it in connection with our study of the particles. We select an example almost at random, though it is lost in translation:

קומי אורי כי בא אורד וקבור יהוה על־ך ורח:
 כִּי־הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה־אֶרֶץ וְעָרְפֹל לְאֲמִים
 וְעַל־ךְ יִרְחַח יְהוָה וְקִבְרוֹ עַל־ךְ יִרְאֶה:
 וְהִלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרֵךְ וּמַלְכִים לְעִנֵּה וְרַחֲדָ: (Isa 60 1–3).

³⁰ Cf. also Pss 3 1 (Heb. 2), 6 1 (Heb. 2), 22 1 (Heb. 2), 25 1, 26 1, 28 1, 31 1 (Heb. 2), 43 1, 51 1 (Heb. 2).

³¹ Cf. also Pss 2 1, 10 1, 15 1, 35 17, 49 5 (Heb. 6), 52 1 (Heb. 2), 58 1 (Heb. 2), 60 9 (Heb. 11), 62 3 (Heb. 4); Jer 5 7a, also Isa 10 11, 14 32, 42 1–4; Jer 5 21a, 9 9.

Amos' oracle on the Day of Yahweh is another good example (Amos 5 18–20). If we may accept the present masoretic text of Isa 55 1, it is not without significance that the prophet's final poem opens with the urgent invitations, which is all the more impressive because of its assonance:

Ho, every one who thirsts,
 come (לִכְּבוֹ) to the waters;
 and he who has no money
 come (לִכְּבוֹ) buy and eat!
 Come (לִכְּבוֹ), buy wine and milk
 without money and without price (Isa 55 1).³²

Repetition serves many and diverse functions in the literary compositions of ancient Israel, whether in the construction of parallel cola or parallel bicola, or in the structure of the strophes, or in the fashioning and ordering of the complete literary units. The repeated words or lines do not appear haphazardly or fortuitously, but rather in rhetorically significant collocations. This phenomenon is to be explained perhaps in many instances by the originally spoken provenance of the passage, or by its employment in cultic celebrations, or, indeed, by the speaking mentality of the ancient Israelite. It served as an effective mnemonic device. It is the key word which may often guide us in our isolation of a literary unit, which gives to it its unity and focus, which helps us to articulate the structure of the composition, and to discern the pattern or texture into which the words are woven. It is noteworthy that repetitions are most abundant in crucial contexts. Perhaps the most familiar of these is the call of Abram (Gen 12 1–3) which opens the Yahwist patriarchal narratives. As Ephraim Speiser has seen, it is a well-constructed poem of three diminutive strophes of three lines each. But what is notable here is the fivefold repetition of the word *bless* in differing syntactical forms, which underscores the power of the blessing that is to attend not only Abram, but all the nations of the earth. It is not surprising, therefore, that the motif should recur again and again and always in decisive places. An example of another kind is the much controverted verse at the beginning of the book of Hosea:

לך קח-לך אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים וְיִלְדֵי זְנוּנִים
 בְּיָנֶה תִּזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ מֵאַחֲרֵי יְהוָה (1 2).

In the following chapter the motif of the new covenant reaches its climax in another repetitive text:

And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in compassion. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know that I am Yahweh (Hos 2 19–20 [Heb 21–22]).

³² Cf. Judg 5 19–21; Pss 25 1–3, 34 1–3 (Heb. 2–4), 7–10 (Heb. 8–11), 121 7–8, 139 11–12 (Heb. 12–13), 145 1–3; Isa 55 6–9; Jer 5 15e–17.

The structure of the first chapter of Ezekiel is determined by the recurring motif of the *demuth* at the beginning of each of its major divisions, and in the finale reaches its climax by the dramatic threefold repetition:

And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were in human form (Ezek 1 26).

Persistent and painstaking attention to the modes of Hebrew literary composition will reveal that the pericopes exhibit linguistic patterns, word formations ordered or arranged in particular ways, verbal sequences which move in fixed structures from beginning to end. It is clear that they have been skillfully wrought in many different ways, often with consummate skill and artistry. It is also apparent that they have been influenced by conventional rhetorical practices. This inevitably poses a question for which I have no answer. From whom did the poets and prophets of Israel acquire their styles and literary habits? Surely they cannot be explained by spontaneity. They must have been learned and mastered from some source, but what this source was is a perplexing problem. Are we to look to the schools of wisdom for an explanation? It is difficult to say. But there is another question into which we have not gone. How are we to explain the numerous and extraordinary literary affinities of the *Gattungen* or genres and other stylistic formulations of Israel's literature with the literatures of the other peoples of the Near East? Were the prophets and poets familiar with these records? If not, how are we to explain them? If so, in what ways?

But there are other latitudes which we have not undertaken to explore. T. S. Eliot once described a poem as a raid on the inarticulate. In the Scriptures we have a literary deposit of those who were confronted by the ultimate questions of life and human destiny, of God and man, of the past out of which the historical people has come and of the future into which it is moving, a speech which seeks to be commensurate with man's ultimate concerns, a raid on the ultimate, if you will.

Finally, it has not been our intent to offer an alternative to form criticism or a substitute for it, but rather to call attention to an approach of eminent lineage which may supplement our form-critical studies. For after all has been said and done about the forms and types of biblical speech, there still remains the task of discerning the actuality of the particular text, and it is with this, we aver, that we must reckon, as best we can, for it is this concreteness which marks the material with which we are dealing. In a word, then, we affirm the necessity of form criticism, but we also lay claim to the legitimacy of what we have called rhetorical criticism. Form criticism and beyond.