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The Biblical Lyric In The Light Of Literary Criticism

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THE BIBLICAL LYRIC
IN
THE LIGHT
OF
LITERARY CRITICISM

The thesis presented to the
Graduate Faculty of the Kansas State Teachers
College of Hays in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

by

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K.S.T.C.

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Approved by

R. Macgregor



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947

Forest Sumner Brown

Spring, 1935

CONTENTS

I.	Literary Criticism in Relation to Biblical Literature.	1.
II.	The Bible As Literature.	7.
III.	The Song Lyric.	15.
IV.	The Dramatic Lyric.	19.
V.	The Ode.	26.
VI.	The Elegy.	32.
VII.	The Sonnet.	36.
VIII.	Conclusion.	41.

THE BIBLICAL LYRIC IN RELATION TO LITERARY CRITICISM

The purpose of this thesis is to judge the Biblical lyric as a work of literature in the light of those principles of criticism which have been accepted as the standards of judgment for all good literature.

First, let us distinguish between literary criticism and higher criticism. The latter is interested in who wrote the books, when they were written, and whether the content is true. Literary criticism, on the other hand, is not interested in who wrote the books, except as the biography of the author may throw light upon his creation. Neither is it interested in the time in which they were written, except as their historical background may contribute to their literary interpretation. The higher critic asks, "Is it true?" The literary critic seeks only to know how the Bible compares in literary form and value with the other great literary works of the ages. The higher critic, as an historian, may seek to know how many authors the Book of Isaiah had. As a scientist, he may seek to find out if the story of creation in the Book of Genesis is accurate. But the literary critic seeks only to judge the Bible as a literary work, and the questions that are paramount in his mind are: What is the literary form? With what universality does it treat the human emotions? How does it compare with the literature of other races and ages? The Iliad and the Odyssey would remain masterpieces in the world's literature even if Homer were proved to be a fictitious character and the

fall of Troy a fable. They would remain works of art because of their universal appeal to human nature of all ages. As we approach the Bible in the light of literary criticism, then, it is with no thought of destroying faith in its historicity or reliability as a moral or spiritual guide. This field of controversy lies within the realm of the theologians and the historians.

The purpose of literary criticism is not to find fault. Etymologically criticism means judgment. The literary critic is a judge and his judgment may be favorable as well as unfavorable. The contribution of literary criticism to the appreciation of the Bible has not as yet been generally recognized. The subject has been avoided by theologians and neglected by students of literature. But a knowledge of the literary value of the Bible tends only to enhance the spiritual message, and that message loses none of its former intrinsic value.

The Bible has nothing to lose and much to gain by being subjected to the rigid scrutiny of the student of literature. And even if the student comes to the Bible with the expressed purpose of enjoying its literary value, he cannot reconstruct those great spiritual experiences without being changed by them. "No one is quite the same person after a new experience."¹ A comedy may not set forth primarily to teach a moral lesson, yet if the moral lesson is there it will be carried away by the audience. Though the literary value of the Bible is not its primary value, yet a wider recognition of the fact that the Bible does have such value may be a means of bringing it before

1. Philo Buck, Literary Criticism. p. 144.

a greater number of readers.

The influence of Biblical literature is especially seen in the writings of John Ruskin who quotes more from the Bible than from any other author. His mother instructed him in a Bible course daily from the time he could read with ease to the day he went to Oxford. The following is the list which his mother gave him to commit to memory:

Exodus,	Chapters 15th and 20th.
2 Samuel,	" 1st, from 17th verse to end.
1 Kings,	" 8th.
Psalms,	" 23d, 32d, 90th, 91st, 103d, 112th, 119th, 139th.
Proverbs,	" 2d, 3d, 8th, 12th.
Isaiah,	" 59th.
Matthew,	" 5th, 6th, 7th.
Acts,	" 26th.
1 Corinthians,	" 13th, 15th.
James,	" 4th.
Revelation,	" 5th, 6th.

Notice how often the lyric occurs. Ruskin himself says,

"And, truly, though I have picked up the elements of a little further knowledge--in mathematics, meteorology, and the like, in after life,--and owe not a little to the teaching of many people, this maternal installation of my mind in that property of chapters I count very confidently the most precious,

2. Robert Shafer, From Beowulf To Thomas Hardy, p. 571.

and, on the whole, the one essential part of all my education."

Literary criticism also has a value in aiding the reader of the Bible to understand better the content. One is in a position to interpret better certain sections of the Bible when one knows that they were written in poetry and that Hebrew poetry has certain peculiar characteristics. Moulton has called attention to this in the interpretation of the following poetry from Genesis:

5

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
 Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:
 For I have slain a man to my wounding,
 And a young man to my hurt:
 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
 Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

How many people are being addressed in the first two lines? One acquainted with the Hebrew system of parallelism in poetry knows that the second is a repetition of the thought of the first and those addressed in the second line are the same as those addressed in the first. The same thing occurs again in the third and fourth lines. How many men has he killed? The English reader who is not familiar with Hebrew poetry would be disposed to say that he had killed two, whereas, the fourth line being only a repetition of the third, he has killed only the one.

The account of creation in Genesis might be subject to less criticism by our scientists and might be better understood by our theologians if both recognized the fact that it is not a scientific, but a poetical account. Realism is in vogue today. The realist is interested in scientific accuracy. He is an accurate observer of details. The realist represents things as he sees them and does not seek in any way to interpret them. The primitive poets of the Bible were not realists in this sense. They were interested more in the general truths and interpretations than in details. Oriental poetry abounds in symbolism which cannot be read literally. It is fortunate that the first chapter of Genesis was written by a poet and not by a scientist. A scientific account of creation of that day would have little in common with this 20th century. But the writer has written in the universal language of poetry, which, if read as such, can be accepted by all ages.

The study of the Biblical lyric is especially fruitful to the student of the Bible. The lyric covers nearly the entire range of human experience. It is found in nearly every book of the Bible. When we become acquainted with the Biblical lyric we are acquainted with the major portion of Biblical literature. The lyric also gives us an interpretation of a people's psychology more than any other form of literature. Moulton says,⁴ "In the poetic side of literature we find a branch

4. Richard G. Moulton, World Literature, p. 402.

specially devoted to the expression of personality, and a medium for the self-revelation of an author. It is what we usually mean by the term Lyrics." This subjective quality of the lyric gives us an insight into the inner thoughts and feelings of the author and of the race for whom he speaks.

It is the purpose of this thesis to point out the poetical form and literary value of the Biblical lyric so that the Bible may be better appreciated and understood by English readers.

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

The source book of Christianity has been rightly termed the Bible, a derivative of the Greek word "biblion", meaning the book. The Bible has been called a library of books, and, from the standpoint of literary form and authorship, it is such. But in its unity of theme it is not a library of books, but one Book. The Bible was committed to writing over a period of about twelve hundred years, during which time civilization, government, and religion changed greatly. Yet the underlying theme remains the same. That which was uppermost in the mind of every writer and which permeated his entire work was the thought of sin and redemption. Each author deals with human suffering and its cause which is sin. In each there is the child-like faith in God as the Redeemer. Author after author cries out, even unto the very Son of God, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But each ends with the simple confession, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

"The topic of trouble and relief merges in that which is the dominant thought of all Old Testament literature--the judgment, the everlasting conflict daily going on between good and evil, in which evil is doomed."⁵

There is no more universal theme found in literature than that of human pain and suffering. It is because of this that the Bible has such a wide appeal, and though written by

5. Richard G. Moulton, Modern Reader's Bible, p. 1439.

Oriental has come to be the most loved and cherished book in the Occidental world. Our modern study of human behavior has shown us that man is psychologically the same regardless of race, nation, or age. The study of comparative religion has shown us that the spiritual experiences are basically the same regardless of creed. The Bible is a book which has been written by men "with like passions such as we" and deals with the same universal problems which we face.

The Bible is not a book which was sent ready-made from heaven. God has spoken to man through men. The only way in which God could reveal himself to the world was through human experience, and the Bible is the record of that experience. It is the history of the endeavor of a people to rise above their material environment and live a spiritual life. That which makes the Bible superior literature is the excellence of the experiences of those who wrote it.

"The Book of Psalms is recognized as the perfection of lyric poetry. It well may be. The musical meditation which is the essence of lyrics can find no higher field than the devout spirit which at once raises itself to the service of God, and overflows on the various sides of active and contemplative life."⁶

As long as humanity experiences pain and suffering and knows not the mystery of life the Bible will have a distinct

literary value because all men can read its pages and live again the experiences of those who wrote it.

There are three outstanding reasons why the Bible should contain much poetry. First, both poetry and religion deal with the human emotions. "The language of poetry seeks metrical form because it is in an especial sense the expression of emotion."⁷ Religion is mainly an emotional experience, and when Biblical writers were stirred to express their emotional experiences in the fullest sense it was natural that that expression should take poetical form. In the second place, there is a fundamental relation between religion and poetry in regard to source. "It is at the outset one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theater."⁸ This is true of all art and especially of poetry. "In their higher aspects, religion and poetry do not only minister to each other, they seem to unite."⁹ The Biblical writers wrote in poetical form so often because the same impulse which sent them delving into these spiritual mysteries also found the highest expression in poetical form. In the third place, the Biblical writers wrote not as individuals giving their individual experiences, but they wrote as spokesmen for their race. This again often necessitated poetical expression.

"The prose utterance of a tragic sufferer is so purely

7. Raymond MacDonald Alden, Introduction to Poetry, p. 125.
8. Jane Ellen Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual, p. 9.
9. Philo Buck, Literary Criticism, p. 127.

individual as to be almost wholly painful; verse utterance gives a certain impression of universal law underlying his words, and he becomes a spokesman for the sorrows of the whole race."¹⁰

The Lamentations of Jeremiah and the drama of Job are the poetical experiences not of individuals, but of a race.

Rhythm is a basic principle of poetry and may be secured in many different ways. Alden defines poetry from the viewpoint of the English language as "the art of representing human experiences, in so far as they are of lasting or universal interest, in metrical language."¹¹ Rhythm in Hebrew poetry consists not in metrical language but is carried into the very thought itself. "All art seeks the expression of beauty, poetry no less than the rest, and rhythm impresses the ear with an effect akin to that of beauty to the eye."¹² The uniqueness of Hebrew poetry is seen, however, in that it carries the rhythm into the thought also, and thus has an aesthetic appeal to the eye and mind as well as to the ear.

Bishop Lowth was the first to emphasize this characteristic of Hebrew poetry. In his Oxford Lectures in 1753, De sacra poesi Hebraeorum, he developed the principle which he termed "parallelismus membrorum." Hebrew poetry secures rhythm by means of parallelism of thought. Lowth found three different types of parallelism: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic.

10. Raymond MacDonald Alden, Introduction to Poetry, p. 200.

11. Ibid, p. 1.

12. Ibid, p. 193.

In synonymous parallelism the second line of each couplet strengthens the thought expressed in the first by repeating that thought in synonymous terms. An example of this is seen in Psalm 24:

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;
 The world, and they that dwell therein.
 For he hath founded it upon the seas,
 And established it upon the floods.
 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
 And who shall stand in his holy place?

By starting at the beginning and reading every other line one gets the complete thought of the poem in prose form. By starting with the second line and reading every other line the same thought is again secured in prose in different terms. When, however, the selection is read as a whole the rhythm is added to the thought and it becomes poetry.

In antithetic parallelism the second line enforces the thought of the first by way of contrast, the second line being opposite in thought to the first. An example of this is in Proverbs 10:

A wise son maketh a glad father:
 But a foolish son is a heaviness of his mother.
 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing:
 But righteousness delivereth from death.

The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous
to famish;

But he thrusteth away the desire of the wicked.

In synthetic parallelism the second line completes
the thought of the first, as in Psalm 27:

When evil-doers came upon me

To eat up my flesh,

Even mine adversaries and my foes,

They stumbled and fell.

To these three types of parallelism has been added a
fourth, called climactic or ascending parallelism. The second
line of the couplet in this type takes up a portion of the
thought given in the first line and repeats it and then adds
something to it, as in Psalm 68:

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;

Let them also that hate him flee before him.

As smoke is driven away,

So drive them away:

As wax melteth before the fire,

So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before

God,
Yea, let them rejoice with gladness.

This type of rhythm makes Hebrew poetry easily translated into any language, for a literal translation does not destroy the poetry.

There are beauties of Hebrew poetry which are lost in the English language, however. Rhythm, in Hebrew poetry, is secured not by the number of words or syllables in a line or verse, but by the number of accents.

"An accent is written upon every word with a twofold design, 1st, of marking its tone-syllable, and 2ndly, of indicating its relation to other words in the sentence. The great number of the accents has respect entirely to this second function, there being no difference in the quality of the stress as is marked by the Greek. . . . The punctuators have attempted not only to indicate the pauses to be made in reading, as is done by the stops in use in other languages, but to represent to the eye the precise position held by each word in the structure of the sentence."¹³

This rhythmical beauty is lost, however, in its usual English reading and is discovered only as the poetry is chanted, using the original Hebrew markings.

There are many methods of classifying lyrics but the method which proves most satisfactory with the Biblical lyrics is to classify them according to their approximation to the

13. William Henry Green, A Grammar of the Hebrew Language, p. 37.

pure song type. Thus we start with the brief song lyrics and go to the more formal and reflective lyrics, odes, elegies, and sonnets.

THE SONG LYRICS

The pure song lyric was written originally to be set to music and its full value cannot be appreciated unless it is sung. The song lyrics are usually brief, simple in style, and deal with but a single emotion. Psalm 117 is an example of this type. The singer breaks out spontaneously in praise of God. There is only one emotion set forth and it is expressed simply and briefly.

O praise the Lord, all ye nations;
 Laud him, all ye peoples.
 For his mercy is great toward us;
 And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.

The Song of Unity, Psalm 133, is another song lyric. It contains symbolism which is so characteristic of much of Oriental poetry.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
 For brethren to dwell together in unity!
 It is like the precious oil upon the head,
 That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard;
 That came down upon the skirt of his garments;
 Like the dew of Hermon that cometh down upon the
 mountains of Zion:

For there the Lord commanded the blessing,
Even life for evermore.

Unity is good and pleasant, therefore it has great value. In that respect it is like the precious oil which is poured upon the head. It is difficult for the Occidental to appreciate this symbol. One would not feel so comfortable with oil streaming down one's face and over one's clothes! But here we have missed the point which was in the mind of the Hebrew poet. Oil was precious to the Oriental, and so was unity. It is the excellency of unity which he is stressing by use of the symbol oil which is also precious. Dew is precious and thus becomes a fitting symbol for the desired unity of God's people.

In the Song of Songs a subject is treated by means of symbolism which would otherwise be offensive to the reader. Take, for instance, this passage in which "King Solomon (under the symbolic expression of an enclosed garden) proposes marriage and, (in the same symbol) is accepted:"¹⁴

A garden shut up is my sister, my bride,
A spring shut up,
A fountain sealed.
Thy shoots are an orchard of pomegranates,
With precious fruits;
Henna with spikenard plants,
Spikenard and saffron,

14. Richard G. Moulton, Modern Reader's Bible, p. 891.

Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense,
 Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.
 Thou art a fountain of gardens,
 A well of living waters,
 And flowing streams from lebanon.

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;
 Blow upon my garden,
 That the spices thereof may flow out.
 Let my beloved come into his garden,
 And eat his precious fruits.

I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride;
 I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
 I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
 I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Throughout the poem the subject of love is treated in a most intimate way under symbols which save it from being repulsive. In a way, the real meaning is obscured by the symbol rather than made clear. In no way can poetry like this be interpreted literally. Take the following lines:

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
 So is my beloved among the sons.
 I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
 And his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The excellence of the apple tree among the other trees of the forest is here the symbol of her lover's love among the love of other men. Compare this symbol with the following imagery from Sappho, in which the apple tree becomes a direct image to picture the loved-one:

Like the sweet apple which reddend upon the top-most
 bough,
 A-top on the topmost twig,--- which the pluckers for-
 got, somehow,--
 Forget it not, nay! But got it not, for none could get
 it till now.
 15

 15. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's translation.

THE DRAMATIC LYRIC

There is an historical relationship between drama and religion.

"The Greek word for a rite. . . . is dromenon, 'a thing done'. . . . It is a fact of cardinal importance that their word for theatrical representation, drama, is own cousin to their word for rite, dromenon; drama also means 'thing done'. Greek linguistic instinct pointed plainly to the fact that art and ritual are near relations."¹⁶

The Greek theater grew out of religious practices. The Greek went to the theater more as a religious duty than to be entertained. It is also to be noted that the first attempts at English drama were the miracle plays of the church.

The first elements of the drama are seen in the antistrophic choral singing, which developed until it came to include impersonators upon the stage.

The Hebrews had no drama as a distinct form. But this, instead of limiting their dramatic expression, permeated all forms of their literature with that impulse. Thus we find the dramatic element in the philosophical Book of Job, the idyl Song of Songs, the dramatic monologues and lyrics in the Psalms, and the prophetic rhapsody, as in Isaiah.

The essential element of drama is change. This may

16. Jane Ellen Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual, p. 35.

be secured in several ways. In many of Browning's dramatic lyrics, as *Andrea Del Sarto*, one person does the speaking and a second is presupposed. In *Micah* we have an example of dramatic personification, in which the mountains engage in conversation with God and Israel.

THE LORD

(to the people)

Arise, contend thou before the mountains,
And let the hills hear thy voice.

(to the mountains)

Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's indictment,
And ye enduring foundations of the earth:
For the Lord hath a controversy with his people,
And he will plead with Israel.

(to the people)

O my people, what have I done unto thee?
And wherein have I wearied thee?
Testify against me.
For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,
And redeemed thee out of the house of bondage;
And I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab
consulted,
And what Balaam the son of Beor answered him;

Remember from Shittim unto Gilgal,

That ye may know the righteous acts of the Lord.

THE PEOPLE (aside)

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,

And bow my self before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

With calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,

Or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,

The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

THE MOUNTAINS (rendering decision)

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;

And what doth the Lord require of thee,

But to do justly,

And to love mercy,

And to walk humbly with thy God?

Another type of dramatic lyric is seen in many of the Psalms in which there is an abrupt change of situation. This change, revealed in the speech of the poet, is especially noticeable in many of the Psalms which deal with suffering and the relief which comes to the sufferer. Psalm 139 is this type of dramatic lyric. In the first part of the poem the poet realizes the power of God to look into the very mind and soul

and there read his thoughts and inmost motives. There comes the realization that there is no escape from this divine insight, for God is everywhere. A parallel to this is seen in Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven":

I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
 I fled Him down the arches of the years;
 I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
 I hid from him and under running laughter
 Up vistaed hopes I sped;
 And shot, precipitated
 Adown titantic glooms of chasmed fears,
 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
 But with unhurrying chase
 And unperturbed pace,
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy
 They beat---and a Voice beat
 More instant than the Feet---
 "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

This thought, in Psalm 139, is the climax and the turning point. The poet turns from contemplation upon the omniscience of God to the praise of his wonderful powers and a desire for the death of all God's enemies. It may be difficult for the Occidental and Christian world to understand the hate which the Psalmist sometimes expresses for his fellowmen. But

this can better be understood when we realize that the Psalmist considered all sinful men as enemies of God, and, he reasons, "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?" This he terms a perfect hatred. The poem consists of strophe and antistrophe. The change comes at the beginning of the antistrophe, and the poet who at first was overburdened with the thought of the penetrating eye of God, closes with a prayer that God will search him and know him thoroughly. Moulton has given the following fitting title to this Psalm:

A SEARCHER OF HEARTS IS THY MAKER

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me.
 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
 Thou understandest my thought afar off.
 Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
 And art acquainted with all my ways.
 For there is not a word in my tongue,
 But, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
 Thou hast beset me behind and before,
 And laid thine hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 It is high, I cannot attain unto it.
 Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
 Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend into heaven, thou art there:

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning,

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall thy hand lead me,

And thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,

And the light about me shall be night;

Even the darkness hideth not from thee,

But the night shineth as the day:

The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

For thou hast possessed my reins:

Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

I will give thanks unto thee; for I am fearfully and

wonderfully made:

Wonderful are thy works;

And that my soul knoweth right well.

My frame was not hidden from thee,

When I was made in secret,

And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of

the earth.

Thine eyes did see mine unperfect substance,

And in thy books were all my members written,

Which day by day were fashioned,

When as yet there was none of them.

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!

How great is the sum of them!

If I should count them, they are more in number than
the sand:

When I awake, I am still with thee.

Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:

Depart from me therefore, ye bloodthirsty men.

For they speak against thee wickedly,

And thine enemies take thy name in vain.

Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?

And am not I grieved with those that rise up
against thee?

I hate them with perfect hatred:

I count them mine enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts;

And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

THE ODE

The ode is a very formal type of lyrical utterance which deals with an outstanding and exalted theme. Great national events often furnish this theme. All but two or three of the forty-four odes of Pindar were written in celebration of victories in the national games of Greece. The first two, and perhaps the best known, Biblical odes are the two processional odes, the Song of Miriam and Moses and the Song of Deborah. The first was written and sung to commemorate the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel at the time of their escape from bondage in Egypt. The latter was written to celebrate the victory of the Israelites over their Canaanitish foes. Originally the term ode was applied to elaborate lyrics which were intended for choral utterance, and were set to music. The Biblical writers of both of the above-named odes clearly state that they were thus originally given. In each case the men and women, led by their respective leaders, sang back and forth to each other.

The strict Pindaric ode consists of three types of stanzas, the strophe, antistrophe, and the epode. The strophe and antistrophe consist of the same number of lines. They may be repeated several times, the subject changing, but the form remains the same. The epode may occur each time or only at the end of the poem. The Vision ode at the conclusion of

the Book of Habakkuk shows a striking resemblance to the Pindaric form. The only difference being, the Hebrew poet adds to the main body of the poem a prelude and a postlude, which contain the poet's reflection and feeling as he witnesses the vision. In the strophe nature stands in awe and humility before the coming of the Lord. There is a parallel to this in Psalm 114:

The sea saw it and fled,
 Jordan was driven back.
 The mountains skipped like rams,
 The little hills like young sheep.

In the antistrophe the question is asked: for what purpose is the Lord coming? Is it because he is angry with nature? Again note the parallel to Psalm 114:

What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest?
 Thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?
 Ye mountains, that ye skip like rams;
 Ye little hills, like young sheep?

The epode answers the question. God is coming to judge his people.

JEHOVAH COME TO JUDGMENT

Prelude

O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and am afraid;
 O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years,
 In the midst of the years make it known:
 In wrath remember mercy!

Strophe

God cometh from Teman,
 And the Holy One from Mount Paran.
 His glory covereth the heavens,
 And the earth is full of his praise.
 And his brightness is as the light;
 He hath rays coming forth from his hand;
 And there is the hiding of his power.
 Before him goeth the pestilence,
 And fiery bolts go forth at his feet.
 He standeth and shaketh the earth;
 He beholdeth, and driveth asunder the nations:
 And the eternal mountains are scattered,
 The everlasting hills do bow;
 His ways are everlasting.
 I see the tents of Cushan in affliction;
 The curtains of the land of Midian do tremble.

Antistrophe

Is the Lord displeased against the rivers?
 Is thine anger against the rivers, or thy wrath
 against the sea,
 That thou dost ride upon thine horses,
 Upon thy chariots of salvation?
 Thy bow is made quite bare;
 Sworn are the chastisements of thy word.
 Thou dost cleave the earth with rivers;
 The mountains see thee and are afraid;
 The tempest of waters passeth by;
 The deep uttereth his voice,
 And lifteth up his hands on high;
 The sun and the moon stand still in their habitation
 At the light of thine arrows as they go,
 At the shining of thy glittering spear.
 Thou dost march through the land in indignation,
 Thou dost thresh the nations in anger.

Epode

Thou art come for the salvation of thy people,
 For the salvation of thine anointed:
 Thou dost smite off the head from the house of the
 wicked,
 Laying bare the foundation even unto the neck.
 Thou dost pierce with his own staves the head of his
 warriors:

(They came as a whirlwind to scatter me,
 Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.)
 Thou dost tread the sea with thine horses, the
 surge of mighty waters.

Postlude

I heard, and my belly trembled,
 My lips quivered at the voice;
 Rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled
 in my place:
 That I should rest waiting for the day of trouble,
 When he that shall invade them in troops cometh up
 against the people.
 For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
 Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
 The labour of the olive shall fail,
 And the fields shall yield no meat;
 The flocks shall be cut off from the fold,
 And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
 I will joy in the God of my salvation,
 Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength,
 And he maketh my feet like hinds' feet,
 And will make me to walk upon mine high places.

Whether this ode was ever rendered by a chorus or not can only be conjecture. However, we do know that it was originally set to music. The writer makes the comment concerning it: "A Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet, set to Shigionoth." The exact meaning of Shigionoth has been lost. But the author adds, "For the Chief Musician, on my stringed instruments."

THE ELEGY

Originally the term elegy was applied to poems of lamentation for the dead. However, both in classical and English usage the term has often been given to poems written on various subjects. But always the elegy is a formal and elaborate lyric which deals with a serious emotion. In the Greek and Latin elegy there is a hexameter line followed by a pentameter. The Hebrew gains a like effect by means of a couplet in which the second line is shortened. It is often shortened to the extent that the parallelism is destroyed, leaving only the one line of five accents.

The lament of the prophet Jeremiah is read by the average English reader as prose, while in reality it is poetry-- a dirge written in the elegiac line. The dirge begins:

How doth the city sit solitary	that was full of
	people!
How is she become as a widow,	she that was great
	among the nations!
Princess among the provinces,	how is she become
	tributary!

In the first of each line the poet's voice rises as the crescendo in music, while in the last there is the diminuendo in which the voice seems to choke with emotion. A caesura is often printed to show the break.

This form of the lyric adapts itself especially well to the expression of a deep emotion, which may either be of great joy or great grief.

David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan is not only the earliest, but also one of the most beautiful of the Biblical elegies. David's words,

Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women,

has become classic. This elegy illustrates the Hebrew principle of augmentation, in which a stanza or line is gradually added to in successive stanzas. Thus the line, "How are the mighty-- Fallen!" becomes, "How are the mighty-- Fallen in the midst of battle!" And finally,

How are the mighty--
Fallen!
And the weapons of war--
Perished!

The Biblical writer adds this comment to this poem: "And he bade them teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher." This elegy became the guild song of an organization formed in honor of Jonathan to foster skill in the bow.

DAVID'S LAMENT

Thy glory, O Israel,
 Is slain upon thy high places!
 How are the mighty--
 Fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,
 Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
 Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
 Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
 Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain
 upon you,
 Neither fields of offerings:
 For there the shield of the mighty was vilely
 cast away,
 The shield of Saul, as of one not anointed with oil.
 From the blood of the slain,
 From the fat of the mighty,
 The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
 And the sword of Saul returned not empty.
 Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
 And in their death they were not divided;
 They were swifter than eagles,
 They were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel,

Weep over Saul,

Who clothed you in scarlet delicately,

Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty--

Fallen in the midst of the Battle!

O Jonathan,

Slain upon thy high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan

Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:

Thy love to me was wonderful,

Passing the love of women.

How are the mighty--

Fallen!

And the weapons of war--

Perished!

THE SONNET

The sonnet is the most formal and reflective of lyrics. Though the root meaning of the term refers to a song to be sung to accompaniment, yet it "is rarely used for other than distinctly conscious and formal expression; at its best, too, it expresses a definite intellectual conception fused with a single emotion."¹⁷ In the sonnet form dominates thought. Thus an English sonnet must have exactly fourteen lines. The Italian sonnet also consists of fourteen lines, made up of an octave and sestet. The exact mechanical form of the sonnet, however, must necessarily vary with different races and ages.

"The term 'sonnet' was used rather loosely by the Elizabethans, being applied to any lyric expression, irrespective of metrical form. . . . Many experimental forms were tried until Shakespeare established a permanent form."¹⁸

It would be impossible to have sonnets in the Bible in the customary sense of English and Italian sonnets.

"But is this limitation to fourteen lines the essential of the sonnet, or is it only a matter of prescriptive usage? I would contend that if the sonnet is to rank as a leading poetic type in universal literature its principle must be deeper. . . . To generalize, we may say that wherever thought runs into poetic moulds we have the spirit of the sonnet; it belongs

17. Raymond MacDonald Alden, An Introduction to Poetry, p. 70.

18. Julian Abernethy, English Literature, p. 128.

to the individuality of different literatures to decide whether
 only one mould shall be used, or more than one."¹⁹

The Biblical sonnet does not limit itself to any one form. In the number sonnet the form is fixed for that particular sonnet. This form is set by the opening lines. Proverbs 6:16-19 is an example of this:

There be six things which the Lord hateth,
 Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him:
 Haughty eyes,
 A lying tongue,
 And hands that shed innocent blood;
 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,
 Feet that be swift in running to mischief,
 A false witness that uttereth lies;
 And he that soweth discord among brethern.

There is also a free Biblical sonnet which is characterized by high parallelism, not of the lines in the stanza, but of the several parts of the poem. Job 28 is such a sonnet. Here a sonnet is inserted into a drama, being a portion of the speech of Zophar, one of Job's comforters. Note the parallel to this in Romeo and Juliet, Act 1, scene 5, where Shakespeare inserts a sonnet into a dialogue. This Biblical sonnet consists of strophe and antistrophe, each containing twenty strains,

 19. Richard G. Moulton, Literary Study of the Bible, p. 308.

and a conclusion: Throughout it is characterized by high parallelism which binds each part of the poem into a whole. The couplet parallelism is varied in both the strophe and antistrophe by the insertion of two triplets, though they do not occur in the same place.

Strophe

Surely there is a mine for silver,
 And a place for gold which they refine.
 Iron is taken out of the earth,
 And brass is molten out of the stone.

Man setteth an end to darkness

And searcheth out to the furthest bound

The stones of thick darkness and of the shadow
 of death.

He breaketh open a shaft away from where men sojourn;

They are forgotten of the foot that passeth by;

They hang afar from men, they swing to and fro.

As for the earth, out of it cometh bread;

And underneath it is turned up as it were by fire.

The stones thereof are the places of sapphires,

And it hath dust of gold.

That path no bird of prey knoweth,

Neither hath the falcon's eye seen it;

The proud beasts have not trodden it,

For hath the fierce lion passed thereby.

He putteth forth his hand upon the flinty rock;
 He overturneth the mountains by the roots.
 He cutteth out passages among the rocks;
 And his eye seeth every precious thing.
 He bindeth the streams that they trickle not;
 And the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.

Antistrophe

But where is wisdom found?
 And where is the place of understanding?
 Man knoweth not the price thereof;
 Neither is it found in the land of the living.
 The deep saith, It is not in me:
 And the sea saith, It is not with me.
 It cannot be gotten for gold,
 Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.
 It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir,
 With the precious onyx, or the sapphire.
 Gold and glass cannot equal it,
 Neither shall the exchange thereof be jewels
 of fine gold
 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystals:
 Yea, the price of wisdom is above rubies;
 The topas of Ethiopia shall not equal it,
 Neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

Whence then cometh wisdom?
 And where is the place of understanding?
 Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living,
 And kept close from the fowls of the air.
 Destruction and Death say,
 We have heard a rumor thereof with our ears.
 God understandeth the way thereof,
 And he knoweth the place thereof.

Conclusion

For he looketh to the ends of the earth,
 And he seeth under the whole heaven;
 To make a weight for the wind;
 Yea, he meteth out the waters by measure.
 When he made a degree for the rain,
 And a way for the lightning of the thunder:
 Then did he see it and declare it;
 He established it, yea, and searched it out.
 And unto man he said,
 Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom:
 And to depart from evil is understanding.

CONCLUSION

No study of world literature is complete without a study of Biblical literature. The Bible claims for itself the right to be placed side by side with the classical literature in the library and the class-room of today. And certainly neither the Greeks nor the Romans have produced lyrics which can be compared with those of the Psalmist. A study of modern literature with reference to Biblical allusions shows the influence of the Bible upon modern thought. We have borrowed our religious thinking from the Jewish nation.

"Our science, our art, our philosophy, our politics, are, in the main, the continuation of processes commenced by the ancient Greeks. But in our spiritual nature we are not Greek, but Hebrew: product of the spiritual movement which has made the Bible."²⁰

Certainly, then, the study of Biblical literature deserves a place in the study of every student of world literature.

But no less important is the study of the Biblical lyric to the student of religion. If so much of the revelation of God to the world has been through this medium of expression then surely it deserves our attention.

20. Richard G. Moulton, World Literature, p. 10.

"God has always stayed the ages upon some bard or singer, and breathed His purposes and providences through parables and poems."²¹ For this reason Newell Dwight Hillis calls the poets the prophets of the new era, for they are always looking forward, while the priests tend to look backward.

"Passing by the soldier, the philosopher, and the king, God hath given the poet in every age the first place in the affections of the people. That which theologians cannot do, the poets easily accomplish. From David's far-off era down to the time of Browning and Tennyson, God hath breathed into poems and songs the revelation of His providence and His love."²²

There is a preservative value in poetry. History clearly shows that that thinker's thoughts have lived the longest which have been expressed in the best literary style. We may enjoy reading a good poem long after we have outgrown the scientific knowledge and philosophical attitude expressed in it. Dante's Divine Comedy and Milton's Paradise Lost are still widely read though we reject their cosmology.

No one need fear that the literary study of the Bible will prove detrimental to it. We may well encourage such study, knowing that if the Bible is subjected to a study in the light of literary criticism the result will be most favorable.

21. Newell Dwight Hillis, Great Books as Life Teachers, p. 26.
 22. Ibid. p. 154.

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