

to become an artist, and that mental illness contributed to his artistic insight. Whereas Erickson seeks to show that Van Gogh's illness was only an interruption to his art, and that his faith, re-cast in modernist form, informed all his work, especially that of his last two years.

If Erickson is right, classic images will need to be reinterpreted. In particular, the famous 'Crows over a Wheatfield' from his last year, which has usually been read as an overwhelming of life (the wheatfield) by trouble and death (clouds and crows), Erickson sees as a Bunyanesque journey of life (the roads) leading through death (the cornfield ready for reaping) to a restoring eternity (the blue infinite).

This book needs to enter, then, into the debate about Van Gogh's mental troubles, and also to show from his letters that his faith continued to be active after he left the church. On both counts the argument seems to be successful. The original diagnosis was non-convulsive epilepsy, which still makes sense today, though there may have been a depressive condition as well. There is also evidence of his faith recovering, in transmuted form, in his last years, not least from three biblical subjects painted while in hospital. From the letters Erickson also infers that sunshine, wheatfields, olive groves and reapers also have biblical overtones. This may perhaps be debated.

But there is much more to this book than its main argument. For by unpicking the major theological influences on the young Vincent, Erickson goes a long way to explain the core of his art, the appealing combination of charity and zeal, individualism and subjectivism that has made him such an icon of the modern age. Theology, seems to have been translated, very influentially, into paint.

Van Gogh's antecedents, back to the C17, were both artistic and theological. His uncles were art dealers, his father was a protestant missionary to the Catholic peasants of south Holland, not a Calvinist, but a moderniser of the Groningen school. Groningen, formed out of Arminianism and pietism, emphasised experience—'religion resides in feeling'—and replaced a doctrine of atonement with a demanding requirement to emulate Jesus; or as the author puts it, 'Human beings are relieved of the burden of sin by following the example of Christ and trying to imitate his life' (p. 19). This modern, but not particularly merciful doctrine helps account for the rigours of Vincent's self-deprivation when evangelising destitute miners, and perhaps also his sense that any churchmen whose sacrifices were less extreme must be hypocrites. Van Gogh's other

close spiritual guide, the uncle with whom he was to quarrel, took Groningen theology further, rejecting the supernatural, critically investigating the Bible, and reducing the fundamental principle of Christianity, in Opzoomer's words, to 'the oneness of the Divine and the human'.

These were not the only influences on the young Vincent, who seems to have had an evangelical conversion while in London, which alarmed his relations, who feared fundamentalism. Later he became enamoured of the modernising of Renan. But the consistent themes of his faith are those represented in his art; subjective experience, self-sacrifice, devotion to the poor, alienation from institutional religion, and a readiness to encounter God (mystically apprehended) through nature.

Erickson writes with strong empathy for her subject. If there is a weakness, it is that sometimes her argument seems overasserted, tempting her, for example, to use the term 'Christian' for phases of Van Gogh's religion which are scarcely to be distinguished from unbelief. One should perhaps remain cautious about the 'Christian' label. But at the very least she has shown that the trials of faith in the modern age were integral to Van Gogh's being and at the core of his art.

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***Biblical Text and Texture—A
Literary Reading of Selected Texts***
Michael Fishbane

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RÉSUMÉ

Fishbane commence par une brève présentation de sa théorie littéraire, dont l'élément clé est la distinction entre la 'réalité littéraire' du texte et la réalité de l'histoire ou de l'expérience qui est extérieure au texte. Cette réalité littéraire s'appréhende le mieux en considérant des procédés stylistiques (comme par exemple la répétition d'un mot thème) qui sont des indications pour le lecteur de ce que l'auteur souhaitait mettre en avant, accentuer et communiquer. Le reste du livre (la plus grande partie) applique, à titre d'exemple, cette théorie à trois types de textes de l'Ancien Testament: le cycle narratif, le discours direct et la

'transformation de texte' (par exemple le thème de l'Éden et sa transformation dans les textes ultérieurs). Les observations de Fishbane sur les procédés stylistiques sont instructives, bien que la séparation entre la 'réalité littéraire' du texte et la réalité historique demeure problématique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Fishbanes Buch beginnt mit einer äußerst knappen Einleitung zu seiner Literaturtheorie, bei der ein Kernaspekt darin besteht, zwischen der 'literarischen Realität' eines Textes und der historischen, d.h. erfahrbaren, Realität, die außerhalb des Textes liegt, zu unterscheiden. Die literarische Realität ist am besten zugänglich mittels stilistischer Konventionen (wie z.B. der Wiederholung eines Leitworts), die dem Leser anzeigen, was der Autor hervorzuheben und zu vermitteln beabsichtigte. Der Rest (d.h. der größte Teil) des Buches ist ein Beispiel für die Anwendung dieser Literaturtheorie auf drei alttestamentliche Literaturtypen, d.h. auf Narrativ-Zyklen, direkte Rede und sogenannte 'Texttransformationen' (wie z.B. das Eden-Motiv und dessen Umgestaltung in späteren Texten). Fishbanes Bemerkungen zu den stilistischen Konventionen sind aufschlußreich, doch seine Unterscheidung zwischen der 'literarischen Realität' eines Textes und dessen historischer Realität ist problematisch.

This book, a reprint of the original published in 1979, is not so much a discussion of literary theory as an example of how to do literary reading. The meat of the book consists of Fishbane's treatment of various biblical texts with a literary reading. His brief theoretical comments, reserved for the introduction and epilogue, bracket this treatment and are considered immediately below.

Fishbane's literary reading methodology is based on three basic presuppositions. First, there is an inseparable relationship between the form of literature and its content. That is to say, the reality presented (content) is constructed by the literary formulation of that text. It is thus a 'literary reality'; to change the form of the text would be to change the reality itself. Further implications of this point as it relates to the Bible are considered below. Second, 'reading rehearses the latent meanings of a text: meaning unfolds in the process of reading, it being a function of the dialectic which takes place between a particular reader and a particular text' (xi). In other words, by reading a text, letting its words wash over her/him, and

rebuilding in her/his mind the picture that the text presents, the reader brings to life again the meaning(s) of the text; s/he reconstructs the 'literary reality' that the text represents. The question that arises from this is, What guides the reader in this reconstruction, this bringing forth of the latent meanings of the text? Fishbane's answer, and his third presupposition, is that stylistic conventions are signposts to the reader of what the original author/editor wished to highlight, emphasise, and convey.

One example he notes is the repetition of a theme word. 'Such repetition, where it occurs, gives a text special texture; and it also serves to highlight major and minor features of content'. (xii). This applies also to repetition of larger themes or motifs, whereby '... latent networks of intra- and intertextual meaning may be perceived by an interpreter'. (xii). To Fishbane, awareness of such stylistic conventions is the starting point for understanding a text, allowing the reader to enter the text 'on its own terms': 'For it must be stressed that stylistic conventions allow the voice of a text to speak on its own terms and according to its own arrangement. The more conscious a reader is of these conventions, the less likely will he be to subjectivize a text irresponsibly...' (xii-xiii; cf. also 141). In this regard it is important to note that Fishbane is promoting a radically different emphasis than most source/higher-critical theorists. Instead of focusing on the repetition of words or themes as indicative of various sources, Fishbane bypasses this question, arguing instead that obvious repetitions in vocabulary or motif are there as markers in the text to alert us to its meanings.

Having sketched in brief the theory of his approach, Fishbane goes on to provide examples of such a literary reading in the context of specific passages. There are three major sections in the book, each of which deals with a different type of text. The first section deals with narratives (Genesis 1) and narrative cycles (e.g., the Jacob cycle), the second with direct speech (e.g., Deut 6:20-25; Psalm 19) and the third with motifs and other 'text-transformations' (e.g., the Eden motif and its 'transformation' in later texts). In each section Fishbane pays close attention to the stylistic conventions that help to demarcate the emphases and meaning(s) of the text. For example, noting some very interesting parallels between Genesis 29 and 31 and the surrounding chapters Fishbane writes:

Genesis 29–31 thus counterpoint the surrounding tale of Esau. Indeed, on reading Genesis 29 . . . one has the distinct sense of déjà vu. The agon of Jacob in pursuit of Rachel, of Rachel in contest with Leah, of Jacob deceived by Laban, and of Laban deceived by Rachel: all mirror the preceding strife between Jacob and Esau and the former's deception of Isaac. By such a foil, moreover, the final formulator of the cycle gives Jacob his comeuppance and circumspectly redresses the injustice of his original act of deceit (in Genesis 27). When Jacob fulfils the serf tenure which Laban has demanded (apparently as a brideprice) for Rachel, but is given Leah in her stead, he reproaches Laban, 'his brother': 'Why have you deceived me [stem: rimmah, 29:25]?' To which Laban rejoins (v. 26): 'It is not our [local] custom to marry off the younger [tze'irah] before the firstborn [bekhirah]'. The counterpoint with Genesis 27 is obvious: there Jacob was the younger (tza'ir/qaton) who misappropriated the birthright (bekhorah) of his elder brother . . . by deception (stem: rimmah, 27:35). With his indignant protest to Laban, Jacob unwittingly condemns himself. (p. 55)

Among numerous other helpful insights in this vein, his chiasmic outline of the Jacob cycle (Gen 25:19–35:22; p. 43) and his explanation of the passage where God appears in order to slay Moses (4:24–26; p. 71) are particularly noteworthy.

Several positive features commend this work. Fishbane's sensitivity to stylistic conventions will prove very instructive to those unfamiliar with a literary reading of biblical texts, as well as those only nominally familiar. Moreover, each chapter contains numerous helpful insights into the passage or cycle or motif that he writes on, especially with regard to thematic repetition, and, to a more limited extent, the psychology of the players in the passages (though this at times goes too far). As well, while acknowledging tensions in the text, Fishbane emphasises the unity of the material, allowing him to concentrate on the meaning(s) latent in the text as it stands before us, an emphasis which has at times been neglected in the era of form and source criticism. Further, and perhaps more basically, Fishbane does hold that there is meaning in the text, and that that meaning is discernible to the reader, a point on which many today would disagree.

As mentioned above, Fishbane's work is primarily practical in its approach with theoretical comments restricted primarily to the four page introduction and two page epilogue. Those wanting a more theoretical discussion will have to go elsewhere. On a more

foundational level, it is especially important for evangelicals to note that literary readings such as Fishbane's—which we sometimes adopt in order to focus on the final form of the text—are based on a distinction between the 'literary reality' of the text and the experiential or historical reality external to it. Carried to its logical conclusion, such a distinction divorces history from the text. This in turn undermines the authority of the Bible as an accurate representation of the historical reality of God's acting in and redeeming the world. On a minor note, there is a mistake in the verse alignment in line three of the chart on the bottom of p. 68, and p. 72 should read 5:22ff (not 6:22ff) in the second paragraph.

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Civil Society, Civil Religion

A. Shanks

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur veut montrer que la théologie confessionnelle ne parvient pas à fournir une vision commune susceptible d'unir notre société post-chrétienne. Il propose de la remplacer par ce qu'il présente comme une 'théologie civile'. Il s'agit d'un cadre spirituel large, qui peut être également partagé par des croyants et des non croyants. Il passe en revue une série de tentatives modernistes pour arriver à une théologie civile en s'inspirant de la pensée de Hegel qui est jugée très favorablement. L'argumentaire nous laisse insatisfait pour deux raisons. Premièrement, pour éviter les vérités exclusives de la théologie confessionnelle, la théologie civile de Shanks demeure tellement indéfinie qu'elle est vide de contenu. Deuxièmement, Shanks n'aborde pas la question de la signification de la christologie, qui fait du christianisme une foi exclusive des autres. Au vu de cette carence, l'argumentation laisse intacte ce qui fait la force de la théologie confessionnelle.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Shanks stellt die Behauptung auf, daß die konfessionelle Theologie nicht in der Lage ist, eine einheitliche Vision hervorzubringen, die unsere nachchristliche Gesellschaft