

CHAPTER XI
THE LITERARY APPROACH TO THE BIBLE
AND FINDING A GOOD TRANSLATION

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I begin this article with some autobiographical matters. Like most biblical scholars of my generation, as with previous generations of scholars, I was trained in the philological method. Wherever one studied, in my case with Cyrus Gordon at New York University, the basic approach was more or less the same.¹ One learned a variety of Semitic languages, at times for their own sake, but more typically with the goal of applying knowledge gained thereby for interpreting the biblical text. Anything that could enhance our understanding of the Bible was deemed important: legal, social, religious, mythological, epic, literary, and linguistic parallels from anywhere in the Near East (typically, Ugarit, Mesopotamia, or Egypt) were brought to bear on whatever portion of the Bible we were reading.

The word “literary,” which I have just used, does not mean “literary” in the sense that I will use it below. Instead, it was used in phrases such as “literary motifs shared by ancient Israel and by the surrounding cultures,” referring, for example, to the episode of Potiphar’s wife with its close parallels in the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers and in the story of Bellerophon in the *Iliad*.² Rarely did my teacher or anyone in class raise an issue of a truly literary nature. True, Gordon was the first to identify the type of parallelism known as Janus parallelism,³ a true literary device, but by and large this was not the main thrust of his teaching and scholarship. Furthermore, because we were

It is my pleasant duty to thank the Center for Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania for welcoming me as a visiting fellow in academic year 1997–98, during which time the present article was written.

1. The same held true for the study of Bible in Europe and in Israel (though the seeds of the literary approach could be seen in Israeli institutions).
2. For a discussion of this example, see C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965) 119–20.
3. C. H. Gordon, “New Directions,” *BASP* 15 (1978) 59–60.

graduate students reading the text in the original Hebrew, rarely was there any interest in how a particular English translation rendered the text.

At the same time, however, I came to know Harry Orlinsky very well. Gordon and Orlinsky both had been students of Max Margolis, and thus had a long relationship dating back to the 1930s. Gordon encouraged me to seek out Orlinsky, which I did. I came to know him slightly from my treks to Hebrew Union College in order to use its library. Halfway through my graduate career, however, HUC relocated to its new quarters adjoining the New York University campus, and thenceforth I had regular contact with Orlinsky. We would meet at HUC, chat, and have tea together. I read all his publications and from him I learned a tremendous amount about Bible, Masorah, translation, and other matters. So, although Orlinsky was never my formal teacher, I am happy to count him as one of the people who influenced me in my studies.

I graduated from NYU in 1980 and off I went to start my teaching career, first for six years at Canisius College in Buffalo, and now for fifteen years at Cornell. Because I was teaching undergraduate students, naturally I needed an English translation for the courses. It was natural for me to choose the new Jewish Publication Society version. First, it was new and fresh. Second, it was the only translation that did not reflect the Christian Bible, that is, with the New Testament appended, and with the books in a different order, including the presence of Daniel among the prophets. This is an important issue for me, because I want my students to understand that the Tanakh is a product of Judaism and not of Christianity. And third, I had come to know the workings of the project intimately through my discussions with Orlinsky, its editor-in-chief, and I was convinced of its merits. This translation served me well. It put in the students' hands a very readable English text that captured the essence of the biblical message. My classes were filled with digests of the kind of material that I had learned as a graduate student. I could teach parallels between the Bible and the Gilgamesh epic, the Nuzi tablets, Hammurapi's code, and so on through this excellent English translation. I could teach the history of ancient Israel through this text and the message of the prophets came through with great clarity. Once the students overcame the shock of a Bible without the archaic "Biblical English" that they were accustomed to read, everything went smoothly.

Things changed, however, with the development of the literary approach to Bible. Soon after arriving at Canisius, I began to read the works of colleagues who were paving new ground in biblical studies. Here I mention Adele Berlin of the University of Maryland, along with Meir Sternberg in

Israel, and Robert Alter in Berkeley.⁴ I had been an English major as an undergraduate, so I was ripe for this approach to the Bible. After the hiatus of my graduate student years and first few years of teaching, the love of literature *qua* literature was kindled anew in me. I rushed to share this new approach with my students, both insights that I learned from colleagues and my own discoveries.

But there was a problem. As everyone knows, the literary approach pays close attention to the specific wording of the story, but the NJPS often takes a different route and does not allow the English reader to see the workings of the Hebrew text.

Let me illustrate using one of Orlinsky's classic witticisms. Gen 24:10 reads ויקח העבד עשרה גמלים מגמלי אדניו וילך וכל טוב אדניו בידו "the servant took ten camels from among the camels of his master, and he went, and all the bounty of his master בידו." In Orlinsky's words: the only way that Abraham's servant could have taken ten camels "in his hand" would be if he had been carrying half a pack of unfiltered cigarettes! Obviously, the word means "with him," and that is how the NJPS translates the text, "taking with him all the bounty of his master," in true idiomatic fashion in accord with the overriding principle of the version that Orlinsky himself so eloquently defended.⁵ But here is the point: upon closer inspection we realize that the word יד ("hand") is a *Leitwort* in our story. The servant places his hand under Abraham's thigh (v. 9, the immediately preceding verse), Rebekah lowers her jug על ידה ("upon her hand," v. 18), the servant places jewelry על ידיה ("on her hands," v. 22), and Laban later sees the jewelry על ידי אחתו ("on the hands of his sister," v. 30). In light of these usages, it is clear that the author chose בידו in v. 10 for additional literary effect, especially when one considers that other prepositions could have been utilized, namely, either עמו or אהו, the simpler words for "with him."⁶ Accordingly, if I use this example to demonstrate the issue of *Leitwort* to my students, I must first "correct" the NJPS trans-

4. I cite here the best-known works of these three scholars: A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); and R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

5. See H. M. Orlinsky, *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation* (New York: Ktav, 1974).

6. For the use of עמו in similar contexts, see Gen 31:23, 48:1, Exod 13:19, 14:6. For the use of אהו after the verb ויקח, see Gen 22:3 (though see also the discussion in the next paragraph).

lation for them. But by the time I do this, I am one step in the hole, and some of the wind in my sails already has gone out.

The same problem arises in Genesis 22. The story uses simple language to express Abraham's first act of taking, in v. 3: **וַיִּקַּח אֶת שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אֹתוֹ וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ** "Abraham took his two servants with him, and Isaac his son," and the NJPS appropriately uses "with him" to render **אֹתוֹ**. But when the author wants the reader to focus on Abraham's hand in v. 6, he writes **וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת** **הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת הַמַּאֲכָלָה** ("he took in his hand the fire and the knife"), using the form **בְּיָדוֹ** ("in his hand") in anticipation of the crucial phrases in v. 10, **וַיִּשְׁלַח** **אֶת יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת הַמַּאֲכָלָה לְשַׁחֵט אֶת בְּנוֹ** "Abraham sent forth his hand and he took the knife, to slaughter his son," and in v. 12, **אֲלֵךְ אֶל תְּשַׁלַּח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעָר** "do not send forth your hand to the boy." But once more the NJPS translation does not allow the English reader to follow this point, rendering v. 6 as "He himself took the fire and the knife,"⁷ v. 10 as "And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son," and v. 12 as "Do not raise your hand against the boy." In other words, only in the third of these passages does the word "hand" appear, with circumlocutions in the first two eradicating the presence of "hand." Again, in the classroom, I am required to do much explaining before I can present this fine literary technique to my students.

To use another example: As numerous scholars have noted, women play a major role in the early life of Moses as described in Exodus 1–2. In fact, it is clear that Moses owes his very existence to the active intervention of women. I can show this to my students quite easily using the Jewish Publication Society translation. But when I want to show them the more precise point, that the word **בַּת** ("daughter") serves as a *Leitwort* in these stories, I run into trouble once more. Pharaoh's twice-repeated decree, of course, is to kill every **בֶּן** ("son") but to let every **בַּת** ("daughter") live (Exod 1:16, 22). But the NJPS does not render **בַּת** as "daughter" in these two verses; instead it utilizes the word "girl," a translation that fits the context and is smooth idiomatic English, but that does not capture the true sense of the Hebrew text.

Immediately after the second royal pronouncement, we read **וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ לְוִי מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי** (Exod 2:1), which I would render "A man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi," but which the NJPS renders "A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman," again in fine idiomatic English but once more omitting any suggestion of the word "daughter." So here we have the word **בַּת** used already three times in the story, twice in the mouth of the Pharaoh and now once by the

7. Reading with the footnote "Lit. 'fire'"; the main text has "firestone."

narrator to describe the mother of Moses. But I cannot show this to my students in order to illustrate the literary issue at hand. I am well aware of the method involved in the NJPS, namely the desire to have the text read as idiomatic English. Ours is a language in which we are taught not to repeat the same word again and again, but rather to vary our vocabulary, so I can explain to my students what has happened in the translation process. But for my purposes, for teaching these literary issues to my students, the NJPS, for all its excellence, often falls short.

Returning to the biblical text, in the next paragraph we have the expression *בת פרעה* (“daughter of Pharaoh”) used five times (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10), which the NJPS renders as such (actually in the first instance as “daughter of Pharaoh,” afterwards as “Pharaoh’s daughter”). Here I can show my students the use of “daughter,” even in our English text, but again I have had to work out of a hole to demonstrate to them how “daughter” appears earlier in the story in key places. And the same is true when the “daughters” of Reuel make their appearance on the scene in Exod 2:16–22, where the plural *בנות* occurs twice (vv. 16, 20) and the singular *בתו* (“his daughter”) occurs once (v. 21), all correctly noted by the NJPS. But the main point is, without “daughter” at the crucial stages in the beginning of the story in our English version, the English reader is not ready to see the word “daughter(s)” operating later in the story.

In addition, because I am interested in alliteration in Hebrew prose,⁸ I often take the time to point this feature out to my students, even in a survey course where the Bible is read in English. In the present instance, I note the problematic word *בתים* “houses, households” in Exod 1:21, as the reward that God grants to the midwives. Whatever it might mean in this context, clearly the author has selected this word to create the sound play with the *Leitwort* *בת* (“daughter”). I do not expect an English translation to be able to render such alliterations in the Hebrew text.⁹ However, I can rely on the basic

8. I am preparing a monograph on this subject at present.

9. On the other hand, an effort in this direction might yield felicitous results. My colleague Frederick Ahl has managed to transfer a number of wordplays in Greek and Latin texts into his English translations. See, e.g., F. M. Ahl, *Seneca: Three Tragedies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), and his general treatment in F. M. Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). This suggests that translators of the Bible might wish to exert more effort in this direction when rendering Hebrew alliterations. Everett Fox (*The Five Books of Moses* [The Schocken Bible, vol. 1; New York: Schocken, 1995]) has managed

Hebrew knowledge of many of my students, who certainly would know the words **בת** and **בתים**, and thus would be able to grasp the point here, but first they need to know that “girl” in Exod 1:16, 22 is actually “daughter” or **בת**, at which point they can understand the presence of **בתים** in v. 21.¹⁰ Again, the NJPS is one step removed from my students’ realization of this point.

Once I have shown my students how this *Leitwort* operates, I next ask them if there are any words or phrases in Exodus 1–2 that echo material that we have read previously in Genesis. Almost always someone is able to provide an answer to my query, pointing correctly to the creation account, but again the full extent of the similarities between the beginning of Exodus and the beginning of Genesis cannot be seen simply by reading the English text of the NJPS.

Exod 1:7 reads: **ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד במאד ותמלא הארץ אתם**, which the NJPS renders “But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them,” echoing God’s words to the first human couple in Gen 1:28, **פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ** (“Be fertile and increase, fill the earth”). So my students can see the connection in general terms, though even here we may note that in the one passage **ארץ** is translated as “land” and in the other as “earth.” But the main point works nonetheless.¹¹

However, note what happens to the expression **כי טוב**, used repeatedly in Genesis 1 and again in Exod 2:2: **והרא אתו כי טוב הוא**, rendered in the NJPS as “and when she saw how beautiful he was.” The expression is turned into a dependent clause, even though it should be read as an independent clause, as in Genesis 1; the syntax of **כי טוב** is not duplicated in the two texts as trans-

to do this on occasion; see, for example, his translation of Gen 15:2, **ובן משק ביתי הוא דמשק אליעזר** as “and the Son Domestic of My House is Damascan Eliezer” (p. 65, with the accompanying footnote: “The translation here reflects the play on sound”). One also should note Jerome’s rendering of Gen 22:2 where the alliteration of **ההרים** “the mountains” and **אמר** “I will tell/show” (both of which, in turn, evoke the sounds of **אברהם** “Abraham”) is captured with “montium” and “monstravero” respectively (as pointed out to me by Fred Ahl).

10. Similarly, the expression **לוי בית לוי** in Exod 2:1 may have been invoked by the author to further the alliteration. The phrase is used twice elsewhere in the Bible, in Num 17:23 and in Zech 12:13.
11. However, note that the verbs do not correspond exactly. In the Genesis passage the root **רבה** is rendered “increase”; in the Exodus passage the same root is rendered “multiplied” and “increased” is used for **ויעצמו**. But the English reader can see the connection nonetheless.

lated; and, of course, טוב is rendered “good” consistently in Genesis 1 but “beautiful” in Exodus 2. So once more I need to stop my presentation of the material in class to inform the students that the phrase is the same. Furthermore, not surprisingly, the word תבה is not rendered similarly in its only two biblical occurrences: Noah’s תבה is “ark,” but Moses’ תבה is “basket.”

I want the students to know the main point that the author is making: the two most important events in the history of the world are the creation of the world and the creation of the people of Israel, and thus the language of Exodus 1–2 echoes the language of the early chapters in Genesis. But I have a lot of explaining to do before I can get to this point, an extremely important one in any course on Bible, at any level, introductory or advanced.

By this point, one may rightly ask, why don’t I simply switch translations and use something more suitable to my needs? The answer is that almost all Bible translations suffer from the problems presented above. The RSV, for example, does translate more literally, rendering each בת as “daughter” but at Exod 2:2 reads “and when she saw that he was a goodly child,” introducing the word “child” into the English text and changing, albeit ever so slightly, the “good” of Genesis 1 to “goodly” in the Moses birth story. Furthermore, as noted above, all other translations reflect the Christian contents and organization of the Bible.

Now, of course, there is another option, namely, Everett Fox’s translation.¹² Here, for sure, we have an English text that both reflects the Jewish Bible and serves my literary needs. To use one example considered above, Fox renders each בת as “daughter,” and also includes a brief remark about the importance of this word in the narrative.¹³ Furthermore, he includes a note about כי טוב in Exod 2:2 as the echo of the same phrase in Genesis 1, and another note about the significance of תבה in its two biblical usages.¹⁴

In theory, this volume should serve as the textbook for my course, but then another problem arises. Fox’s work covers only the Torah, and obviously my students, especially in a survey course, require the entire Tanakh in their hands, not just the first five books. Furthermore, notwithstanding my tremendous admiration for Fox’s achievement—and I have recommended his book to numerous people since its appearance—even with his translation I find that not all the literary nuances of the Hebrew text are captured in the English.

12. The work is cited above, with full bibliographic details, in note 9.

13. Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 260.

14. *Ibid.*, 263.

In a recent article, I presented seven examples in the Bible of confused syntax as an intentional literary device to show the confusion of the moment or the quandary in the mind of a particular character;¹⁵ in short, form follows content. Among these passages is the following. Upon discovering that Joseph was missing from the pit, Reuben returns to his brothers and says **בא הילד איננו ואני אנה אני בא** “the child is not, and I, to where shall I come?” (Gen 37:30). I emphasize the final word in the phrase, **בא**, and my English rendering thereof, “come.” Neither Fox nor any other modern translation (in any language) that I have checked renders the word in this fashion—they typically use “go”—but “come,” of course, is the plain meaning of **בא**. The reason why translators do not render **בא** as “come” in this instance, but instead are compelled to use “go,” is clear. As Leo Depuydt noted in a study of Hebrew and Egyptian words of movement, “In questions asking for the destination to which a person is moving, the verb ‘to go’ is compulsory, because using ‘to come’ equals assuming that the destination is already known, namely the speaker (or hearer). So, we do not say ‘Where are you coming?’, but rather: ‘Where are you going?’”¹⁶ Depuydt further noted, correctly and not surprisingly, that Gen 37:30 “is the only case where **אנה** goes together with **בוא**, against 11 examples with **הלך**.”¹⁷ In my view, we are to explain this peculiarity in the text, with confused—or in this case, impossible—syntax,¹⁸ as the author’s attempt to portray the bewildered and confused Reuben. Poor Reuben, with no knowledge of what has become of Joseph and in a fretful state, can barely speak. His twofold use of the word **אני** is one indication of this (though even this is not replicated in many English translations¹⁹), and an even more glaring indication is the phrase **אנה אני בא**, the product of a confused mind. If I want to demonstrate this fine literary

15. See G. A. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1998–99), on the Web at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/>.

16. L. Depuydt, “On the Notion of Movement in Egypto-Coptic and Biblical Hebrew,” in *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity* (ed. S. Israelit-Groll; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 37.

17. Depuydt, “Notion of Movement,” 37.

18. I fully recognize that words for “come” and “go” do not correspond in all cases in all languages. There may be instances of **הלך** in which “come” is the desired English equivalent and there may be instances of **בוא** in which “go” is the desired English equivalent. But Depuydt is correct in this case, since with **אנה** the only “correct” option is **הלך** and the use of **בוא** creates confused syntax.

19. Thus, for example, REB, NJB, and NIV.

point to my students, not even Fox will serve me here because he, similar to everyone else, renders the phrase “where am I to go?”

I now raise a new topic. During the past several years I have begun to read more and more about discourse analysis or text linguistics, with the goal of understanding more about the workings of the biblical text beyond the level of sentence syntax. The most important thing that I, along with others who have ventured into this brave new world, have learned from discourse analysis is to pay more attention to verbal usage within narrative. As an illustration, I call attention to 1 Sam 17:38, where we read how Saul dressed David with his armor: וילבש שאול את דוד מדיו ונתן קובע נחשת על ראשו וילבש אתו שריון. This passage is rendered uniformly as a series of consecutive acts, as in the NJPS: “Saul clothed David in his own garment; he placed a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him in a breastplate.”²⁰ But if we take a closer look at the verbs, we note that only the first and the third are in the *wayyiqṭōl* form and that the second of them is in the *wəqātal* form. Two recent studies from the field of discourse analysis, one by R. E. Longacre and one by C. H. J. van der Merwe, have isolated this passage as among the most difficult nuts to crack, with neither able to supply an answer to the problem of why ונתן (instead of the expected ויתן) is used here.²¹ The lack of a solution notwithstanding, I am indebted to these studies, and to the entire enterprise of discourse analysis, because it has sensitized me to the issue of verbal usage, and thus I feel that I have benefited as a reader of the Bible.

Ever ready to explain a linguistic peculiarity as the conscious product of an ancient Israelite literary mind, I here propose that we interpret 1 Sam 17:38 along the following lines. While considering this passage, it occurred to me that most likely the order of donning armor was first the מדים, or body-suit, then the שריון, or breastplate, and finally the קובע, or helmet.²² I checked

20. Reading the last part of the verse with the footnote; the main text reads “and fastened a breastplate on him.”

21. R. E. Longacre, “*Weqatal* Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose: A Discourse-modular Approach,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. R. D. Bergen; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994) 75; and C. H. J. Van der Merwe, “Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Grammar,” in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. R. D. Bergen; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994) 28.

22. I admit to some difficulty here in rendering the terms מדים and שריון. The former is a generic word for “garment” and the latter is typically translated “body armor” or “coat of mail.” In the present instance, it appears that מדים must be a body-suit with some protective function and that שריון would then be the

with an authority on the subject, Pierre Terjanian, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in European Arms and Armor at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and he confirmed my hunch. In the entire history of human armor, the last item to be donned is always the helmet. The most explicit evidence is forthcoming from the fifteenth-century Hastings manuscript, a volume that includes a section entitled “How a man schall be armyd at his ese when he schal fighte on foote” (folios 122b–123b). In great detail the author of this text describes the manner of dressing, with the “basinet,” or helmet, affixed last.²³ In addition, there are numerous references to the donning of armor in medieval literary compositions (*La Chanson de Roland* and many other works), and they consistently refer to the helmet as the last item to be affixed.²⁴

Perhaps more germane than these medieval references are the following passages from the *Iliad*, a text roughly contemporary with the authorship of 1 Samuel 17.²⁵ In four places—3:330–38 (Alexandros [Paris]), 11:17–43

breastplate. Note that M. J. Fretz (“Weapons and Implements of Warfare,” *ABD* 6.894) allowed for רָמָה = “armor” and שָׁרֵיט = “breastplate.” In any case, the exact designations of these terms in the present context is not the main concern here, since however one understands them, it is clear that the helmet should be donned last.

23. For detailed treatment of the text, see (Viscount) H. A. Dillon, “On a MS. Collection of Ordinances of Chivalry of the Fifteenth Century, Belonging to Lord Hastings,” *Archaeologia, or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London* 57 (1900) 29–70, esp. pp. 43–46. A briefer discussion may be found in C. Ffoulkes, *The Armourer and His Craft from the XIth to the XVIth Century* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1912) 107–8. On the term “basinet,” see G. C. Stone, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor* (New York: Jack Brussel, 1961) 102–5.
24. For numerous examples, see F. Buttin, *Du costume militaire au Moyen Age et pendant la Renaissance* (Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona 12; Barcelona: Real Academia de Buenas Letras, 1971) 15–16, 20, 154–59. I take this opportunity to thank Pierre Terjanian for his kind assistance and for the above references in this and the preceding note.

On the subject of suiting up, even Mark Twain got it right in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, with his very detailed description ending with “your iron rat-trap onto your head, with a rag of steel web hitched onto it to hang over the back of your neck—and there you are, snug as a candle in a candle-mould”; see Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 134–35 (in chapter XI, entitled “The Yankee in Search of Adventures”).

25. For detailed discussion, see J. P. Brown, *Israel and Hellas* (BZAW 231; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) 163–70.

(Agamemnon), 16:131–39 (Patroclus), 19:369–83 (Achilles)—Homer portrays the hero preparing for battle by donning the armor. In each case the order is: greaves, corselet, shield, helmet. A fifth hero does likewise, as we can see from 3:339, following immediately upon Alexandros’s suiting: “In the same way warlike Menelaos put on his armour.”²⁶ Finally, note that when Moses dresses Aaron with the priestly vestments in Lev 8:6–9, the last item donned is the headdress.

One of the overall goals of the author of 1 Samuel, as many scholars have noted,²⁷ is to show the inadequacy of Saul. The present passage should be understood as part of the portrayal. Saul cannot even dress another soldier properly.²⁸ The *wēqātal* form וָקָטַל (“he placed”) serves to highlight the fact that Saul placed the helmet on David before the breastplate. Not surprisingly, no English translation attempts to portray this linguistic peculiarity, and therefore no English reader could possibly be informed of the issue at stake here. I would propose, accordingly, that we render the verse as “Saul clothed David in his body-suit, then he even placed a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with a breastplate,” with the highlighting function of the *wēqātal* verb indicated by the addition of the word “even.” Or, more radically, I could envision an English rendering such as “Saul clothed David in his

26. Translation of R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 109.

27. See, for example, D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980); and M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1983); as well as the succinct remarks by J. Rosenberg, “1 and 2 Samuel,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) 127–28.

28. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (4 vols.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981–93) 2.176, noted, “The line concerning the bronze helmet already makes us suspect that something is not quite right, for it is too similar to v. 5a, Goliath’s line, and is also followed by the armour (5b–38c).” This is a fine point, but it is not clear to me whether or not he was guided as well by the unusual verbal syntax, though in “Appendix I: Accounting for the Selected Text,” Fokkelman (p. 727) called attention to F. E. König, *Historisch-comparative Syntax der hebräischen Sprache* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897) 529–30. König considered our example “eine Digression,” with the comment: “so ist ausmalend-exegetisch 1 S 17 38: und zwar gab er.” This insight from König is close to my own reading of the passage and I am happy to have been anticipated by this classic scholar (I came to the König reference only in the last stage of preparing this article). See also H. J. Stoebe, “Die Goliathperikope 1 Sam. xvii 1 – xviii 5 und die Textform der Septuaginta,” *VT* 6 (1956) 407.

body-suit, then placed he a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with a breastplate,” with the inverted word order “then placed he” replicating the most unusual presence of the Hebrew *wēqātal* form. With such a translation, English readers—whether they be general readers or my students—could see the literary technique inherent in this passage.²⁹

I conclude this article with a detailed discussion of a biblical story that has received much attention in recent years, namely, the episode of the two prostitutes before Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:16–28. In a recent treatment of this story, Ellen van Wolde noted the following: “There is a turning point in the story at the moment that the narrator for the first time identifies one of the two women as ‘the mother of the living child’ (v. 26a) in a direct narrator’s text. The readers do not yet know whether the first or the second woman is this mother, and they never will.”³⁰ Van Wolde is not alone in this stance. Meir Sternberg, for example, stated similarly, “we never find out for sure which of the harlots (‘the one’ or ‘the other’) is the mother,”³¹ and indeed most commentators on this story would agree, whether they say so explicitly or not. In a recent article I present the case against this view.³² I cannot go into all the details here, but I believe that the author of this pericope has provided for the careful reader the means by which to discern which of the two women was the guilty party. The reader can do so, not by solving the case from within, which would place the reader in the unlikely position of being the equal to Solomon or even of out-Solomoning Solomon, clearly not the author’s intent; but rather from without, that is, by paying careful attention to the narrator’s words.

The first woman, called by the narrator **האשה האחת** (“the one woman”), and whom we shall call “Woman A,” begins with a relatively long speech describing the events as she recreated them (vv. 17–21). The second woman,

29. For much of the above, see already Rendsburg, “Confused Language,” section 7. Another approach to this verse is textual emendation, as practiced, for example, by P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980). McCarter reconstructed the verse as **וילבש את דוד מריו וקובע נחשת על ראשו** “Then [he] dressed David in a uniform with a bronze helmet for his head” (translation on p. 285), declaring **ונהן** as “syntactically impossible” (p. 288); deleting **שריון אהו וילבש אהו** altogether “with LXX^B” (ibid.); and omitting **שאול**, though without comment.

30. E. van Wolde, “Who Guides Whom? Embeddedness and Perspective in Biblical Hebrew and in 1 Kings 3:16–28,” *JBL* 114 (1995) 623–42, esp. p. 638.

31. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 169.

32. G. A. Rendsburg, “The Guilty Party in 1 Kings iii 16–28,” *VT* 48 (1998) 534–41.

called by the narrator *האשה האחרת* (“the other woman”), and whom we shall call “Woman B,” then responds with the short phrase *לא כי בני החי* “No! my son is the living one, and your son is the dead one” (v. 22a). The text then continues, *וזאת אמרת לא כי בנך המת ובני החי* “And this one says: No! your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one” (v. 22b). The key expression here is the phrase *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says”) with reference to Woman A. These two words are used in the next verse to refer to Woman A, and still later to refer to the woman who is not the mother of the living child. Thus, by paying close attention to the threefold use of the phrase *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says”) the reader is able to determine that it is Woman A who is the mother of the dead child.

In the next verse, when Solomon repeats what he has just heard, he states: *זאת אמרת זה בני החי ובנך המת וזאת אמרת לא כי בנך המת ובני החי* “This one says: This is my son, the living one, and your son is the dead one. And this one says: No! your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one” (v. 23). Note how the words *זאת אמרת* (“this one says”) are used to refer to Woman B, and how the words *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says”), differing only by the addition of a conjunctive *waw*, refer to Woman A. This is a very small difference indeed, but such small differences are inherent in the biblical narrative tradition, which demands the reader’s attention to such detail.

At an apparent impasse, Solomon next issues his famous judgment to divide the living child in two and to give one half to each woman (vv. 24–25). At this point the narrator introduces the compassionate speech of the one woman with *והאמר האשה אשר בנה החי* “the woman, whose son was the living one, said” (v. 26a), in contrast to the second woman’s cold retort, which is introduced with the key phrase *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says,” v. 26b). Since twice earlier the author used the words *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says”) to refer to Woman A, the attentive reader will use this expression as a key to identifying the guilty party.

In short, Woman B is the mother of the living child and Woman A is the mother of the dead child, a fact that the reader may discern on his or her own by carefully noting the narrator’s use of the thrice repeated words *וזאת אמרת* (“and this one says”). There are other indications in the text that guide the reader, including the portrayal of Woman B as a Cordelia prototype, with nary a word to say in her defense, the details of which are presented in my article.

Now, when we look at different English translations of this text, we note that not a single version allows the reader to follow the argument that I have presented. That is to say, the words *וזאת אמרת* and *זאת אמרת* are not consis-

tently translated as “this one says,” “and this one says,” but rather the different versions elect some other system, including, in some instances, the introduction of the word “first” or “other” to refer to one of the women at different times, even when the Hebrew original includes no such equivalent. For example, the RSV renders each of the three instances of וְזֹאת אָמְרָה differently: in v. 22 “the first said,” in v. 23 “and the other says,” and in v. 26 “but the other said.” There is no continuity here that would allow the English reader to see the literary technique at play. Similarly, the NJPS renders the three occurrences as “but the first insisted,” “and the other says,” and “the other insisted,” again not allowing the English reader to follow the author’s clue imbedded in the Hebrew words וְזֹאת אָמְרָה.³³ And to use one more example, the REB utilizes “while the first insisted,” “the other says,” and “the other said” to render the same Hebrew phrase וְזֹאת אָמְרָה.

In addition, a number of these standard translations introduce the word “first” in v. 27 in a way even more at odds with the Hebrew original. The Hebrew text has Solomon say simply תֵּנוּ לָהּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי “give her the living newborn,” but note how the following English Bibles handle this (the issue of how to translate יָלֹד aside): RSV “give the living child to the first woman”; NRSV “give the first woman the living boy”; NEB and REB “give the living baby to the first woman”; and NAB “give the first one the living child.” Now if these translations intended “first” here to refer to the first of the two women who spoke in v. 26, then at least they have not violated the story too severely, because the narrator himself informs us that the first of the women to speak in v. 26, the one whose “compassions were tender for her son,” was indeed the mother of the living child. But if these translations intended “first” to refer to the first of the women to speak from the outset, that is, Woman A, beginning in v. 17, then they have fallen into the trap, and have led their readers with them. For thus they would believe that Woman A is the mother of the living child, when our reading of the story indicates Woman B, the silent Cordelia-like figure, to be the mother of the living child.³⁴ Either way, these translations should not introduce such a word as “first” (let alone “the first one” or “the first woman”) when the Hebrew text

33. Though, interestingly, the repetition of the word “insisted” allows the reader to follow the lead partially.

34. In so reading the story, however, these translations are in good company, since earlier generations of Bible readers, from Josephus through the Radbaz, concluded similarly. See my article “The Guilty Party in 1 Kings iii 16–28” for details.

discloses no such reading. Also, the crispness of *תנו לה* (“give her”) in v. 27 should be presented in any English rendering. The NJPS is a little better than the others with “give the live child to her,” but even here some of the crispness is lost by the change in word order. “Give her the living newborn” is the preferred English rendering.

Furthermore, with one small exception, note that Solomon’s words in v. 27, *תנו לה את הילוד החי והמת לא תמיתוהו* (“give her the living newborn, only you shall not put him to death”) repeat verbatim Woman B’s words *תנו לה את הילוד החי והמת אל תמיתוהו* (“give her the living newborn, only do not put him to death”) from v. 26, the only change being the shift from the jussive negative *אל* to the commanding negative *לא*. Again, many English translations do not allow the reader to see this point. Most striking is the NJPS, which even changes the verb from “kill” in v. 26 to “put to death” in v. 27 (the RSV comes closest to reproducing the nearly verbatim words, though as noted above, it introduces the word “first” without cause).

We return now to the main point of this article. What do I do in the classroom? I am left with little choice. My students use the new Jewish Publication Society version, for only this volume allows the students to see the Tanakh for what it truly is, the product of ancient Israelite literati as canonized by the ancient Jewish community. When I need to present the literary issues that I have presented herein, I inform my class of the actual reading of the Hebrew text, and if necessary, I distribute handouts with my own translations (for a sample, see the Appendix with my translation of 1 Kgs 3:16–28). The optimal solution is a total reworking of the NJPS, incorporating all that we have learned from the extraordinary Harry Orlinsky,³⁵ but presenting the text in the light of scholarly developments of the last few decades.³⁶ Is there anyone among us ready to tackle this daunting task?

35. Of course, there were other scholars who worked on the NJPS, namely, E. A. Speiser and H. L. Ginsberg with Orlinsky on *The Torah*, Ginsberg with Orlinsky on *The Prophets*, and Moshe Greenberg, Jonas Greenfield, and Nahum Sarna on *The Writings*. But the guiding light for the entire project was Orlinsky.

36. As a model, I would follow R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), which pays fine attention to literary issues. See the long essay “To the Reader” (pp. ix–xlvi) for general orientation, with his treatment of Gen 26:8 (on p. xxxi) as an excellent illustration of the process. Of course, Alter’s work is even more limited than Fox’s, restricted as it is to only the first book of the Bible. And even Alter violates his own dictates on occasion, as when he renders Gen 37:31 “where can I turn?” (p. 214).

APPENDIX: ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF 1 KINGS 3:16–28

¹⁶ Then came two harlot women to the king and they stood before him.

¹⁷ The one woman said, “Please, my lord! I and this woman dwell in one house, and I gave birth, with her in the house. ¹⁸ On the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. And we were alone, there was no one else with us in the house, just the two of us in the house. ¹⁹ The son of this woman died in the night, because she lay on him. ²⁰ She arose in the middle of the night, and she took my son from my side, while your maidservant was asleep, and she laid him in her bosom, and her dead son she laid in my bosom. ²¹ I arose in the morning to nurse my son, and behold, he was dead. I inspected him closely in the morning, and behold, it was not the son that I had borne.”

²² The other woman said, “No! for my son is the living-one, and your son is the dead-one.”

And this one says, “No! for your son is the dead-one, and my son is the living-one.”

Thus they spoke before the king.

²³ The king said, “This one says: This is my son, the living-one, and your son is the dead-one. And this one says: No! for your son is the dead-one, and my son is the living-one.”

²⁴ The king said, “Get me a sword!” They brought the sword before the king.

²⁵ The king said, “Cut the living child in two, and give half to one and half to one.”

²⁶ The woman whose son was the living-one, said to the king, for her compassions were tender for her son, she said, “Please, my lord! give her the living newborn, only do not put him to death!”

And this one says, “It shall be neither mine nor yours, cut!”

²⁷ The king answered, and he said, “Give her the living newborn, only you shall not put him to death! She is his mother.”

²⁸ All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had judged, and they were in awe of the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in his midst to do judgment.