

# THE GENESIS GENESIS

Anthony Abela

Genesis is often accorded the lion's share of attention and reference in the current debate about the validity of the historical-critical method and the Documentary Hypothesis, its first-born child in the field of pentateuchal research.<sup>(1)</sup> The explanation for this phenomenon perhaps lies in the role of Genesis as "the point of departure for Higher Criticism".<sup>(2)</sup> Present day views on the historical-critical study oscillate from open declarations of the approach's bankruptcy or limitations,<sup>(3)</sup> to a proposal of an empirical basis for the Documentary Hypothesis<sup>(4)</sup> and to faithful adherence to the method of "classical source criticism".<sup>(5)</sup>

1. For summaries of this discussion I refer the reader to Joseph Blenkinsopp "The Documentary hypothesis in trouble" *Bible Review*, 1,4 (1985) 22-32; Raymond Brown, "Historical Critical Exegesis and attempts at Revisionism", *The Bible Today* 23 (1985) 157-165. A. Graeme Auld, "Keeping up with Recent Studies, VI, The Pentateuch", *The Espository Times* 9 (1979s) 297-302; A.H.J. Gunnweg, "Anmerkungen und Anfragen zur neueren Pentateuchforschung" *Theologische Rundschau* 48 (1983) 227-253; 50 (1985) 107-131; M.A. Martin Juarez, "Situación actual de los estudios sobre el Pentateuco" *Religion y Cultura* 29 (1983) 27-43; J.C. McConville, "The Pentateuch Today" *Themelios* 8,3 (1982s) 5-11; A.L. Nations, "Historical criticism and Current methodological Crisis", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983)59-71; Fausto Salvoni, "Le fonti del Pentateuco nelle recenti discussioni", *Ricerche Bibliche e Religiose* 14 (1979) 69-90; J. Vermeulen, "La Formation du Pentateuque à la lumiere de l'exegese historico-critique", *Revue Theologique de Louvain* 12 (1981) 324-346; John T. Willis, "Some recent Studies on Genesis and the Literary-Historical Approach" *Restoration Quarterly* 23 (1980) 193-200.

2. Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative" in J.W. Welsh (ed) *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim; Gerstenberg 1981) 96. Cfr. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (Blackwell; Oxford 1974) 160-161.

3. Valentine Long, "Higher Criticism has Gone Bankrupt" *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 83 (1, 1982) 50-57 cfr. also R. K. Harrison, "Genesis", *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II (W.B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids 1982) 432-435; Alan F. John, "The Historical Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983) 3-15; Augustine Stock, "The limits of Historical-Critical Exegesis", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983) 28-31 and the response by Leland J. White in 13 (1983)32-34.

4. cfr. Jeffrey H. Tigay, "An Empirical Basis for the Documentary Hypothesis" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975) 329-342.

5. cfr. Sean E. McEvenue, "The Elohist at Work" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (1984) 315-332: ".....as contemporary scholarship develops fertile new approaches to the Bible, it would be a tragedy if we failed to systematize the results of several centuries of traditional source criticism, collecting those data which have proven to be dependable, and picking from the welter of uncertainties those data which can be substantiated" (316). For a defence of the historical-critical approach cfr. James Barr, *Holy Scripture. Canon Authority Criticism* (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1983) ch. 5.

The space between these two poles is studded with hypotheses that are often critical of the solutions proposed so far to the problems of the Pentateuch in general and of Genesis in particular while, at the same time, they indicate new possible avenues. For the sake of simplicity we group the several positions in three trends: (a) *the 'reform' trend*. The historical-critical method is at home among this group of scholars. Yet they pay attention not to confuse literary criticism with one of its possible results, the Documentary Hypothesis.<sup>(6)</sup> The high esteem enjoyed by the historical-critical approach to the Bible often contrasts with the ever-diminishing importance for exegesis of the previous distribution of the pentateuchal text into the "famous quartet of hypothetical sources" (Graeme Auld) reconstructed by the Wellhausen School. In this group we would put Brevard S. Childs' canonical-critical reading of the Old Testament,<sup>(7)</sup> David J.A. Clines' holistic approach to "the theme of the Pentateuch as a whole" that steers away from the 'atomism' and 'geneticism' of previous methods,<sup>(8)</sup> and the 'new Pentateuchal criticism' (Clines) which includes the contributions of Sven Tengström,<sup>(9)</sup> John Van Seters,<sup>(10)</sup> Hans Heinrich Schmid and Rolf Rendtorff<sup>(11)</sup> and which shakes the "impressive edifice of eminent intellectual acumen" (Radday) built by J. Wellhausen and his

6. cfr. Rolf Rendtorff, "The Future of Pentateuchal Criticism" *Henoch VI* (1984) 3.

7. cfr. his commentary *Exodus* (Old Testament Library, SCM Press; London 1974). His comments on the text's prehistory are illuminating: "At times the results of the prehistory of the text have direct bearing on the interpretation of the canonical text; at other times the prehistory is quite irrelevant to understanding the synchronistic dimension of the biblical text" (p. XIV). cfr. Graeme Auld, "Keeping up with Recent Studies", 298. Childs' approach is further discussed in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (SCM Press; London 1979) 27-106. On pp. 109-135 the author discusses the problems raised by the Pentateuch. For this approach cfr. also James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Fortress Press; Philadelphia 1984); Robert L. Cohn "Narrative structure and canonical perspective in Genesis" *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983) 3-16. For a critique cfr. Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 75-104. 130-171.

8. *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT Supplement Series 10; Sheffield 1978) 7-15. Clines is respectful of the 'traditional' critical study; yet it is only after he has taken "a synoptic view of the theme of the Pentateuch as a whole" does he come to grips with the 'literary history' behind the present text (pp. 84-96). For an evaluation of Clines' book and method cfr. Graeme Auld, "Keeping up with Recent Studies", 300-301; McConville, "Pentateuch Today", 7-8.

9. "Die Hexateucherzählung. Eine Literaturgeschichtliche Studie", *Coniectura Biblica*, 7 (1976). For a critique of his ideas cfr. A. Graeme Auld, *Joshua, Moses and the Land. Tetrataeuch-Pentateuch-Hexateuch in a generation since 1938* (Edinburgh 1980) 92-93. 113-114.

10. *Abraham in History and Tradition* (Yale University Press; New Haven/London 1975) Critiques of his book are to be found in Graeme Auld, "Keeping up with Recent Studies", 299-300; Thomas L. Thompson *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel* (JSOT Supplement Series 55; Sheffield 1987) 41-59; Henri Gazelles, Review in *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978) 241-255.

11. H.H. Schmid, *Der Sogenannte Jahwist Beobachtungen und Fragen zur Pentateuchforschung* (Zurich 1976); R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; W. de Gruyter; Berlin/New York 1977). Reviews of and comments

colleagues through proposed radical changes in the established sources' chronology or the outright suppression of one of the sources themselves.<sup>(12)</sup>

(b) *The conservative trend.* Again we have a wide prospectus which ranges from defensive closure to critical analysis of the biblical text to "a movement within more conservative writing away from defensiveness and towards imaginative building upon traditional premises".<sup>(13)</sup> The constituents of this group tend to be characterized by (i) a refusal or a negative evaluation of higher criticism and its global results: (ii) a re-affirmation of the "supposed dogma of mosaic authorship of the pentateuch" (Petuchowski),<sup>(14)</sup> or the delineation of a mosaic role in the

on these two seminal works are numerous. A limited list: J. Alberto Soggin, Review of Schmid in *Biblica* 59 (1978) 576-579; the entire number of the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 3 (1977) is dedicated to a review of Rendtorff's ideas expressed in his paper "The 'Yahwist' as Theologian? The Dilemma of Pentateuchal Criticism" (pp. 2-10). Besides cfr. Frederick A. Niedner, *The Date of the Yahwist Source of the Pentateuch and its Role in the History of Israelite Traditions* (Dissertation. St. Louis Semmex 1979); Graeme Auld, "Keeping up with Recent Studies", 298-299; idem, *Joshua, Moses and the Land*, 111-113; Erich Zenger, "Wo steht die Pentateuchforschung heute? Ein kritischen Bericht über zwei wichtige neuere Publikationen", *Biblische Zeitschrift* 24 (1980) 101-116; McConville, "Pentateuch Today", 7; Antonio Bonaro, "Recenti studi storiografici sui racconti patriarcali (Gen 12-26)", *Theologia* 8 (1983) 83-108.

12. Just to stay within the precincts of the last mentioned: in this Rome lecture (cfr. note 6 for details) about the future of Pentateuchal criticism Rendtorff declares that "the questions of the future of pentateuchal criticism, at least for German Protestant theology, is at the same time the question as to whether scholars can free themselves from the burden of the documentary hypothesis" (3). The Heidelberg professor describes the present state of pentateuchal studies as belonging to 'after Wellhausen' and urges the abandonment of source criticism as proposed by Wellhausen and to return to the methodology of H. Gunkel who was interested mainly in the smallest units within the Pentateuch. This methodology was further developed by G. von Rad who demonstrated that the Pentateuch is in fact composed of several complexes of traditions (Traditionskomplexe) each with its own theme. Rendtorff insists that we take seriously the existence of "these different circles of tradition" and that we "study the course from the smallest units, that means the single, independent narratives and so on, to these larger units", and that we must "try to understand the intentions of the respective collectors, traditors and interpreters who shaped these different groups of texts" (5). According to Rendtorff "Each of these sections has its own literary character, each of them not only having its own style and literary technique but even its own intentions and interests", so that "... it is more useful to study the particular character of these different sections of the Pentateuch than to try and find out sources and documents running through the whole Pentateuch. In doing so we can learn much about the art of narration, its changes and developments in Old Testament times and thus gain an insight into the history of the Pentateuch" (7). Rendtorff denies the existence of the Yahwist while he criticises Schmid's retaining the name 'Yahwist' which he gives to a process of redaction and interpretation rather than to a single collector, author or theologian (pp. 10-11). In this respect cfr. Robert North, "Can Geography save J from Rendtorff?" *Biblica* 63 (1982) 47-55. For a practical application of Rendtorff's approach and programme on the *tóledót* traditions in Genesis - Exodus 23 cfr. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel* (details in note 10) chapters 3-4-5.

13. McConville, "Pentateuch Today", 5.

14. *The Hibbert Journal* 57 (1958) 356-360.

literary history of Genesis (and the rest of the Torah);<sup>(15)</sup> (iii) a tendency towards a unitarian reading of Genesis: (iv) an attempt to explain the various difficulties to a unitarian reading through form-critical and rhetorical theories.<sup>(16)</sup>

15. cfr. James P. O'Reilly, "The mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 80 (April 1980) 25-31; Harrison, "Genesis", 437-438; P.J. Wiseman, *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis. A case for Literary Unity* (Thomas Nelson Publishers; Nashville 1985).

16. In this category we should probably include Yehuda T. Radday's fine study on 'Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative' (cfr. note 2 for details) and R.K. Harrison's form critical proposal about the origin of Genesis (cfr. note 3). At the beginning of his essay Radday makes three claims: (a) that many narrative sections of Scripture are chiasmically built: this chiasm structure is a "key to meaning"; (b) that biblical authors and/or editors placed the main idea, the thesis, or the turning point of each literary unit, at its centre and this fact is God-send as often "the books of the Bible are silent as to the express purposes for which they were written" so that this structure "reveals the book's focal concepts"; (c) that "the beauty and completeness of the chiasm construction bias a direct correlation to age: the older, the more chiasm" (51). He then reviews the narrative sections of the Old Testament starting with Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles and finishes with Genesis (pp. 52-110). For Radday the Torah itself is chiasmically arranged with the Book of Leviticus occupying the structural centre: "the commandments occupy the ultimate position of preeminence" (86). His analysis of the Book of Genesis (pp. 96-110) leads to the same theme. The author attempts "to discover..... whether the book itself may not offer indications of its own internal construction, perhaps more homogeneous than assumed" (96). One such indication has been characterization patterns present within Genesis; three such patterns exist indeed: typological in Genesis 1-11, 'gradual individualization of character' in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 12-36), strict individualization in the Joseph narrative (Gen 37-50). "From this evolves a natural and internally dictated division of the book into a typological prologue (1, 1-11, 32), a progressively individualizing main part (12, 1-36, 43) and a highly individualized portrait in the epilogue (37, 1-50, 26)" (97). Once the overarching structure is discovered and delineated Radday passes on to discuss chiasm patterns in particular texts (pp. 98-108). Closer attention receives the middle section, the patriarchal narrative (103-100), especially the Abraham cycle which Radday considers "extensively symmetrical" (104-105). He then concentrates on two structurally important texts, chapter 17 and chapter 22 "both of immense impact upon Judaism" and are "highlighted by displaying themselves with extra chiasm features" (105). The former revolves around the commandment of circumcision (106), while the latter which "comprises the centrepiece of Genesis and are "the core of the book" (106) has as its pivot the dialogue between father and son in vv. 7-8 which express parabolically the two classes of commandments, the ethical precepts (*mispatim*) which govern social relationships, and the *huqqim* which cover man's relationship to God (109). And from this structural analysis Radday arrives to the conclusion that "Genesis was written in order to lead the reader, by means of narrative towards a deeper comprehension of the succeeding four books of the Pentateuch, whose essence is the two categories of commandments *huqqim* and *mispatim*" (110).

In his "concluding remarks" (110-112) the author recapitulates his main intuitions and attempts to counter possible objections to his approach. Important is his general statement: "When the same structural principle is found throughout the Pentateuch..... this fact points towards internal unity, homogeneity, design and to a mastermind or masterhand, i.e. to the opposite of multiple authorship and redactional recensions, with their wholesale additions, expansions, omissions, conflation, and interpolations, the pillars on which the 'orthodox' Quellenscheidung of the Wellhausen - Graf - de Wette school rests. What is at stake regarding chiasm in the Hebrew Bible, therefore, is nothing less than an entire school of interpretative thought" (111). One should add that (a) Radday employs statistical procedures to

(c) *The new literary criticism trend.* In the last twenty years or so there appeared on the scholarly horizon<sup>(17)</sup> an increasing number of works which Robert Alter lumped together under the generic rubric “the new

establish the accuracy of each concentric pattern and the level of its conscious artfulness (p. 52 cfr. pp. 116-117); (b) he adopts S. Talmon’s view of the *unio personalis* of author and copyist or writer: “it is easy to see such a writer utilizing chiasmic principles at either or any stage of his writing process” (112). He postulates “one single author as the composer of any smoothly symmetrical chiasm” (112).

Harrison’s form-critical proposal about the origin of Genesis is made after his account of the solutions by literary criticism which unfortunately led nowhere owing to weaknesses inherent to the literary-critical approach (pp. 432-435). Resorting to form-criticism was necessary “in the light of the conspicuous failure of European literary criticism of the Graf-Wellhausen variety to elicit accredited and realistic sources” (435). Harrison takes his cue from the literary form of many clay tablets unearthed at Mesopotamian sites, containing a wide range of material; those tablets which carry communications normally began with a title, continued with the text of the document and concluded with a *colophon*. This latter item included the title of the document, the name of the tablet’s scribe or owner, and sometimes the date of writing. According to Harrison something of the sort lies behind the *tòledôt* structure of Genesis. The frequently found phrase “these are the generations of” corresponds to these colophons and should be read as the conclusion not the opening of the literary units in which it is found (cfr. Gen 2,4 for instance). From the presence of this phrase Harrison isolated eleven passages in Genesis which in fact constituted the literary sources from which Genesis was eventually composed. Further comments: (a) The eleven proposed underlying tablets comprised: 1, 1-2, 4; 2, 5-5, 2; 5, 3-6, 9a; 6, 9b-10, 1; 10, 2-11, 10a; 11, 10b-27a; 11, 27b-25, 12; 25, 13-19a; 25, 19b-36, 1; 36, 2-9; 36, 10-37, 2. Besides there was the Joseph narratives (37, 2b--50, 26) which were composed later by one individual. (b) The *tòledôt* phrase indicating the colophon includes the name of the person who wrote or possessed the tablet: each tablet; with the exception of the first, contained the family history. (c) “As a means of emphasizing the ancient historiographic character of the material (over against any mythical or legendary estimate), it should be noted that none of the tablets contains any information that could not have been known to the individuals mentioned in the colophons as scribes or owners of the various sources” (437) (d) The putting together into a continuous narrative of the eleven cuneiform tablets was carried out by a compiler: “The tactful nature of the editorial changes in Genesis might well point to the compiler’s high degree of veneration for the sources because of their origin and antiquity” (ibid) (e) A first-class writer composed the Joseph narratives. “It is quite probable that Moses had a hand in producing the elegant literary form in which they are extant in Hebrew. If it is correct to assume that the first thirty-six chapters of Genesis had originally had an independent existence as cuneiform tablets, it would have been a comparatively easy matter for a talented person such as Moses to compile the canonical book by arranging the tablets in a rough chronological order, adding the material relating to Joseph, and transcribing the entire corpus on a leather or papyrus roll” (437)

17. To mention only a handful according to their chronological order: Kenneth R.R. Gross Louis, *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (Abingdon; Nashville 1974); David Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Fortress Press; Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Philadelphia 1977); Charles Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!* (Analecta Biblica 81; Rome 1978); Jacob Licht, *Story telling in the Bible* (Magnes Press; Jerusalem 1978); Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture. Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (Schocken Books; New York 1979); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books; New York 1981); David J.A. Clines/David M. Gunn/Aland J. Hauser (eds), *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOT Supplement Series 19; Sheffield 1982); Kenneth R. R. Gross Louis/James S. Ackerman (eds), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, II (Abingdon; Nashville 1982); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Almond Press; Sheffield

literary criticism of the Bible''.<sup>(18)</sup> This trend may be characterized as (i) paying close and respectful attention to the conventions of style and editorial arrangement of the Hebrew Bible;<sup>(19)</sup> (ii) positively appreciating the attempts by the historical-critical method to account for the literary complexity of the Bible;<sup>(20)</sup> (iii) being aware of the limitations of the diachronical approach to answer all the queries which the Bible's multiformal reality gives rise to;<sup>(21)</sup> (iv) reading the Bible as a synchronic unity notwithstanding the multiplicity of strata, chronological sequences, diversity of literary genres within the same canonical reality;<sup>(22)</sup> (v) viewing Genesis as a unity even though there exists multiplicity of literary genres, of units of different sizes, of elements of different contents material which call for some explanation;<sup>(23)</sup> (vi) defining Genesis as a self-contained unit even if it now stands logically inserted within a larger literary reality which is the Torah.<sup>(24)</sup>

---

1983); Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Academie Books; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1984); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1985); Robert Alter/Frank Kermode (eds), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts 1987). One should include here the contributions in the review *Semeia*.

18. *Literary Guide*, 26. cfr. also Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3-22.

19. "Perception of the stylistic and editorial arrangements of literary materials may thus bear on one's appreciation of both the modulation of textual sequences and the simultaneity of meanings which comprise biblical texts. For it must be stressed that stylistic conventions allow the voice of a text to speak on its own terms and according to its own arrangement. The more conscious a reader is of these conventions, the less likely will he be to subjectivize a text irresponsibly, the more likely will his reading tend towards a disciplined freedom: spontaneity within necessity", Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, xii-xiii. "By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative view point, compositional units and much else....." Alter, *Art*, 12.

20. cfr. for instance Berlin, *Poetics*, 111-134.

21. Concerning Genesis J.P. Fokkelman wrote: "For at least two reasons Genesis, like other narrative books of the Bible, can be hard to understand. It is very complex, and it exhibits a baffling multiformity. The difficulties have not been diminished by two centuries of the so-called Higher Criticism, a historical-critical approach-an 'excavative scholarship' as it has been called - that subjects the text to serious redaction", "Genesis", *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, (eds R. Alter and F. Kermode) (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts 1987) 36.

22. cfr. Alter, *Literary Guide*, 12-26; Northrop Frye, *the Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York 1982); P. Joseph Cahill, "The Unity of the Bible", *Biblica* 65 (1984) 404-411.

23. cfr. Fokkelman, *Literary Guide*, 36-53. cfr. Bruce T. Dahlberg, "The Unity of Genesis", *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (eds K.R.R. Gros Louis/J.S. Ackerman) (Abingdon, Nashville 1982) 126-133.

24. cfr. Dahlberg, *ibid*, and the discussion on the literary unity in Old Testament Narrative by Peter D. Miscall and others in *Semeia* 15 (1979) 27-50.

The foregoing outline synthesis of current scholarly research is meant to 'contextualize' the review of two important books on Genesis, that have been published quite recently. One has Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore as both authors and general editors: *Genesis: An Authorship Study* (Analecta Biblica 103; Rome 1985).

In struggling through this authorship study the biblical scholar has to jump over a number of hurdles. Probably he has to wrestle with inborn prejudice when he discovers from the back-cover that most of the writers thereof are not biblical scholars, but professionals trained in well different disciplines like mathematics, statistics, philosophy and psychology, statistical linguistics and computer studies. Biblicists are of course used to scholarly anthologies like *Festschriften*, yet this book is not an anthology notwithstanding the number of writers who fathered it. The subtitle to the book, *An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics* suffices to show that here we have the same material being approached from (five) different angles. The biblical scholar, though, must resist this temptation of shelving the book simply because it has not been penned by professional colleagues in the strict sense.

But there are two other difficulties to surmount. One can hardly escape the impression of unnecessary repetitiveness of materials in the book. Especially in Part Three where a series of different procedures are applied to the same material yielding identical results. The situation in which the contributors worked, together with certain methodological options, rendered a good amount of repetition inevitable. In the 'Acknowledgements' we read that for geographical reasons the team involved "never had opportunity to meet altogether, at the same time and place" so that the individual writers are in fact each responsible "only for the chapter or chapters where his participation is mentioned".

And this circumstance explains why twice we read the bibliography of scholarly works by the same authors where computer science has been applied to the Bible (pp. 13 note 30/45 note 2); again twice we are given an outline history of pentateuchal research (though from different perspectives), in Part One (pp. 1-9) and in Part Seven (pp. 229-231).

In the 'Interim Postscript' Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore account for much of the repetition especially in the Third Part. "Much of what is included particularly in Part Three it is true, could have been eliminated or shortened, had we not decided to let it stand for the sake of completeness and for the benefit of colleagues. Who knows whether they, infected by our belief that buried under the heap of digits, a hidden treasure lies of still untapped information, may not one day wish to base their research on our data and further exploit them" (p. 216). A satisfactory explanation, indeed, but the book remains cumbersome and tiring for reading.

But the chief obstacle for easy reading shall remain the algebraic formulations in which proceedings and results are given and which often fall beyond the grasp and interpretation of the uninitiated. The principal promoters of the project that flowered then in this book express their apology for what might be considered by some as a failure: "It is a fair guess that we have failed in the task we set ourselves right at the beginning, that is, to write readable prose and that we have often confused the reader who must have found some of the material submitted to him exoteric" (p. 215). Not that the prose is unreadable but the material proves difficult especially when the mathematical component predominates in the author's exposition. Even if he understands "the meaning of a dozen basic concepts" which statistical linguistics and computer science may be offering the reader in this volume, the biblical scholar who happens to fall outside the pail of the fortunate "computer-assisted literary researchers" (who by the way are contrasted by Radday and his team to "the more conservative-minded colleagues", p. 55 cfr. pp. 215-216) may still feel at a loss as he roams across forests of unscrutable algebraic formulae that grow on every section except the first and the last. The "Raw Data of Realizations in 96 samples of 54 Variables" (Appendix 1.A) may indeed contain "a hidden treasure of still untapped information" (p. 216); but it is bound to remain untapped for the specialist in biblical scholarship unless he enlists the services of any computer scientist to unscrew what is unscrutable for the ordinary reader.

But these initial difficulties notwithstanding, this 'prodigious amount of long lists, perplexing diagrammes and tiny percentages' (p. 216) does offer the biblical scholar much food for thought and he cannot afford to shelve the volume, especially if he is interested in the literary history behind the present shape of Genesis. The book comprises seven essays, each constituting an independent 'part' although cross-references do happen. Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore have written the main parts of the book and act as general editors as well.

Radday penned the introductory part (pp. 1-31) wherein he attempts to justify the resorting to a completely new approach to the question of the origin of Genesis. He starts with putting the problem in focus by delineating the history of pentateuchal research down from the early doubts about the book's homogeneity and mosaic genesis to the present state of the controversy. The perspective of this resumé is essentially Jewish [ "the earliest *gentile* rejectionist" (p. 7) ]<sup>(25)</sup> and admittedly not prejudice-free [ "I hope that the way the problem has been presented here does not reveal

25. Italics mine.



my own bias, which I admit, exists” (p. 10)]. The author underlines the element of subjectivity inherent to the approaches adopted so far (p. 9). This subjectivity quota in methods of study created a situation of *empasse* which evoked the need to develop a tool that would “maximize objectivity”. Radday claims that as the problem of the unity of Genesis belongs essentially to the realm of philology (p. 11), the desired tool may be furnished by statistical linguistics. The primary aim of the Genesis Project which flowered in this volume has been to “try to quantify the case of homogeneity vs heterogeneity in Genesis by means of statistical linguistics, and take the ‘text’ as it stands’ as the only unquestionable data one can be certain of. It aims at arriving at calculating the probability that one section, hypothetically originating in, say J was written by the same person to whom an E or P section is ascribed” (p. 13). This approach that has already been adopted with some success on three different parts of the bible,<sup>(26)</sup> basically consists in “counting the words’ that is, in analysing each of the 20504 words of Genesis (leaving out composite toponyms and numerals from eleven to nineteen) and registering on the computer important information which includes details about their lemma, length in terms of phonemes, number and gender, bound prepositional prefixes, the definite article and the *waw coniunctivum* and *consecutivum*, bound possessive and objective pronominal suffices to nouns, verbs, prepositions and numerals; besides, on each word were given a detailed numerical code indicating the part of speech, a siglum to show to which of the three Documents J, E and P the word is attributed, and another siglum to indicate whether the word is found in the narrator’s (N) description or in human (H) or in divine (D) direct speech. Of course, chapter and verse, and the number of the word within the verse figure among the data collected (pp. 16-17).

Two important operational decisions were taken before this mountain of data was fed to the computer. The first concerned which version of source criticism made by proponents of the documentary hypothesis was to choose; the lot fell upon “a more moderate version of *Quellenscheidung*”, that proposed by E. Sellin<sup>(27)</sup> and which has been more or less followed by the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.<sup>(28)</sup> The project promoters avoided to take into consideration the possibility of different layers within the same source. A

26. The author here refers to Y.T. Radday, *The Unity of Isaiah in the light of statistical linguistics* (Hildesheim, Gerstenberg 1973); id. and D. Wickmann; “The Unity of Zechariah in the light of Statistical Linguistics” *ZAW* 87 (1975) 30-55; id. and id., G. Leb/S. Talmon, “The Book of Judges Examined by Statistical Linguistics”, *Biblica* 58 (1977) 469-499.

27. cfr. E. Sellin and L. Roth, *Einleitung in das Alte Testaments* (Quelle & Meyer; Heidelberg 1959).

28. (MacMillan; Jerusalem 1971) cfr. Table 1.1 on p. 20 of the present volume for the distribution of Genesis among the presumed sources.

second decision touching on method regarded whether the entire book of Genesis could be included within the research project given the possibility of different literary genres to co-exist in this book. The team decided to leave out only the creation pericope in Genesis 1, 1-2,3 and the poetical portraiture of the tribes in the future as found in Gen 49, 1-27. These two pericopes offer a different type of literature than the rest which is “cast” in some traditional form possessing a sort of rhythmical diction and obeying certain rules of composition” (p. 19). Genesis 14 is said to present “a special case” (ibid) even though it is included with the discussed text.

Two other procedural options were taken as the Genesis linguistic reality was being fed to the computer. As an “after thought” the researchers decided to distinguish between material belonging to the narrative voice (N) or to direct speech uttered by human (H) or divine (D) protagonists. Secondly, they partitioned Genesis sequentially into (I) the Prologue (Genesis 1-11), (II) the Main Body i.e. the patriarchal history (Gen 12-36), and (III) the Epilogue which means the Joseph Cycle (Gen 37-50). For an overview of the dissections of Genesis into Documents (JEP) and Sorts-of-Discourse (NHD) in the three divisions one should consult Table 1.2 on p. 22. Taking into consideration the divisions into documents and sorts-of-discourse, the book was dissected into nine cells which resulted of course to be unequally populated. In order to examine the possible similarity between cells as well as their own inner homogeneity each cell was further subdivided into 96 samples of about 200 words. “In each cell, the number of the pertaining words are pooled together as if they constituted a continuous text, with complete disregard to chapter and verse partitions” (23). As a result of this procedure some of the samples extend over almost half the book (nos. 90.91.96) while others cover less than one chapter (for instance samples no. 17.18) (one should see Table 1.3 on pp. 25-26 which maps out the limit and characteristic of each sample: cfr. also Table 1.2 for the categories, subcategories and numbers of samples).

Next comes a discussion of author-specifying criteria. These criteria are language criteria which should be “countable and accurately counted” “preferably by the computer”. They must be so minute and unobtrusive that the author himself remains unaware of their presence (for which reason these language phenomena have to be content-free, independent of each other, optional and facultative), should have previously been tested in writings of unquestioned homogeneity as to their use ‘within’ a writer before qualifying as discriminants between writings. “These criteria should not be confused with stylistic devices such as figures of speech and the like since these may intentionally be controlled by a writer” (p. 27).

Fifty-four of such criteria were selected to serve in this study (cfr. Table 1.4 on p. 30). The first ten criteria consider word length in terms of

phonemes. Nos. 11-16 are morphological criteria including nouns in construct and absolute state 'within the total number of nouns', verbs in *pa<sup>c</sup>al*, *hiphil*, *nif<sup>c</sup>al* and *pu<sup>c</sup>al* forms. Then come three syntactical criteria (nos. 17-19) which comprise subordinative conjunctions, the definite article, and the conjunctive and consecutive waw (leaving out 'fine distinctions' which such waw requires in translation, p. 28). The remaining criteria are catalogued 'Transition Frequencies', that is, transitions between word categories within the sum of all words (cfr. pp. 27-29 for a brief description of these criteria). Not all the fifty-four criteria employed in previous studies were relevant for this work on Genesis: eleven are not even found in Genesis (p. 29). It was the hope of the researchers that through those criteria they could describe "the language behaviour of any sufficiently long sample. What the optimal length of such sample is for the statistician to decide" (p. 29).

The present reviewer dedicated a rather long space for the first essay owing to the information it offers on the methodology adopted. But the contribution of the other scholars which we shall review more briefly, is no less important. Part two (pp. 32-57), for instance, written by Dieter Wickmann, a physicist, who teaches Mathematics and Statistics at the Technische Hochschule in Aachen, West Germany, constitutes somehow a corrective to the impression created by Radday's essay about the absolute objectivity of the method employed. The writer admits that in his exposition he tries "to prevent the reader from interpreting a statistical test, as an authoritative battery of high-level mathematics which usurps the genuine domain of his individual judgemental freedom to choose his own risks and benefits. In short I have argued against formalistic ideology" (pp. 42-43). The subjective element in the entire decision taking process involved in a statistical test is a leitmotif in the first section of Wickmann's essay (pp. 32-46) in which the author discusses the philosophy of statistics, the basic concepts and problems in statistical decision-making. "A statistical judgement, in other words, a statistical test consists basically of two steps, the objective, or better, the inter-subjective, and the subjective" (p. 33). Statistics involves error probabilities and this leaves room for subjective judgement on the part of the reader. In applying the statistical decision pattern to Genesis the reader is bound to encounter the special difficulty of not having an objective criterion for evaluating the error probabilities. "Everyone has to assess the matter for himself and to weigh the risks and consequences of his possibly wrong decisions. One person, less inclined to rely on religious tradition will tend to attach to error probabilities completely different values than another who is closely and dutifully committed to what the Bible and its pre-critical commentators have to say on the authorship of Torah in general and of Genesis in particular" (pp.

40-44). For Wickmann the "subjective part... must precede the inter-subjective. This means to say that before looking at the results, the reader has to make up his mind as to what risk he is ready to wrongly rejecting the null hypothesis of homogeneity. The answer depends on his own, individual or rather intimate attitude to the problem of Genesis" (p. 46). But this would neutralize or at least narrow down the claim for absolute objectivity of the raw material itself of statistics.

The remaining pages (46-51) of this part is taken up by a technical description of the procedures used by the promoters of the project, as well as of the main results of the enquiry. According to Wickmann the chief result of this research project was that E and J Documents in Genesis "may well have been written by the same person" (p. 51).

By far the longest and perhaps the main contribution in this book is Part Three (pp. 52-190) entitled "Statistical Analysis of Formal Criteria", authored by Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore. This section of the volume picks up the subject from where the previous part leaves it: the authors describe a number of other techniques employed in this project, most of which used rather rarely in literary criticism and even less often with regard to Scripture. In the words of Radday himself "these recently developed techniques are so sophisticated that their verbal demonstration is inevitably highly technical and demands a certain familiarity, on the part of the reader, with statistical terminology and procedure" (p. 31).

They try to come to the aid of the layman by resums (pp. 82, 85, 94, 98, 167, 178) which summarize at the end of the discussion of each technique described, its aims and results. This essay is essentially made up of four subsections: after an introduction into the character of the study project and its methodology (pp. 52-73), the authors embark on a detailed analysis of what they term 'Phase I' of their project, which consisted essentially of a statistical evaluation of current hypotheses (pp. 73-122), that is, whether there exists a linguistic basis for the three divisions JEP, NHD, and I II III. The third subsection (pp. 122-179) covers 'Phase II' of the project: this subsection the authors entitle "An exploratory Journey into Genesis"; here they aimed at detecting groups of samples which are akin to each other by virtue of their common linguistic properties (for a short description of the two phases of the work, cfr. pp. 181-187). The last subsection is taken up first with the conclusions of each phase (pp. 182-185) and then with the final results of the research (pp. 189-190).

Radday collaborated with Moshe A. Pollatschek in the writing of Part Four which discusses "vocabulary richness and concentration" (pp. 191-214). This enquiry, aimed at complementing the preceding approaches to the study of the unity of Genesis, concentrates on the lexical corpus of the book (p. 192). The theoretical apparatus is first presented (pp. 192-202)

wherein the several parameters for measuring vocabulary distribution in literary texts are briefly expounded. In the course of this exposition the authors table in the 'Frequency Profile of D' (p. 193) as well as the hapaxlegomena and personal names in JEP (p. 193).

To measure vocabulary distribution in Genesis the authors fell for the theoretical distribution developed by H.S. Sichel (cfr. pp. 196-200 for details). The vocabulary of Genesis was examined by the team in two dimensions, dividing the test in NHD and in JEP. Each category was then subdivided into two subtexts. Applying the Sichel distribution system to the word inventories of NHD (pp. 202-205) three interesting facts emerged:

- (i) vocabulary richness and concentration in Genesis<sup>(29)</sup> are not negatively correlated (p. 202: cfr. figure 4.3 on p. 203). Concerning the vocabulary in NHD the team members noticed low richness and low concentrations in N, low richness and high concentration in H, high richness and high concentration in D (pp. 202-204).
- (ii) The vocabulary behaviour of the three Sorts-of-Discourse do not overlap to all.
- (iii) This behaviour of the vocabulary in NHD is consistent throughout the book. "In Genesis.... we meet.... three manners of writing, each neatly distinguished from the other, each consistently emanating from a different Sorts-of-Discourse and each most appurtenant to the Sort-of-Discourse from which it stems. This seems to us an outstanding and almost inexplicable literary fact" (p. 204). When discussing the consistency of NHD regarding vocabulary distribution the authors comment that this diversity in vocabulary behaviour in NHD that cut across JEP in Genesis argue against the Documentary Hypothesis (p. 205).

Applying the same parameter to JEP (pp. 205-214) the team discovered P's vocabulary to deviate from JE's especially in vocabulary richness (pp. 206-207). They found that this detail was due mostly to the presence in P of Hapaxlegomena of which, though, 45.97% are personal names – cfr Table 4.2 on p. 193. Concerning vocabulary concentration Radday and Pollatschek listed the twenty most frequent words in both JEP and NHD (Table 4.3 on p. 208); intriguingly enough the team discovered that among the ten mostly recurring words in P do not figure any *mots de structure* like

29. Perhaps one should not forget an important *distinguo* made by the authors: "..... the measures of concentration and richness of vocabulary have nothing to do with the choice of a specific kind of words. Such choice is very much under the writer's control, but vocabulary richness and concentration are quantitative characteristics which he can hardly be aware of..... studies of vocabulary to this effect are also so rare in professional literature that none can be adduced to evidence the claim of unawareness, although, we feel, common sense would confirm it" (p. 204).

conjunctions, prepositions, and similar particles. This in contrast to the JE divisions. And this threw some light as to what P might have been before it was integrated into the textual reality which is Genesis. "If therefore, P in its original form contained, exactly like J and E, variegated literary genres, it must or should also have contained the indispensable amount of *mots de structure*. If this was not the actual case.... it can only be due to the fact that the segments earmarked P's in Genesis.... are a biased selection from the hypothesized original P Document. The latter, as conceived by critics, can hardly stand on its own feet, so to speak, and owes its survival in fragments to the tendentious treatment of the text" (p. 210). The authors do not disclaim the existence of P but suggest that we attribute the P sections of Genesis to the same author of J and E (p. 210; cfr p. 214).

The volume under review treasures a surprise for the reader in Part Five (pp. 215 – 217). For when the statistical investigation comes to an end, he finds a personal note from the leaders of the team that has written this book. This 'interim postscript' voices the writers' apprehension at their failure to express adequately the dozen basic concepts behind statistics and statistical analysis. This declaration verges on the apologetic in its insistence on the suitability of their approach to the problem of the Genesis origin, even though short-comings are not swept under the carpet.

This strange apologia serves another purpose, though, because it reiterates the conclusions to which the team's research led to. The Documentary Hypothesis, which has been the target of their manouvres, has been weakened indeed by the results of the authors' computations, but not vanguished. Not only so. The issue of the Genesis literary history has been complicated since its language behaviour resulted to be not uniform and it stands now on biblical scholars and Literarkritiken to *interpret* this fact. Another element of multiformity within Genesis is the style changes from one division to another; "whether one has reason to ascribe these variations to multiple authorship or whether they are necessitated in accordance with the theory of literature and discourse is not for us to determine. Personally, we feel like favouring to second alternative, against the first" (p. 216). Of course this constitutes an *interpretation* of the data available, reflecting subjective choices far removed from the "uncompromising objectivity" which allegedly guided this research project (p. 191).

Once the Documentary Hypothesis is thrown out as the only plausible explanation of how Genesis came about, one is left with an enigma in hand. "To be sure there is no denying that what has been presented here does not deliver the *coup de grâce* to the Documentary Hypothesis. For this, the number of tantalizing puzzles in Genesis all commending that hypothesis, is too great. They are not even touched upon, let alone solved, in our work,

dealing, as it did, with the overall nature of language habits and no more” (p. 217).

The researchers end their explanation in the certainty that “Genesis will continue to be a rich field for research”; the team expresses its sincere hope that their work will supply research “with some new fertilizer” (p. 217).<sup>(30)</sup>

## Critique

How are we to evaluate this book? What contribution has it made to the discussion of an old problem, the origin and literary history of Genesis? Where to situate this contribution within the context of current pentateuchal research? And how can this volume be of use to biblical scholars, especially to those who happen not to have joined the fold of the computer-assisted?

(a) Classification tend to be minimalistic; yet they are useful to situate research contributions within wider currents of thought. The present reviewer believes we may classify this book with the creative movement within the conservative trend of research mentioned by McConville.<sup>(31)</sup> This not withstanding the novelty of the “radically new, modern method, the employment of computer and statistical Linguistics” (Avant-propos by the Publishers). The conservative stance of at least the co-ordinators of the project and the main contributors to this book, comes out clear in the rather biased presentation of the history of pentateuchal research in Part One, and in the ‘personal’ interpretation they give the linguistic elements in Genesis that would testify to the possibility of multiple authorship. Radday and Shore opted for an unitarian reading of Genesis (p. 216) without, though, espousing the cause for mosaic authorship (p. 190).

(b) As the object of this research project has been “an investigation into the so-called literary sources of the Pentateuch in so far as they are found in the Book of Genesis” (David Noel Freedman in the Preface), that is, “the Documentary Hypothesis, subscribed to if not by orthodox scholarship, then by scholarly orthodoxy” (p. 216), the usefulness of this volume on this score for biblical scholarship is undermined by a number of factors:

(i) We have seen how recent scholarship has steered away from the Documentary Hypothesis as an instrument of analysis and interpretation.

30. As the last two Parts offer “overall appraisals” of the contents of the statistical research” (p. 31), their contribution shall be used in the ensuing critique of the volume.

31. “The Pentateuch today”, 5.

To quote Thomas L. Thompson's most recent monograph: "Traditionsgeschichte has ignored both the implications of the documentary hypothesis and its fundamental opposition to a history of traditions and their forms. As a result, the documentary hypothesis has become a creed empty of substance, something which students learn in their early years of study. It is no longer a tool used by scholars to analyse or clarify a text".<sup>(32)</sup> In such state of affairs the present research resembles very much a post mortem examination of a corpse aimed at establishing whether it has ever been animated.

(ii) Anyone with the minimum of experience with pentateuchal source criticism will know that there is hardly one text in Genesis which is attributed purely and simply to one document or source alone. Touches, if not levels, from later redactions are often detected. A quick perusal of C.A. Simpson's *The early Traditions of Israel. A critical Analysis of the Pre-Deuteronomic Narrative of the Hexateuch*<sup>(33)</sup> will suffice to prove the point. This lack of a clear-cut version of the Documentary Hypothesis imposes on whomsoever wishes to use computer for studying JEP in Genesis, for instance, to employ programmes with various shades of certainty. In his review of this volume Eep Talstra comments: "It might have been wise and also have done more justice to several versions of the Documentary Hypthesis.... if one had either accepted a lot more uncertainty as a peculiarity of several texts, or had omitted the more complex texts from the statistical procedures".<sup>(34)</sup> Radday and his colleagues opted instead for a more rigid version of the Documentary Hypothesis, acknowledging simply J E and P (pp. 17-19); this option renders their research even less useful as the documentary hypothesis they work to test is only an abstraction.<sup>(35)</sup>

32. *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel*, 49.

33. (Oxford 1948).

34. "Genesis Bit by Bit" *Biblica* 67 (1986) 559.

35. Stephen L. Portnoy and David L. Petersen raise another objection to the Documentary Hypothesis as represented in this volume. "When Genesis 37-50 are entered as examples of putative sources, and this despite the fact that many scholars now think the J and E sources may not be distinguished in the Joseph novelette, the statistical testing of the documentary hypothesis necessarily provides results which appear to falsify the overall hypothesis", "Genesis, Wellhausen and the Computer: A Response", *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (1984) 424, which article has been a response to another by Y. T. Radday, H. Shore, M. Pollatschek and D. Wickmann entitled "Genesis, Wellhausen and the Computer", *ZAW* 94 (1982) 467-481 (cfr. also Y. T. Radday and D. Wickmann in *ZAW* 87 (1975) 30-55). For the team's results on the source criticism within the Joseph Story cfr. p. 104-187. For a modern scholar who believes that the Joseph story forms basically a unit where "repetitions belong to the story's stylistic repertoire and do not serve source distinctions or value judgements on successive editions" cfr. George W. Coats, *Genesis. With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, I, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (W.B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1983) 264.



(iii) The conclusions themselves to which the research team arrived will not recommend this volume for reference work for the years to come. The Genesis Project aimed at unknotting the Documentary Hypothesis in Genesis by analyzing its language on the phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical levels. Without entering the discussion as to whether such analysis suffices to resolve authorship questions,<sup>36</sup> the present reviewer believes that the results of the team's research make the reader no wiser as to how Genesis came about. In brief the authors of this book concluded: (A) that "the Jahwist and the Elohist were each other's alter ego" (p. 186). "The equation J = E is founded on quantitative and unassailably objective data" (p. 189).

The authors admit that the fact that J and E coincide is no novum in biblical scholarship which often indicates parts of Genesis as JE; Radday and his colleagues question also this siglum which "still implies that these main sources are indeed distinct in other places". "It was this latter motion that was revealed to stand on shaky ground" (p. 190).

(B) But what could be said of J and E was inapplicable for P. "P is a source apart" (p. 189). In other words "Language behaviour in Genesis is indeed not at uniform" (p. 216).

And this requires interpretation. For the authors of this book these signs of non-conformity within Genesis "are more easily explained by arguing *ex genere scriptorum* than by arguing *ex auctore*" (p. 189 cfr. p. 216). The fact remains that the quintessence of the team's endeavours is that "the Documentary Hypothesis.... is not demolished, but severely wounded by the results of our computations" which means that modern scholarship remains where it was with this book concerning the literary history of Genesis.

(c) The above negative evaluations of the volume's contribution to the discussion of the Genesis literary history may have created the impression that for the present reviewer this volume carries no value at all. This is a false impression for probably in the linguistic field this book does contain "a hidden treasure of still untapped information", "buried under the heap of digits" (p. 216). In this paper one line of study will be indicated where this information about the linguistic behaviour of Genesis shall be most welcome.<sup>37</sup> There is the three-partite division of Genesis into: I the 'Urgeschichte' (chs 1-11) which the team identifies with the Prologue of Genesis: this covers 19% of the whole; II, the Patriarchal History (chs 12-36) wherein Radday and his colleagues see the main body and which

36. For this see Talstra, "Genesis Bit by Bit", 558-559.

37. Another possible line of research concerns the Sorts-of-Discourse partition of Genesis. On this cfr. the contributions of Chaim Rabin (pp. 218-224) and that of Shemaryahu Talmon (pp. 225-235), as well as the criticisms of Talstra (pp. 557-564) and Portnoy/Petersen (pp. 423-424).

constitutes 52% of the first book of the Torah; III, the Joseph Cycle (chs. 37-50) which is Genesis' Epilogue taking 31% (cfr. p. 21). The research on the language of Genesis has demonstrated that "Division I comported itself linguistically unlike Divisions II and III" (p. 184). How are we to explain this important variation? Can we attribute this distinction to the difference of the Sorts-of-Discourse present in Division I on the one hand and II and III on the other? While in Divisions II and III the narrative voice (N) shares space relatively equally (53% and 56% respectively) with direct speech, it predominates in Division I (74%). The other 47% of Division III is taken up by human speech (H) while in Division II H occupies 34% with divine discourse (D) covering only 10%. The next relevant portion in I is made up of D (21%) with H offering only 5% (cfr. p. 232 for these figures). If we take the distinctions between N and H/D and those between H and D drawn by Rabin (pp. 219-222), we may be justified in asking whether the distinctions between the divisions is not due to the Sort-of-Discourse that predominate in them.

Unfortunately, Radday and his colleagues do not pursue this line of thought. Rabin himself fails to take into consideration the vocabulary variations between the three divisions. Instead in their search to buttress the distinction between the Divisions the authors draw from the literary field; they point to the characterization pattern in the three divisions: "We have spoken of the distinctive traits of the three Divisions. What we referred to was that typology characterizes Division I, that there is gradually increasing individuation in Division II and true life portraiture in Division III. Put differently, content and its presentation range from the quasi-mythical to the semi-heroic to the fully human" (p. 184 cfr. p. 216). Two comments: (i) methodologies here got mixed up;<sup>(38)</sup> (ii) this is where the influence of Radday's essay on chiasmus in the Hebrew Bible is most clearly felt.

But these methodological mishaps apart, the discovery of the linguistic distinction of the three divisions may be of great use to those scholars who follow the track indicated by R. Rendtorff and study Genesis by narrative blocks which Rendtorff himself termed "grössere Einheiten" 'larger units'.<sup>(39)</sup> Thompson<sup>(40)</sup> discovered no less than four such larger units in Genesis, units which he identifies with a particular genre which he called the 'traditional complex-chain narrative', "an ancient narrative genre, a specific type of oral or literary unit. It has its own beginning and end, its own theme, and its own plot-line (i.e. its own developmental direction),

38. cfr. Talstra, "Genesis Bit by Bit", 558-559.

39. *Problem des Pentateuch*, 19-28. For details cfr. note 11. In pp. 29-79 Rendtorff discusses the patriarchal narratives as an example of a 'larger unit' within the context of the Pentateuch.

40. *Origin Tradition*, 155-172.

which enables it to exist as a literary entity, and to have a life of its own, independent of both its context and the narrative materials from which it is formed. The traditional complex-chain narrative is not an editorial or a redactional structure, but a type of literature in its own right: one of the ways in which ancient Israel told long stories".<sup>(41)</sup>

Scholars who like Thompson will take Rendtorff's suggestion<sup>(42)</sup> to concentrate on these larger units in order to discover their particular character and literary dynamics, shall surely appreciate Radday's research on the language fabric of the individual Divisions, even though these latter are sometimes wider than the larger units thematically delineated by Rendtorff's disciples.

---

A similar *cantata* is offered in the monograph on Genesis to be reviewed here, Gary A. Rendsburg's *The Redaction of Genesis*.<sup>(43)</sup> This small book has as its major goal, positively "to describe the literary technique of the redactor of Genesis" (p. 107), negatively, to emass literary evidence in the so-called 'redactional structuring' which would weaken the Documentary Hypothesis as an explanation for the present form of Genesis.

This 'slender ... and not wholly original' volume (p. XI) consists of an introduction and seven chapters (besides preface and index of biblical passages referred to in the book). In chapter I through V Rendsburg discusses the 'redactional structuring' of five different units of Genesis: the primeval history (chapter I), the Abraham cycle (chapter II), the Jacob cycle (chapter III), parts of Genesis which link the story of Abraham to that of Jacob, and the Jacob cycle to the Joseph story (textual elements the author terms 'the linking material') (chapter IV), and the Joseph story (chapter V). In the introduction (pp. 1-6) Rendsburg lays out "the background of this endeavour and the principle methods by which the material is presented" (p. 6); the relationship of the redactional structuring in Genesis to the Documentary Hypothesis is examined in chapter VI (pp. 99-106), while in chapter VII (pp. 107-120) the author argues for a Davidic-Solomonic redaction of Genesis.

In his introductory chapter Rendsburg starts with locating his monograph within that current of biblical research we termed 'the new literary criticism'. "The present volume builds on the groundbreaking work

41. Ibid., 156-157.

42. cfr. "The Future of Pentateuchal Criticism", 5-7.

43. (Eisenbrauns; Winona Lake, Indiana 1986).

effected by these authors, and hopes to further their efforts in demonstrating the gain which literary analysis of the Bible can yield" (p. 2). He focuses in a special way on the contribution of a small number of exegetes who approached parts of Genesis structurally: Michael Fishbane's "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25, 19-35,22)";<sup>(44)</sup> Jack M. Sasson on Genesis 1-11: "The 'Tower of Babel' as a clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History (Gen 1-11,9)"<sup>(45)</sup> (from this author Rendsburg borrows the basic term/concept 'redactional structuring' which means the "literary schema used by the compiler" p. 3); Umberto Cassuto's second volume of his Genesis commentary *From Noah to Abraham*<sup>(46)</sup> and Nahum M. Sarna's commentary *Understanding Genesis*,<sup>(47)</sup> which furnished the author with intuitions on the Abraham Cycle. These authors provided Rendsburg with the groundwork upon which he built his own research. "In the pages that follow I accept the basic conclusions of these scholars. Occasionally I have made adjustments to their work and always I have greatly expanded their ideas and multiplied their examples" (p. 3).

The introduction is also important for the delineation of Rendsburg's method of work. In his analysis of each cycle the author would (a) present the overall structure within the unit; (b) review the manner in which the corresponding elements of the structure correlate through the use of theme words, parallel ideas, motifs and story lines, all of which 'connect the matched units as a group' (p. 4), and which he lists verse-wise; (c) examine the significance for the structure as a whole of the two texts in the unit 'upon which the entire cycle pivots' (p. 5); (d) pass under review elements like catchwords that serve to link successive units, acting "as bridges which aid the linear flow of the cycle from unit to unit" (p. 5); (e) point out critical problems that in his opinion disappear in the light of the literary analysis undertaken; emphasis is here put on the implications of redactional structuring for source criticism especially as proposed by the Documentary Hypothesis.

In the five chapters that follow Rendsburg discusses the redactional structuring in the four large units of Genesis as well as in the linking material. For the primeval history he accepts not merely the general consensus that it constitutes "an integrated unit", but also Sasson's

44. *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975) 15-18, reprinted with some changes in *Text and Texture*, 40-62 (cfr. note 17 for details).

45. In *The Bible World: Essays in Honour of Cyrus H. Gordon* (ed. G. Rendsburg) (New York 1980) 211-219.

46. (Jerusalem 1964).

47. (New York 1966).

hypothesis about the basic structure that makes of the ten episodes in Gen 1-11 one unity: "two matching sequences", each containing five sub-units: A (1, 1-3,24) and A' (6, 9-9,17), B (4, 1-16) and B' (9, 18-29); C (4, 17-26) and C' (10, 1-32); D (5, 1-32) and D' (11, 10-26); E (6, 1-8) and E' (11, 1-9). One should note that in the second set the fourth unit (D') comes after the fifth (E'). "The stories are duplied not only regarding theme and general story line, but key vocabulary items or theme-words in the individual units are repeated to highlight the method of compilation" (p. 8).

With regards to the Abraham Cycle Rendsburg builds his analysis upon Cassuto's intuition that it is made up of ten stories, each speaking of a separate trial through which the patriarch had to pass: these episodes are arranged in chiasmic parallelism. The Abraham narrative extends from 11, 27 through to 22, 24; in this concentric structure A (11, 27-32) corresponds to A' (22, 20-24), B (12, 1-9) to B' (22, 1-19); C (12, 10-13, 18) to C' (20, 1-21, 34); D (14, 1-24) to D' (18, 16-19, 38); E (15, 1-16, 16) to E' (17, 1-18, 15). The last two texts are the centre of the structure. To buttress this deliberate structuring of the Abraham narrative we find in the second half of the structure two new onomastic entries: Abram/Abraham, Saray/Sarah as well as Yhwh/Elohim (pp. 46-47). "The compiler has artfully created a palistrophe" (p. 45).

Rendsburg's treatment of the Jacob cycle "is in large part merely a rewarding or reorganization" of Fishbane's study (p. 54). Fishbane was the first to recognize that this cycle, described as "unquestionably a masterpiece, well-conceived, brilliantly constructed and expertly executed" (p. 67), reflects a deliberate symmetrical structure in which the compiler has organized the twelve individual units into reverse sequences (p. 66). Rendsburg introduces only two slight variations into Fishbane's schema (p. 52 note 3) which reads as follows: A (25, 19-34) corresponds to A' (35, 1-22), B (26, 1-34) to B' (34, 1-31), C (27, 1-28, 9) to C' (33, 1-20), D (28, 10-22) to D' (32, 1-32), E (29, 1-39) to E' (31, 1-54) with the fulcrum being F (29, 31-30, 24) and F' (30, 25-43).

The discussion on the 'linking material' occupies a chapter on its own (IV). Rendsburg describes Gen 23, 1-25, 18 and 35, 23-36, 43 as hodgepodes of material culled from various sources. "But even here our compiler was able to evince a redactional structuring. Just as each cycle consists of matching sequences, so these two sections are conceived along parallel lines" (p. 71). The 'systematic design' consists of A (23, 1-20) which unfortunately has no corresponding text, B (24, 1-67) which corresponds to B' (36, 1-5), C (25, 1-6) to C' (35, 23-26), D (25, 7-11) to D' (35, 27-29) and E (25, 12-18) that corresponds to E' (36, 6-43). Rendsburg speaks of 'imperfections' in the pattern in the sense that A has no matching text while B's location in the structure does not parallel that of B. In the unit-by-unit

survey that ensues (pp. 72-77) Rendsburg attempts to explain the difficulties encountered by the compiler. "The flow of the Abraham and Jacob cycles could not be accomplished here given the long lists which dominate 23, 1-25, 18 and 35, 23-36, 43, especially the latter. Nevertheless a redactional structure is achieved" (p. 72).

Chapter V offers perhaps the most original contribution by the author in this monograph: Rendsburg's discovery and discussion of redactional structuring within the Joseph story. The reader should remember how the author arrived to discover this schema within this unit: "Once it was determined that the first three cycles reveal a purposeful literary structure, the search for such a pattern in the one remaining cycle became an obvious task" (p. 3 cfr. p. 79). Rendsburg could quote several scholars who insisted upon this section of Genesis as being a unity (p. 79), but none to indicate the presence of a structure. The schema he discovers within Joseph story is again a concentric pattern which includes the "material in which he (Joseph) is absent or nominally present", that is, 38, 1-30 and 49, 1-28 which Rendsburg term 'interludes'. "The result is a neatly constructed palistrophe in what is a remarkably united story" (p. 80). This palistrophe consists of A (37, 1-36) corresponding to A<sup>1</sup> (49, 29-50, 26), B (38, 1-30) to B<sup>1</sup> (49, 1-28), C (39, 1-23) to C<sup>1</sup> (47, 28-48, 22), D (40, 1-41, 57) to D<sup>1</sup> (47, 13-27), E (42, 1-43, 34) to E<sup>1</sup> (46, 1-47, 12), F (44, 1-34) to F<sup>1</sup> (45, 1-28). "As with the Abraham cycle and the Jacob Cycle, the Joseph story builds to a pivot point after which the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order" (p. 80).

For the purposes of this paper chapter VI entitled 'Redactional Structuring and Source Criticism' is the most pertinent. According to Rendsburg the previous five chapters of the monograph have demonstrated conclusively "that the stories of Genesis are aligned not in ad hoc or haphazard manner, rather along well-conceived and deliberate lines" (p. 99). And though we cannot see clearly the motivation for this redactional structuring we have got an insight into "the modus operandi" of the individual who was responsible for the final shape of Genesis (p. 100). All this cannot but involve talk on the Documentary Hypothesis. Rendsburg accepts Fishbane's cautious judgement that recognition of redactional structuring does not a priori militate against the conclusions of the JEDP theory, but prefers Cassuto's more negative stance against the theory: "..... it must be admitted that wherever the basic unity of a section can be established the Documentary Hypothesis can be called into question. This is even more the case when specific evidence can be forwarded to show the failing of this school of source criticism" (p. 102). He then quotes the example of Gen 12, 1-9 and 22, 1-19, listing a number of themewords and other parallels which remain quite difficult to explain "if one retains the JEP source analysis of Genesis. The evidence points to one author for these two units" (p. 103).

He then culls other examples from other matched units (pp. 103-104) and considers the “nexuses which bridge successive units” (p. 105). “All this material demonstrates how attention to redactional structuring greatly weakens the Documentary Hypothesis, indeed according to the present writer, renders it untenable” (p. 104). The general conclusion of the book in this regard reads as follows: “there is much more uniformity and much less fragmentation in the book of Genesis than generally assumed. The standard division of Genesis into J, E and P strands should be discarded. This method of source criticism is a method of an earlier age, predominantly of the 19th century. If new approaches to the text, such as literary criticism of the type advanced here, deem the Documentary Hypothesis unreasonable and invalid, then source critics will have to rethink earlier conclusions and start anew” (p. 105). Rendsburg is not thereby arguing for unitarian authorship “for there clearly remain different sources and variant traditions”. “But, we must posit one compiler or collator for the Primeval History, one for the Abraham Cycle, one for the Jacob Cycle, and one for the Joseph Story. Whether these four compilers are the same person – in which case we can posit a single editor for the whole book of Genesis – or not, is a question which cannot be answered. But given the systematic working of the entire redactional structure, this would not be a different conclusion to reach” (p. 106).

In his argumentation in chapter VII for a Davidic-Solomonic redaction of Genesis Rendsburg relies heavily upon Benjamin Mazar’s study, “The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis”,<sup>(48)</sup> especially where he mentions allusions in Genesis to historical facts and events (pp. 107-111); but he draws upon his own research when he bases his arguments on the antiquity of the Genesis material (pp 114-166), and on literary and linguistic considerations (pp. 116-119). “The mass of evidence very clearly supports a redaction for the Book of Genesis during the United Kingdom. The historical allusions adduced mainly by Mazar, various indications of the book’s antiquity, the literary style, and the linguistic data all merge in the Davidic-Solomonic era” (p. 119).

## Evaluation

- (a) Together with the elegance of its printing and the clear and simple presentation of its material this monograph has another service to

48. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 28 (1969) 73-83.

recommend it: that it brings to easy access the works of four scholars who share a common characteristic: sensitivity to structures and overarching structures as compositional elements within the “four great cycles” (p. 1) that make up the Book of Genesis.

- (b) Post-Wellhausenian historical-critical scholars who consider a synchronical analysis of texts as a necessary pre-condition for diachronical reconstruction, may find this monograph useful in their attempt “to understand the intentions of the respective collectors, traditors and interpreters who shaped these different groups of texts”.<sup>(49)</sup> Provided, of course, they pay due attention to a number of methodological issues we are going to raise in this review. For, indeed, the discovery of global and minute structures may lend an insight into the *modus operandi* of the individual/s responsible for the final edition of these ‘larger units’ as well as of Genesis as a whole. This compositional technique served authors/compiler very well to build the so-called “narrative analogy” “which invites the reader to read one story in terms of another”.<sup>(50)</sup> Yet, that discovering the narrative’s location within the presumed overarching structure does not suffice to exhaust all the possibilities for interpreting a text, becomes clear when one compares Rendsburg’s discussion of Gen 38 (pp. 83-86) to Alter’s fine exposition.<sup>(51)</sup> Rendsburg’s work reminds the present reviewer of another monograph, written more than thirty years ago, Enrico Galbiati’s *La struttura letteraria dell’ Esodo*,<sup>(52)</sup> and of the reaction of another important literary critic, Luis ALonso Schökel’s to Galbiati’s contribution: “Prefiero aprovechar alguno de sos elementos, manteniendo la flexibilidad y, sobre todo, una atencion explicita a los valores esteticos”.<sup>(53)</sup>
- (c) The present reviewer still cannot comprehend how Rendsburg on the one hand subscribes to the view that “it is possible that the Genesis compiler merely took the J, E and P materials, and edited them in a manner to produce the corresponding sections” (p. 101), and on the other hand admits “that wherever the basic unity of a section can be established the Documentary Hypothesis can be called into question” (p. 102). (One presumes that the author by ‘basic unity’ here means ‘redactional unity’). In his view the

49. Rendtorff, “Future”, 5.

50. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 136.

51. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3-12.

52. (Rome 1956).

53. *Estudios de Poética Hebrea* (Juan Flors; Barcelona 1963) 318.



numerous theme-words and other parallels between Gen 12, 1-9 and 22, 1-19 become “extremely coincidental and much too difficult to explain if one retains the JEP source analysis of Genesis. The evidence points to one author for these two units” (pp.102-103).

This is perhaps the only case in Rendsburg’s book where the word *author* instead of *compiler* or *collator* is used. For Rendsburg seems interested only of the final stage of the redactional process which ultimately resulted into the present-day Genesis. Of course he is aware that compilation or collation implies pre-existing “different sources and variant traditions” (p. 106). So that one cannot but marvel on what footing stands his statement that “attention to redactional structuring greatly weakens the Documentary Hypothesis, indeed according to the present writer renders it untenable” (p. 104). Rendsburg does not make it clear on which level he means (synchronic or diachronic) when he states emphatically that “there is much more uniformity and much less fragmentation in the book of Genesis than generally assumed” (p. 105). Diachronically speaking, redactional structuring as expounded by Rendsburg leaves space for the Documentary Hypothesis as it does for any other explanation of the Genesis origin. Even the strong case he builds for single *authorship* in Gen 12, 1-9 and 22, 1-19 does not exclude the possibility, given the technique of allusion, that an Elohist living several decades after a Jahwist, “adopts the language of the earlier writer to define (his) own allied but somewhat different meanings.... Such intertextual play occurs repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible, drawing its disparate elements into a certain mobile, unpredictable unity”.<sup>54</sup> In discussions of this kind one should pay attention not to fall into the trap of mixing up the levels on which he is approaching Genesis. And all this leaves the present reviewer wondering what to make of Rendsburg’s statement that “if new approaches to the text, such as literary criticism of the type advanced here, deem the Documentary Hypothesis unreasonable and invalid, their source critics will have to rethink earlier conclusions and start anew” (p. 105). With Rendsburg’s monograph the last word upon the Documentary Hypothesis has definitely not been pronounced yet.

- (d) The present reviewer would not quarrel with Rendsburg upon the rather early datation in the Davidic-Solomonic era for the last stage

54. Alter, *Literary Guide*, 14. One should note that Alter was speaking about the Book of Ruth vis-à-vis Genesis 12, 1-9.

of the redactional process which resulted in Genesis. Yet even this essay raises a number of methodological problems: (i) One may understand the desire of the writer to limit himself to an exposition of his own position; yet a mere passing reference to that current of research which locates the final redaction within a more recent time framework would not have been out of place. Besides, from the reference works mentioned or quoted in the essay, one cannot but get the impression that Rendsburg's reconstruction of the historical context in which Genesis is supposed to have been edited is based upon research carried out some three decades ago. No one would call in question the validity of a work simply because more recent literature appeared in the meantime; but if Rendsburg is in dialogue with contemporary scholarship, he should have engaged some more recent works. (ii) Suppose one accepts as cogent the claim about the historical allusions present in several *individual* Genesis stories; does this necessarily mean that these stories formed part of their present literary context already by the time of early monarchy? Are we really sure that here does not subsist a fundamental confusion between authorship and editorship? (iii) Once you hold Genesis or at least the larger sections in Genesis as literary units, you cannot argue for a certain datation of its/their redaction from a number of details that presumably allude to the period in question; you have to establish the relevance of the entire unit to that historical situation. For instance what special message could Gen 17 with its emphasis on circumcision have for the Davidic era?

(e) Rendsburg's method of analysis of the biblical text merits closer scrutiny; in this paper we shall concentrate on his research upon the Abraham narrative.

(i) The strong correspondence between Gen 12, 1-9 and 22, 1-19 led Cassuto and hence Rendsburg to posit the end of the Abraham narrative with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. "Obviously there is more material about the patriarch's life, but it is not central to his spiritual odyssey" (p. 50). This material (23, 1-25, 18) Rendsburg term 'linking material' which he discusses in a separate chapter (IV). Cassuto and Rendsburg are not alone to define the closing of the Abraham Cycle at Gen 22, 1-19 or at most with the ensuing genealogy (22. 20-24). There is Radday in his study of chiasmus in the Hebrew Bible who follows Cassuto's intuition about the ten tests undergone by Abraham and reads within this

unit a concentric structure the extremities of which are constituted by 12, 1-9 where Abram renounces his past and 22, 1-19 where he renounces his future.<sup>(55)</sup> But there is also Dixon Sutherland who in his short article “The Organization of the Abraham Narratives”<sup>(56)</sup> follows J.P. Fokkelmann’s observation on the Jacob cycle having ‘an outer frame’ in the genealogies, suggesting that this could have been the case in the Abraham promise cycle. All would agree that 11, 27 constitutes the introduction of the Abraham cycle. For the conclusion, if ‘Fokkelmann’s analysis is correct.... the compilers may have arranged the close of the narrative cycle not around death but around genealogies’.<sup>(57)</sup> They follows a short discussion of several factors that indicate that the Abraham promise cycle should not be concluded with the death of Abraham.<sup>(58)</sup>

Notwithstanding the obvious advantage of this hypothesis in highlighting the role of texts B/B' in Rendsburg’s schema as foundation stones of the whole structure (cfr. p. 43), and with all the strength of Sutherland’s argumentation to end the Abraham narrative at 22, 24, from the literary point of view the Abraham narrative would be left hanging in mid-air. For a whole string of important questions [vis-à-vis the plot which is essential to posit if one chooses to read the Abraham narrative as a literary (however redactional) unit] remain without an answer if the story terminates with Abraham’s return to Beersheba after the ordeal of Mount Moriyyah (22, 19). For instance. Now that Abraham has left the scene how are God’s promises about the patriarch’s descendants to be fulfilled? Or, there is the question about Sarah: what happened to her? What happened to Abraham himself? Have Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham’s sons, become eternal enemies? The answers to these queries are all given in 22, 20-25, 18. When approaching the narratives of Genesis one should never forget the principle that derives from the so-called laconism of these narratives,<sup>(59)</sup> namely, that every detail, however minute, must have its explanation in the literary dynamics of the unit under discussion. The mention of Nahor and Milcah in 11, 29 offer a clear example of the truth of

55. “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative”, 104.

56. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95 (1983) 337-343.

57. “Organization”, 338.

58. *Ibid*, 338-339.

59. Cfr. William McKane, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives* (Handsel Press; Edinburgh 1979) 31-36.

this principle.<sup>60</sup> The fact that 22, 20-25, 18 wind up a number of narrative threads which otherwise remain loose prove that these texts are conceived by the author/compiler as the conclusion of the Abraham narrative and not simply as linking material.

(ii) Rendsburg's treatment of the individual larger units of Genesis leave these literary entities rather static. Even if one accepts his description of the global structure beneath each unit, as well as the numerous nexuses which presumably sew the various elements of each structure into a closely knit literary reality, one still does not know from Rendsburg what moves the plot. Cassuto himself wrote that the material drawn out from tradition to build the Abraham narrative, has been set out "with numerical symmetry based on the numbers seven and ten, and the theme develops progressively stage by stage. Abraham is put to repeated tests, which amount to ten in all... and after each trial he receives consolation in the form of a renewed assurance by God, or of a specific act for his benefit. Thus there is fashioned a chain of alternating light and shade, in continuing succession, until the last and most sublime promise, which is given to Abraham at the end of the final and severest ordeal that of the offering of Isaac".<sup>61</sup> Redactional structuring in narrative units cannot ignore plot dynamics and characterization development.

(iii) Rendsburg's description of the redactional structuring behind the present form of Genesis is based mainly upon the presence of what he calls *theme-words* and *catch words*. He himself provides a description of these items: "They can be of several types. The most obvious are those where the same word is used in matching or successive episodes. Others are different words or, to use more precise grammatical terminology, different inflections, from the same root. Some theme-words and catchwords can be like-sounding words which derive from separate roots, and still others may be merely similar in meaning or share a similar connotation. What links all of these variations is the ability to connect, if the writer or compiler has achieved his goal, the different units of the cycle" (p. 5). Three observations. First. The present reviewer

60. Just as there is a rationale in mentioning Ischah in the same verse. "Ischah is introduced to inform us that Nahor's father-in-law Haran is not the same individual as his brother Haran" Rendsburg, *Redaction*, 30.

61. *From Noah to Abraham*, 294. "The arrangement of material is oriented around a tension between promise and obstacle to promise. The movement of the whole unit is from promise to resolution, but within that movement also exists the tension of non-resolution of promise", Sutherland, "Organization", 341.

would not deny the possibility that the compiler/author used this literary technique in the structuring of, say, the Abraham narrative, especially so if, as Rendtorff insists, he was merely a *collector* who, while arranging his material “did not alter the form of the single narratives transmitted to him but only put them in a certain order almost without cross-references”.<sup>62</sup> Second. Does the use of the same word or of similar-sounding words in two texts necessarily reveal the compiler’s intention to match the two texts within a global structure? The rather mechanical application by Rendsburg of the theme-word/catchword principle to discover matching texts or to see nexuses between successive texts may give the impression that he would answer this question positively. Though one should also say that he seems aware that the whole business of theme-words and catchwords could prove rather more complicated than his application of the principle may give one to surmise (p. 50). Third. In order to establish with certain amount of probability the use of a word or phrase as theme-word one has to investigate its role within the literary dynamics of the texts involved. Otherwise, the rather narrow family interest shown in most patriarchal stories, an interest which tend to reduce heavily their vocabulary richness, makes the appearance of the same words in these narratives rather a necessity. Besides, the interpreter has to establish to which level of redaction does an established theme-word belongs: is it original with the narrative or was it introduced by the compiler to give the narrative a particular slant?

(iv) Attention to the literary dynamics of the larger units, as well as to the long redactional process that antedated the present form of Genesis would have helped Rendsburg avoid a number of obvious mistakes:

A. Rendsburg goes beyond Cassuto in considering as structurally relevant the two genealogies in 11, 27-32 and 22, 20-24, both of which he considers as “bookends for the Abraham Cycle encasing the essential events in the life of the first patriarch” (p. 29). The main argument for reading these two texts as matching concerns the introduction of an important grandchild, Lot/Rebekah, who is supposed to “play a prominent role in the chapters that follow” (*ibid*). Serious reflection would have shown that if Rebekah is introduced here in view of what follows, 22, 20-24 cannot be taken as matching 11, 27-32 within a palistrophe, at least if we take a palistrophe as McEvanue defines it – cfr. p. 45 note 34 –

62. “The Future of Pentateuchal Criticism”, 6.

Rendsburg is correct in saying that the literary justification for the Nahor genealogy is to usher Rebekah in because she is supposed to play a significant role in the ensuing episodes. But the anticipatory use of this news item<sup>(63)</sup> means that 22, 20-24 is not meant to 'end a book' but to 'open another'.

However there exists a genealogy in Genesis that seems intended to wind up a literary unit, the Ishmael genealogy in 25, 12-18. The narrator (to avoid indicating at which level of the redaction) needed both to show how God's promises to Abraham concerning Ishmael (Gen 21) were fulfilled, and to shelve the figure of Ishmael as it no longer served his literary purposes; so he appended his genealogy here just before the Isaac story opens. In the reviewer's own research on the Abraham narrative<sup>(64)</sup> he has shown how 25, 12-18 actually balances 22, 20-24 within a concentric structure which has for nucleus Gen 24, where Rebekah is not merely mentioned but fully introduced into the Abraham narrative as ancestress to take the place of Sarah who in the meantime died.

B. For Rendsburg the discovery of redactional structuring between Gen 12, 1-9 and 22, 1-19 would resolve the dispute about the relationship of 22, 15-18 to the first 14 verses of the chapter. Historical-critical scholarship has long considered vv. 15-18 as an addition to an original self-contained narrative.<sup>(65)</sup> For Rendsburg "in the light of the redactional structuring in the Abraham Cycle... this position is untenable" (34). He cites the several parallels between the blessings in 12, 1-3 and 22, 15-18. Rather than a sign of redactional activity, the adverb *senit*, 'a second time' in 22, 15 is seen by Rendsburg as highlighting "the expectation of the concluding blessing in the Abraham Cycle". This "word is central to the literary composition" (p. 35). The present reviewer would not quarrel with the writer about this statement if only the latter had indicated clearly of which level of redaction he was speaking. Because, once you admit the possibility of sources having been employed by the compiler in his redactional structuring (p. 106), you have to establish whether this individual, responsible for the final shape of the Abraham Cycle, found this episode extending from vv. 1-19 and just included it within the literary unit he was constructing, or came across a shorter version (vv. 1-14) and felt himself free to add vv. 15-18 in order to

63. cfr. N.M. Sarna, "The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives" in *The Creation of Sacred Literature* (ed. R.E. Friedman) (Berkeley 1981) 78-80.

64. cfr. Anthony Abela, *Reading the Abraham Narrative in Gen. 11, 27-25, 18 as a Literary Unit* (Dissertation: Pontifical Biblical Institute; Rome 1985).

65. cfr. Rudolf Kilian, *Isaaks Opferung. Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte von Gen 22* (Stuttgart 1970) chapters two and three.

integrate it better within the larger unit, and to give it a particular interpretative direction.<sup>(66)</sup> In the second alternative vv. 15-18 would indeed be central to the literary composition.<sup>(67)</sup>

---

There is no doubt that the two books reviewed here increased our knowledge of Genesis; but we cannot say that they brought to a definitive solution the discussion about the whence of this first book of the Torah.

Anthony Abela,  
University of Malta,  
Faculty of Theology,  
Msida,  
Malta.

66. For this I would recommend the paper by R. W. L. Moberly, "The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah" read during the Winter Meeting of *The Society for Old Testament Study*. The reviewer would like to express his gratitude to the author for passing on to him the paper before it was published in *Vetus Testamentum* XXXVIII 3 (1988) 302-323.

67. For a synchronic reading of Gen 22 taking vv. 15-18 as 'part of the literary composition' cfr. J. L. Ska, "Gn 22, 1-9. Essai sur les niveaux de lecture", *Biblica* 69 (1988) 324-339.