PAST HISTORY AND PRESENT TEXT

The Clash of Classical and Post-Critical Approaches to Biblical Text *

Antony F. Campbell, SJ

This paper is concerned with the current clash of academic approaches to the biblical text, specifically that of the Older Testament. These clashing approaches could be designated critical and literary, or classical and post-modern, but perhaps classical and post-critical catches the issue best. The new concerns—once structuralist, then canonical, now predominantly literary—are with the present text. Both enchantment and disenchantment seem to have had their role to play.

Enchantment with the biblical text as literary text is as old as the Bible's origins. The endeavour to bring this enchantment to fruition in compelling interpretation has, over recent decades, been fraught with difficulties. There is a new and welcome move afoot with more determinedly professional literary scholarship being brought to bear upon biblical interpretation. This move is still in its infancy. In a number of published examples it is problematic; the theoretical coherence with critical study is far from fully worked out. In this paper, I will be sticking to my last and offering the contribution of a reflective practitioner, which I believe I am, rather than that of a literary theoretician, which I am not. Theory has to keep in touch with the realities of the biblical text. It is these realities I seek to explore here.

Disenchantment has played its role in the recent emergence of a series of new approaches to the biblical text. Perhaps the compounding increase in the complexity of knowledge and skills demanded of the scholarly exegete has effectively stolen the Bible from its ordinary readers. Certainly, the inadequacy of the exclusively critical approach has made itself felt. It is forcefully expressed by a colleague in ascetical/mystical theology:

> It is now clear to everybody that the historical-critical approach, however valuable, is woefully insufficient. It alone will not put us in touch with the underlying mystery; it alone will not

bring us to those eternal realities towards which the Scriptures point; it alone will not enrich our lives with mysticism.[1]

The key here is the phrase, "it alone". The historical-critical approach is valuable and often indispensable; but it is not the be-all and end-all of exegesis or biblical study. The question remains: once critical study has robbed us of our first innocence, is there a literary innocence which may be legitimately regained?

Naturally, individual studies vary. Among the examples of recent approaches there is reason to question whether in their essential functioning some have returned to a pre-critical position, or whether we are witnessing a further development in the sequence of critical disciplines (i.e., text, source, form, tradition, and redaction criticism), or whether again some are signalling a genuinely post-critical phase in the study of the biblical text. Significant shifts have occurred. The cultural mindset which dominated the disciplines of biblical interpretation had its roots in the early nineteenth century and in developments in the classical and historical disciplines. Literary approaches to the task of biblical interpretation, with their roots in the late twentieth century, are having a significant impact on this formerly dominant cultural mindset. Some shifts can be sketched, without attempting to be exhaustive.

Significant Shifts

1 . SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE AIM OF INTERPRETATION

Once upon a time, it was said that the aim of critical interpretation was "to determine what the writer intended to say and the first readers could and must have understood."[2] Nowadays, I would prefer to say that it is to determine the meaning of the text—in other words, what the text says.[3]

Ideological issues aside, experience has taught that this change of language brings with it a change of mental focus. "Intention of the

[1]William Johnston, *The Wounded Stag* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1985) 25.

[2]Quoted from Kümmel with regard to Schleiermacher by Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 24.

[3]Should this sound too bland, it may be balanced by the insight given paradoxical formulation by Paul Beauchamp: "Expliquer un text est, a toujours été, dire ce qu'il ne dit pas"—to exegete a text is, and has always been, to say what it does not say! (*Création et séparation: étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse* [Bibliothèque de Sciences religieuses; n.p: Aubier Montaigne/ Editions du Cerf/Delachaux & Niestlé/Desclée De Brouwer, 1969] 15). Failure to see the paradox is not license for criticism or parody.

author" is open to the intentional fallacy, to be corrected by attention to the text. "Intention of the text", the terminology of the FOTL project, is still an invitation to personify the text, again to be corrected by attention to the text itself.[4] Language which focuses initially and primarily on the text forces a more direct attention to the source of meaning in the phenomena of the text.[5] This is not to deny or decry the place of the author, but to insist on the focus of our attention. With Paul Ricoeur, I cannot conceive of a text without an author, but the author is known only through the text and our attention must therefore be directed to the text without distraction.[6]

2. SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE AIM OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Once upon a time, the aim of historical-critical scholarship was the recovery of history: the history of Israel itself, the history of Israelite literature, the history of Israel's literary forms, the history of Israel's theology. Nowadays, while all these are important, the primary aim should be moving toward interpreting the text with historical consciousness and critical awareness. "Historical-critical" refers less to the goal of study and more to the attitudes of the practitioner. A baneful overemphasis on history is tending to yield place to an appropriate concern for faith and theology or other issues.

A substantial contributory factor to this shift is the recognition that many of our scriptural texts are themselves concerned primarily not with the facts but with the meaning and the proclamation that can be woven from them. Redaction criticism points to this for the gospels. In the Older Testament, the duality of evidently contrasting accounts for both

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[4]FOTL: the series, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, published by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

[5]I gratefully acknowledge that my conversion to this language is due to the sustained efforts of Stephen Prickett.

[6]"L'intention de l'auteur n'est pas son vécu psychologique, son expérience, ni l'expérience de la communauté à jamais insaisissable car déjà structurée par son discours. L'auteur est précisément celui que dénonce ou annonce le texte, par rétro-référence à celui qui l'a écrit; ... pour ma part, je ne concevrais pas ce que pourrait être un texte sans auteur, un texte qui n'aurait été écrit par personne; ... ce qu'il importe de découvrir, c'est que la notion d'auteur n'est pas une notion psychologique, mais précisément une grandeur herméneutique, une fonction du texte lui-même" (P. Ricoeur, "Esquisse de Conclusion," in R. Barthes, et al., *Exégèse et herméneutique* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971] 292-93. See also my *The Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4-6; 2 Sam 6): A Form-critical and Traditio-historical Study* (SLBDS 16; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 195-97

creation and flood, for exodus from Egypt and entry into Canaan, for the occupation of the land and the emergence of statehood—to mention only these—point in the same direction. They point to the narrative biblical texts as texts of faith, written from a stance of faith with a view to promoting faith.[7]

3. SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE INTERPRETER

Once upon a time, the emphasis was on the ideal of "impartial and objective research".[8] Nowadays, we are likely to prefer language about informed and responsible research as the ideal. Many factors have given subjectivity a better press than was formerly the case.

4. SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE REDACTOR

Once upon a time, the redactor was an ever-available and definitive explanation for any perceived clumsiness or incoherence in the text. Nowadays, redactors are coming to be recognized as consummately careful people and compilers or preservers with authorial status.[9]

5. SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE TEXT

Once upon a time, it might have been taken for granted that a composite text was not available as a whole for interpretation, since it was no more than the sum of its sources. Nowadays, with the change in attitude toward compilers and redactors, there is a demand for the final text to be interpreted in its own right.

Alongside these aspects, there is the question of the root cause for the resistance by much of traditional scholarship to approaches based

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[7]See A. F. Campbell, "Old Testament Narrative as Theology," Pacifica 4 (1991) 165-80.

[8]See Krentz, again with regard to Schleiermacher (*Historical-Critical Method*, 24).

[9]See Shemaryahu Talmon's description of the Tannaitic fifth-century scribe: "a man of many parts, a comprehensive literate who could be author, editor, transmitter, scribe or copyist when performing different aspects of his profession" ("The Textual Study of the Bible—A New Outlook,"in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, edited by F. M. Cross and S. Talmon [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975] 336; see also p. 381). In this context, we may note Robert Polzin's comment—rightly inveighing against the tendency to brush redactors aside as clumsy and therefore a self-sufficient explanation for incoherence in the text: "Is the narrative hand "crude"—what critics usually mean when they write *redactional*—or "careful"—what I mean when I write *authorial*?" (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989] 57). The phenomenon he pillories is only slowly fading from the exegetical scene.

primarily on the present text. If it is more than mere curmudgeonly dislike for change, it is important to know what is at stake. One area in particular is significant here: the question whether compilation and redaction allow the present text to be claimed as a text in all cases and invariably.[10]

We are so accustomed to the world of the printed book and the computerized recovery of information, it is immensely difficult to conceptualize a world in which books were written but not printed. In such circumstances, what use were written texts put to and what was their audience? How much was for private reading and how much for public? Did written texts accurately reflect their oral performance, or were oral performances based on texts, yet developing and expanding far beyond them? Without files or footnotes, how were valuable items to be preserved, which might not fit particularly well with a given text? Or how were dissenting views recorded and recovered? On all this vast area of the storage, recovery, and disseminating of information in ancient Israel we know very little. Yet it is significant for understanding the texts and the purposes they served.

When the Text Is Not Always a Text

A useful working definition of a text is given by Harald Weinrich: "A text is a meaningful (i.e., coherent and consistent) sequence of language signs between two evident breaks in communication."[11] The correlation with Zellig Harris's definition of an utterance is worth noting: "any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person".[12] The increasing number of literary studies

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[10]Polzin expresses this trenchantly in a criticism of the present writer. "As I suggested in the Introduction, a relevant matter in this regard may be a scholar's view of the final text: does it appear so incoherent, ideologically speaking (because of the complicated process that the scholar believes lies behind its historical composition and because of the supposed crudity of its redactors), that any full-blown account of it as 'narrative functioning as a vehicle for theology' ... would be an unsatisfying and embarrassing exercise?" (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, n. 15, p. 237). In the particular instance, Polzin unjustifiably overlooks the limits imposed by the length of a journal article; the wider application of the comment is nevertheless valid.

[11]"Ein Text is eine sinnvolle (d.h. kohärente und konsistente) Abfolge sprachlicher Zeichen zwischen zwei auffälligen Kommunikationsunterbrechungen" (Harald Weinrich, *Tempus: Besprochene und erzählte Welt* (3rd ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977; 1st ed., 1964) 11.

[12]Z. S. Harris, quoted in John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 172.

which assume or argue for the literary unity of the biblical text raises the issue of whether the biblical text is, in fact, always a text.[13]

We often use the term "biblical text" to designate a sequence of words on a manuscript or page. When we pay attention to an understanding of "a text" such as Weinrich's—a meaningful (i.e., coherent and consistent) sequence of language signs between two evident breaks in communication—we have to ask whether discussion of the "present text" may often involve a confusion of the two senses of text and whether this has serious consequences.

The question becomes acute when we take note of an observation associated by Weinrich with his definition of text. He remarks: "Even arbitrarily juxtaposed pieces constitute in this sense evident (quasi-metalinguistic) breaks in communication."[14] Is it possible that on occasion the juxtaposition of material by redactors or transmitters constitutes such a break in the sequence of communication that we are no longer correct in referring to the juxtaposed pieces as a text (in the strict sense)? If such a possibility exists, must we conclude that an indispensable step in all interpretation is to ascertain the existence and limits of the text as a text, technically understood, which is to be interpreted?

A critical element in this regard is the explication given by Weinrich for the qualification "meaningful": i.e., coherent and consistent. Coherence and consistency are relative terms. In using them, we claim a "competence" to determine what is coherent or consistent in a given piece of literature or in the literature of a given culture.[15] If we were totally out

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[13]In normal usage, phrases such as "the text", "the biblical text", "the present text" certainly denote words on a page and also automatically include the notion of a text in the strict sense. In this paper, I shall retain this common usage. "A text", with the indefinite article, is adequate in most circumstances to denote a text in the strict sense of the term; the qualification can be added explicitly when needed. In these terms, the issue under consideration is whether it is justifiable to assume automatically that "the biblical text" is always "a text" in the strict sense.

[14]"Auch willkürlich angelegte Schnitte schaffen in diesem Sinne (quasi-metasprachliche) auffällige Kommunikationsunterbrechungen" (Weinrich, *Tempus*, 11).

[15]A brief treatment of the issues is given by John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1984) 11-16. A good example of what is meant is provided by a note of Polzin's. "Fokkelman's remarks on the apparent incoherence between and within chaps. 16 and 17 [of 1 Samuel] are, in my opinion, unsatisfactory because they assert that *in this particular case* the Bible's 'consistency requirements' are different from ours (*Narrative Art*, vol. 2, pp. 144ff.). There is no doubt that in many respects ancient and modern consistency requirements are different; the question here, however, is whether the type of

of touch with the canons and conventions of ancient Israelite literature, we would not be able to understand the Hebrew scriptures. But insofar as we do not have any explicit and exhaustive description of these canons and conventions, we need always to proceed with caution, basing assertions on careful analysis of comparable passages.

In my observation of the Bible, I believe we encounter texts which may be better understood and given meaning better by interpretations which do not assume their unity, the assumption that they constitute a text. Certain aspects of this phenomenon need exploration and clarification. The issue might be said to be basically which of the three "C's" is dominant in any given text: communication, conservation, and contradiction or modification (change).

•Communication, plain and simple, usually leads to a unified text.

•Conservation may interrupt such a text to point to another and different text or tradition. I think, for example, of the tree of life in Genesis 2-3 or the special collection of Davidic traditions in 2 Sam 21-24.

•Contradiction or modification may seek to express a viewpoint which is diametrically opposed to that of the coherent literary text, and may do so at the cost of substantial incoherence without sufficient integration to form a literary text.[16]

So a methodological step must be the inquiry whether a text is straightforward communication, or contains a dominant element of conservation, or is strongly marked by the expression of contradiction or modification. In the latter cases, the question has to be carefully investigated whether the text can be understood in such a way as to constitute a text in the strict sense.[17]

At this point, it is appropriate to move to three texts which can function as useful exemplars of the three different possibilities of communication, conservation, and contradiction or modification. In the first, in my judgement, a unified text has been created through

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'inconsistency' represented, say, by the known-to-Saul David of chaps. 16:14-23 and 17:32-39 and the supposedly not-known-to-Saul David of 17:55-58 is an example of one of these differences. I maintain that such a supposed inconsistency as this would have been as obviously unacceptable to an ancient Israelite as it is to us" (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, n. 19, pp. 258-59). The only source for Polzin's conviction is his experience of the consistency requirements of the Bible in other texts.

[16]Over and above these, of course, there is M. Noth's concept of the "enrichment" of texts in the Pentateuch or elsewhere. Also significant is my concept of the reported story (see "The Reported Story: Midway between Oral Performance and Literary Art," *Semeia* 46 [1989] 77-85).

[17]This is the aspect which is so frequently omitted, as Polzin, for example, rightly complains.

composition (communication); in the second, two versions of a story have been preserved in combination, without achieving a unified text (conservation); in the third, different opinions have been given expression in a careful composition (contradiction/modification).

1 SAMUEL 1-7

A debate has existed, at least since Wellhausen in 1878, over the relationship of chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6 in 1 Samuel. More recently, in a difference of opinion between myself and P. D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts, it has focused on whether a substantial part of 1 Samuel 2 belonged to the Ark Narrative or not.[18] Put in this way, the question is argued as one of authorial identity. I believe, however, that it is fundamentally a present-text question.

There is neither space nor reason for going over the arguments in detail here; they are all available.[19] The issue is a theologically significant one. Does Israel's narrative present its God as one who punishes the nation as a whole for the cultic and sexual sins of two priests and the alleged failure of their aged father to discipline them effectively? Or is there no causal connection between the loss of the ark and the sins of the Shiloh priests, so that the causes need to be looked for elsewhere?

For Miller and Roberts, for example, it is the former. The early part of the narrative (1 Sam 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36) "both describes the sin and announces the consequent punishment. This part of the narrative provides the motivation for all that follows. It gives an explanation for what would otherwise be an utterly inexplicable event—the defeat of Israel and the seeming defeat of Yahweh at Ebenezer."[20]

My primary argument is that the text in 1 Samuel 2 does not sustain this interpretation. The narrative looks forward to a time of dishonour for the family of Eli, when they are replaced by another priestly family in the service of the king, a punishment normally understood to reflect Solomon's banishment of Abiathar in favour of the family of Zadok.[21] Specifically, the death of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, on the same

[18]Campbell, against the inclusion, *The Ark Narrative*, above, note 5; Miller and Roberts, for the inclusion, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977.

[19]See my discussion in "Yahweh and the Ark: A Case Study in Narrative," *JBL* 98 (1979) 31-43.

[20]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 61-62.

[21]See M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *HUCA* 32 (1961) 191-216.

day is to be a sign for Eli of this punishment. A sign is not to be confused with what it signifies.[22]

In my view, unless one takes for granted that chronological sequence is to be equated with causal sequence, a careful reading of the text of chapter 2 indicates that it is not predicting chapter 4 as the punishment of the Elide sins, and a careful reading of chapter 4 shows no sign of any attempt to explain the at-first-sight inexplicable defeats by reference to these sins and their punishment.

This is not a matter of genetic pre-texting, with an exclusive interest in sources and no interest in the present text. It is a question of giving serious attention to the meaning of the present text. In a critical reading of the text, it is possible to account for this lack of causal sequence by seeing the text as a composition of separate traditions. In a post-critical reading of the text, it is possible to be aware of this difference in origin and still interpret the movement of the text as a whole.[23]

While Wellhausen's comment that it is beyond doubt that chapters 1-3 were written with chapter 4 in mind would need a lot of nuancing today, it does acknowledge the presence of links between the texts and the direction of those links.[24] I have no difficulty in accepting that 1 Samuel 1-3 and 4-6 form a single text. The critical issue is how this is to be understood. In my judgement, both blocks of text prepare for the emergence of the monarchy, but in quite different ways.

1 Samuel 1-3 prepares the way for Samuel to step on to the stage of Israel's history as the prophet who would preside over the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. In my understanding, this aspect derives from the Prophetic Record.[25] The anti-Elide traditions were used as a foil to the presentation of Samuel; with a little help from the Deuteronomists,

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[22]The key text is: "See, a time is coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your ancestor's family, so that no one in your family will live to old age. Then in distress you will look with greedy eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed upon Israel; and no one in your family shall ever live to old age" (1 Sam 2:31-32). This is more than the loss of two sons in a single day. There is no suggestion that the loss of the ark precipitated a period of prosperity in Israel; the reference is surely to the monarchy.

[23]For my attempt to do this, see the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*; contrast a different approach by Robert Polzin, for whom it is clear that chapter 4 is fulfilment of the prophecies in chapters 2 and 3 in all their dimensions (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 60).

[24]J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (4th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963) 238.

[25]For the Prophetic Record, see A. F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel 1-2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS 17; Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986.

they also prepare the way for the new institution of monarchy by discrediting the old way of things. 1 Samuel 4-6, on the other hand, prepares the way for the emergence of the monarchy quite differently. The message of these chapters is entirely focussed on the ark, as the manifestation of God's power and purpose. In the withdrawal of the ark from the mainstream of Israel's life of worship, the way is left clear for new developments to occur. In the return of the ark to David's Jerusalem, under God's control of course, the seal of God's approval is placed on the newly established institution.

So I believe it is perfectly legitimate to speak of a text here. It is not a single sequence of sin and punishment. It is not a single text penned by one author; it is a composite text arranged by one author. It draws on the richness of Israel's traditions to portray the move toward the monarchy.

1 SAMUEL 16-18

This is the well-known story of David and Goliath. Robert Polzin comments that it "offers a serious challenge to anyone intent upon illustrating the narrative coherence of the present text."[26] While admiring the courage of Polzin's effort with this text, I do not believe that he adequately spells out the full extent of the challenge, so I will endeavour to sketch it briefly here.

In 16:1-13, David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, is anointed by Samuel as Saul's replacement. As we know well, nothing more is heard of this anointing in the rest of the stories. In 16:14-23, Saul is in need of a lyre player to soothe his troubled spirits and David is summoned, enters Saul's service and becomes his armour-bearer as well as his lyre player. In chapter 17, we have the famous story of David's combat with the Philistine, Goliath. There are divergent text traditions in the Greek and Hebrew.[27] After the initial setting of the two armies in place, the giant Philistine champion comes forth to make his challenge to Israel: risk all in one-to-one combat with me! The reaction to the challenge is in v. 11:

> When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

The Greek version continues with what is now v. 32 in the present text. David, Saul's armour-bearer, speaks up from beside his king:

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[26]R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 161.

[27]In chapters 17-18, the shorter version common to Hebrew and Greek traditions is: 17:1-11, 32-40, 42-48a, 49, 51-54; 18:6aβb-9; 12a, 13-16, 20-21a, 22-29a; beyond this, the Hebrew alone has: 17:12-31, 41, 48b, 50; 17:55-18:6aα; 18:10-11, 12b, 17-19, 21b, 29b-30.

> Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and
> fight with this Philistine.

The sharp contrast between the dispirited Saul and inspired David is clear.

In the present text, however, v. 11 is followed by v. 12 which form-critically resembles a new narrative beginning. David is presented as Jesse's son, one of eight. This repeats information already given in 16:1-13. More significantly, it is a usual way to start an Israelite story. As a beginning, it would seem to be unaware of David's earlier role in the narrative. In v. 15, however, it says that "David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem", indicating an awareness of David's place with Saul. It also notes in v. 16 that the Philistine took his stand for forty days, morning and evening. This reflects an awareness of the earlier part of the David and Goliath story.

The story then takes its own independent way. Jesse despatches David to the camp with provisions for his brothers and a gift for their commander. The location of the Israelite camp is specified, as in v. 2. The Philistine champion is brought on to the scene, introduced no more definitely than in v. 4, and repeats his challenge, speaking "the same words as before".[28] The text adds:

> All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were
> very much afraid. (v. 24)

We must wonder whether this flight and fear by all Israel was repeated morning and evening for forty days.

The story continues with the exchanges between David and the soldiery. Royal reward is promised for the one who will defeat this Philistine.

> The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give
> him his daughter and make his family free in Israel. (v. 25)

Form-critically, this is almost fairy-tale stuff: the youngest son, fresh from the farm, offered half of the kingdom and the hand of the king's daughter in marriage. David is portrayed taking up this theme and emphasizing the issue of the reward to be gained. Finally the matter reaches Saul's ears and David is brought before the king. At this point, the two story-lines have converged, although for a while there is no more talk of reward.

At this point, it is time to pause and take stock. At first sight, we have two stories here: two introductions of David, of the battling armies, of the Philistine challenger. Is it possible to make sense of the present

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[28]*RSV* and *NRSV* have "a champion" in v. 4 and "the champion" in v. 23. The difference in translation reflects the present text rather than the Hebrew; that is, the definite article is used in v. 23 because it is the second occurrence in the present text, not because of any change in the Hebrew from v. 4.

text? We could appeal to the flashback technique, as legitimate in story as in film.[29] The narrative has brought the story to the point where King Saul quails before the menace to Israel's survival posed by the giant Philistine; David is about to face the menace and meet the challenge. But before we are allowed to hear David's response, then, the narrative takes us back to the origins of this brave man. So we see him coming from the farm to the camp, ready to be where he is now, brought by his bravery to Saul's side.

For Polzin, the opening description of the battle scene is expository (vv. 1-11), with the exposition followed by the description of what happens at the battle scene when David actually arrives (vv. 19-24). "These two narrative sides of the battle scene are related to each other as exposition to story proper." They are bracketed around the narrative intro-duction of David into the story (vv. 12-18).[30]

The difficulty with this approach is that David has already been introduced into the story when he was brought to Saul's court and made his armour-bearer and lyre player. Even if David shuttled between his home and the court, a second introduction is not needed. The strongest argument against any harmonization of the two passages is the continu-ation of the two stories, with noted differences at several key moments, and with fundamentally quite different themes. Harmonization, as the key to understanding the text, founders on the repetition both of the killing and the question, "Whose son are you?"

There is the moment of the killing. It is repetitive and different in the two versions. The version found in the Greek has David do the killing with a sword, after felling the Philistine with a slingstone.

> When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut his head off with it. (vv. 48a, 49, 51 [NRSV])

The Hebrew verses which are absent from the Greek have David do the killing with sling and stone, there was no sword in David's hand.

> David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. (vv. 48b, 50 [NRSV])

[29]David evokes his past when referring to his experience as a shepherd (17:34-36).

[30]Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 164-65.

While the two versions can be harmonized, there is a clear difference in the presentation. If it were simply a matter of repetitive and full detail, v. 51 need only have read: And David ran and stood over him and took his sword and cut off his head. There would have been no need to repeat "and he killed him".

To clinch the matter, the two stories continue their separate ways, pursuing quite different plots.

i. The story of David, the armour-bearer and lyre player, after contrasting the dispirited Saul and the inspired David, follows this contrast through with the song of the women and the success of David, the jealousy of Saul, and the commitment of all Israel and Judah to David (18:6aβ-9, 12a, 13-16).

ii. The story of David, fresh from the farm and eager for a reward from the king, continues with Saul's inquiries about David's identity ("Whose son are you?") and taking David into his service,[31] the friendship between David and Jonathan, Saul's offer of the hand of his eldest daughter Merab to David, and finally his failure to honour the offer, provoking enmity between the two men (17:55-18:6aα, 18:10-11, 12b, 17-19 [21b], 29b-30).[32]

My point in going into this degree of detail about a well-known story is to raise as clearly as possible the question: can this be a text? In my judgement, this text cannot be "a text". Attempts to unify its beginning by appeal to a flashback or differentiation between exposition and narration fail to do justice to the two clear and distinct story-lines which are present. Does this then force us to adopt the position that its interpretation, as present text, would be an unsatisfying and embarrassing exercise? This may depend on how we understand the possibilities for interpretation of the text.

We have to reflect on the phenomena in the text and decide what kind of understanding will do the text most justice. There is no question of a

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[31]Polzin recognizes the difficulty here fully and frankly. He makes a valiant attempt to construe Saul's "Whose son are you young man?" (17:58a) as asking David "formally to renounce Jesse's paternity in favor of his own" and to read as "a note of defiance" David's reply, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (v. 58b). Despite the ingenuity and insight, it just does not carry conviction (see Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 175).

[32]For a fuller presentation of my interpretation of these stories, see my "From Philistine to Throne," *AusBR* 34 (1986) 35-41 and my *Study Companion to Old Testament Literature* (now Michael Glazier Books; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989) pp. 206-13. Extensive treatment of the text traditions is given in D. Barthélemy, D. W. Gooding, J. Lust, and E. Tov, *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism* (OBO 73: Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1986).

covert appeal to the supposed crudity or clumsiness of redactors. If we do not have "a text" here, we have the very skilled preservation of two texts, woven into a single narrative presentation. In my understanding, the phenomena of the text are best interpreted as an attempt to preserve two different stories, respecting their integrity and their difference. It is not to be understood as a attempt to compress and unify two stories into one. The differences have been maintained far too cleverly for that and could have been stamped out so very easily.

What the compilation has achieved here is to offer us two different visions of David's first moves to prominence and power. There is uncertain ambiguity in so much of the Story of David's Rise. Was it simply that God was with the David whom Samuel anointed? Or was there truth in Shimei ben Gera's taunts, "Murderer! Scoundrel! Man of blood" (2 Sam 16:7-8). These two stories, at the beginning, leave avenues open to both views. David, the (anointed) armour-bearer and lyre player, is portrayed as the man who had God with him all the way to the throne. David, fresh from the farm and eager for a reward from the king, is more open to a portrayal as Shimei's ambitious and grasping scoundrel.

If the combined stories do not constitute "a text," the outstanding question remains: why the interweaving here into a sequential text? It would have been perfectly possible to juxtapose them, as elsewhere in the Pentateuch or the Story of David's Rise (e.g., 1 Samuel 24 and 26). On reflection, however, we can see the pitfalls involved in launching the royal career twice. Further, the difficulties encountered in interpreting the present text would be hugely multiplied if the two stories were told separately. Combined into a sequential text, all the details are available to a story-teller who then has the freedom to shape them as best befits the story to be told.[33]

One of the interesting aspects of this David and Goliath story is that there appears to be an attempt to harmonize the two stories in the text itself. 1 Sam 17:15 portrays David moving back and forth between his father's flock and Saul's court. 17:16 creates space for this by claiming that Goliath proclaimed his challenge morning and evening for forty days.[34]

[33]See my "Reported Story," above, note 16.
[34]Such a forty day span would fit comfortably into the narrative horizon of the more legendary story as long as the motif of the flight of the troops was handled carefully—"All the Israelites ... fled from him" lacks verisimilitude if repeated twice a day for forty days.

Has such harmonization succeeded? In my judgement, it has not. Close inspection shows that it fails.[35] But does that leave open a second way of reading the text in which we prescind from close inspection, a reading in which the unity of the text is foregrounded? We know that most unsuspecting readers of the flood story, the story of the deliverance at the sea, and the story of David and Goliath read these foregrounding the unity and leaving the issues of discontinuity unnoticed in the background. Once the critical perception of the nature of the text has been achieved, is there anything which disqualifies such a reading? I tend to think not. Such a reading is panoramic rather than close-up; it foregrounds unity rather than foregrounding diversity.

A panoramic reading can be greatly assisted by judiciously delimiting the text considered. If the David and Goliath story is begun at 1 Sam 17:1 instead of 16:14, the tension with the David who is already in Saul's service is lessened. If the story is stopped at 17:54, the problem of Saul's ignorance of David's identity is avoided. For many purposes surely this is a legitimate procedure.

1 SAMUEL 7-12

The complexity of these chapters is well-known, with the claim to original texts, and prophetic and deuteronomistic overlays. To simplify brutally:

•In 1 Samuel 7, God delivers Israel at Samuel's intercession by thundering mightily and throwing the Philistines into confusion (7:10).

•In 1 Samuel 8, the people demand a king in place of Samuel's sons, much to his displeasure, but he is instructed by God to set a king over them.

•In 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16, without any reference to this request, God acts to bring Saul before Samuel to be anointed king in order to deliver Israel from the Philistines—an action which is unnecessary in the light of thunderous divine power available through prophetic intercession.

•In 1 Samuel 10:17-27, despite having previously anointed him, Samuel uses oracular procedures such as the casting of lots to locate and identify Saul, in hiding, who is then acclaimed king.

[35]In fact, these two verses create considerable difficulties for close reading. Nevertheless it could be argued that since a modern scholar (e.g., Polzin) believes the unity of the text can be sustained, the ancient compiler might have thought the same. While perfectly possible, if that were the case it may also be possible that both ancient and modern were wrong in their judgement.

•In 1 Samuel 11, a message reaches Saul, without any reference to his
having been acclaimed king, and, empowered by the spirit, his military
deliverance of a threatened town leads to his being crowned king at Gilgal.
•In 1 Samuel 12, most of this is pulled together, with an emphasis on
Israel's sin and Samuel's continued prophetic intercession.

In a panoramic foregrounding of unity, much of the detailed disunity
of these chapters can be overlooked. But is the pursuit of unity the best
and richest way to derive meaning from them? Careful redaction has been
at work with what result? Not a unified narrative by a long chalk. Nor is
it an explicitly discursive text. Rather, we have the juxtaposition of
differing traditions, with implicit possibility for the discerning of
meaning between them.[36] There is conservation of at least one view-
point, juxtaposed with contradiction or major modification from other
viewpoints, resulting in communication of the varying views in Israel
about the emergence of the monarchy.

I think it fair to say that a text has been constituted by the careful and
unconcealed juxtaposition of differing positions. Such an interpretation
is justified in foregrounding the unity. The backgrounded diversity, not
only between the blocks but above all within them, is immense and
complex. I believe it is a fairer reading of the final text to recognize and
respect the diversity, which has here been marshalled into line without
being muted into unity.

Issues of Meaning Then and Now

Turning to the question of meaning brings us within range of
hermeneutic and literary theory. Without wishing to engage in the
debates, there are certain elements worth a practitioner's while singling
out.

The autonomy of a text is a gain since the days of Wimsatt and
Beardsley which cannot be relinquished. As E. D. Hirsch notes, "Self-
evidently a text can mean anything it has been understood to mean. If an
ancient text has been interpreted as a Christian allegory, that is unanswer-
able proof that it can be so interpreted."[37] It is equally significant that we

[36]Lyle M. Eslinger comments: "The existence of a text containing
contradictory views should be assumed to present an examination of a
controversy" (*Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12*
[Sheffield: Almond, 1985] 38). Such an assumption seems to me thoroughly
justifiable; Eslinger's scorn for a composite text stands in need of better
justification than it gets. He manifests an appalling concept of historical
critical interpretation (see p. 35).

[37]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The Univ. of
Chicago Press, 1976). It is useful to remember Hirsch's distinctions between

are able to distinguish between a critical construal of an ancient text and its anachronistic interpretation as a Christian allegory.

Our increasing awareness of the inevitability and value of subjectivity in all interpretation, as in so much else of human activity, prepares us to forgo the claim to *the* definitive interpretation of a text. Any interpretation I propose is my interpretation of the text, as informed and as responsible as I know how, as adequately and fully controlled by the text as I am able to make it. It is not humility but hermeneutic which renounces all claim to the definitive.

For the biblical believer, the autonomy of a text cannot be used universally to separate the interpreter's understanding of it from its origin as the word of God (however that might be spelled out). The historical or incarnational quality of God's word is essential to most Christian and Jewish belief. It is ultimately an issue of the nature of God's word: on the one hand, is it written in clear or in code; on the other, is it free of the trammels of human ambiguity or is it richly enmeshed in them? If association with an author and the distinction between meaning then and meaning now are totally written off, the scriptures risk becoming either code or divorced from human involvement with God. Must either of these things happen?

If interpretation is always *my* interpretation, then it may be my interpretation of what it is appropriate for a text to mean now and my interpretation of what, in my best judgement, is appropriate for a text to have meant then, in the time of its composition.[38] The limits of my or our knowledge about "then" may often mean that this aspect of interpretation is more negative than positive. That is, it may more often permit us to exclude meanings which we have reasonable grounds to be sure do not apply, rather than giving us reasonable and positive grounds to affirm a particular meaning. It is meaning controlled by my informed and responsible reading of the text, in the light of what I am able to know of its time. It may not and need not be identical with the anachronistic meaning which an informed and responsible reading of the text suggests to me as appropriate for today.

Today, in a post-critical world, I believe there is room for both critical and creative readings of the biblical text, each in its proper settings. We may signal these with antithetical balance. A critical reading will need to be informed and responsible, with particular reference to the time and context of the composition of the text, but aware of today. A creative

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original meaning and anachronistic meaning, and between meaning and significance, and their various combinations.

[38]It is not my recovery of the author's meaning, but my interpretation of the text's meaning.

reading will need to be informed and responsible, with particular reference to the time and context of today, but aware of the nature of the biblical text—and so post-critical. Today, a pre-critical reading would not be informed or responsible.

Hirsch argues that the decision between original meaning and anachronistic meaning is ultimately an ethical one.[39] The Bible was written, it is said, for the building up of the Jewish and Christian communities. Is it unethical for it to be read responsibly for this same purpose today?

Can the Bible be read as any other book? As incarnate word, can it be read in any other way? Yet it cannot be regarded as any other book, for the Bible is foundational for the faith-communities of Judaism and Christianity and that can be said of no other book.

[39]Hirsch, *Aims*, 77.