
Beauty and the Enigma: and Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible. By Francis Landy. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series* 312. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. ISBN 1-84127-147-0P. Pp. 427.

The essays in this collection have appeared or are about to appear elsewhere, in journals or collections published from 1980 onward. They constitute a collection in one volume of literary essays on the Hebrew Bible published by Francis Landy over twenty years. For someone who is fascinated by the insights he offers into biblical texts, this is a treasury to dip into. There does not seem to be any particular theme to the collection, except for the very general one, acknowledged in the introduction, of communication. The Bible has something to say and it is his urge as a critic to elucidate its creativity for other readers. He presents this as a conversation between the text, himself as a critic and other readers (7). This includes other critics and creative re-appropriation of biblical texts. In chapter eleven, "Flood and Fludd," Landy comments on retelling of the flood story, both in the Bible and later midrashic and literary accounts. Chapter thirteen, "Ghostwriting," is his imaginative recreation of the voices of biblical writers reflecting, from beyond the grave, on what it was like to be an author of a biblical text. In all of these essays, Landy's major asset is his critical and poetic sensitivity, his personal responsiveness to the text and his ability to organise and express his response for the enlightenment of other readers of the Bible.

The first and title essay was the most difficult to follow. This essay, previously published as chapter three of his book, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), seemed to me to begin *in media res*, lacking the context which I needed in order to follow it. He describes the essay in his introduction as "a close reading of four of the most difficult passages of the Song" (35). While I found the elucidation of widely scattered passages which follows to be of considerable interest, it was also hard to understand with no previous material to assist in orientation, and consequently I felt the need to return to the original book to assist my comprehension. Landy's extensive reading in literary theory, postmodernism and Western literature, in addition to his knowledge of biblical studies, makes it both challenging and rewarding to read his essays. His interest extends to all parts of the Hebrew Bible, with particular emphasis on the prophets: there are four essays on Isaiah, one on Amos, and one on Hosea in this collection. Two essays present his response to books of biblical criticism: the first, James Kugel's *Idea of Biblical Poetry* and the second, *Women, War and Metaphor*, edited by Claudia Camp and Carole Fontaine (*Semeia* vol. 61). The complexity of Landy's responses to these two books cannot be easily summarised, but to use his own term, they partake of the nature of play, with ideas, images, and theories interacting in a complex, somewhat repetitive manner. This analysis

merits rereading as much to understand Landy's mind and thought as to comprehend the books under discussion.

Several of the essays dealing with biblical texts employ the method of tracing the progress of an image or series of images in order to show the development of thought in a text or, in some cases, the use of symbols to express incoherence, as with the carrying out of Isaiah's vocation to speak and not be understood (190). Landy undertakes to show how difficult passages can be read as parts of an original whole rather than consenting to the fragmentation of historical-critical analysis, which extracts awkward verses as inserted by a different, later author or editor. He reads biblical poetry as if it consists largely of longer unified passages, however difficult, rather than of edited collections of fragments. This makes it possible for the reader to recover the meaning in some of the more challenging passages and is one of the more congenial aspects of these essays for me.

While he has much that is original to offer, Landy constantly refers to works of contemporary biblical scholarship, as well as to psychological criticism. His dialogue with other scholars offers a summary of the issues under discussion, often in considerable detail, with lengthy footnotes frequently occupying half the page. His work is clearly aimed at other scholars, familiar with the material. I enjoy his critical readings primarily for his poetic sensitivity, which is able to reveal the interior workings of biblical texts. I would be happy to share the essays in this book with fellow scholars or to recommend it to those with less familiarity with academic scholarship, with the proviso that it is frequently intellectually challenging, as well as stimulating.

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Numbers 21-36. The Anchor Bible. By Baruch A. Levine. New York: Doubleday, 2000. ISBN 0-385-41256-8. Pp. xxii+614.

This present volume brings to completion Levine's massive commentary on Numbers. The format follows the one familiar from the earlier volume with a full translation, followed by a continuation of his introduction to the Book of Numbers as a whole, which deals sequentially with the two major sources JE and P in terms of their basic units or themes "in context." The commentary follows the ordering of the Bible itself but various parts and sub-units pay attention to the source divisions of literary criticism to which he subscribes. Each major unit of the commentary has a brief literary-critical introduction, followed by the translation for that unit and notes of a philological or grammatical nature. This in turn is followed by a series of comments on geographic, historical, cultic and other subjects, often in the nature of lengthy digressions. Needless to say the work contains a wealth of information on topics that in his view have some relationship with the Book of Numbers.