Biblical Interpretation and Method

Essays in Honour of John Barton

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Foreword

Over twenty years ago, I had the privilege of teaching a class at Oxford with John Barton, one of a number of continuing seminars that attempted to bridge the gap between biblical scholarship and systematic theology. Part of John’s distinctiveness as a biblical scholar has always been his readiness to engage with people in other areas of theological study, and to register the fact that Scripture does not exist in a historical, liturgical, or doctrinal vacuum; and I found the experience of collaborating with him a delight and an education. But the fact that he is willing to engage across what are often some of the least porous boundaries in the intellectual world reflects an unusual sensitivity not only to the character of the biblical text but also to the nature of texts in general. John has been able to make some brilliantly fresh contributions to the mainstream of biblical scholarship partly by his awareness that, when all the analysis of sources and composition history has been scrupulously done, what remains is, in spite of everything, a textual unit. Someone has put it together in an imaginative act, and it needs to be read synthetically as well as analytically. The ‘plain meaning’ of Scripture is a notoriously unclear concept; but John has, crucially, helped us to see that it involves at least a recognition of what that final imaginative act presents—what (to borrow the language of one of the pieces collected here) the ‘story world’ of this text looks like.

It is a subtle position—not quite what has been understood by ‘canonical criticism’, certainly not a tone-deaf literalism, something of Ricoeur’s ‘second naivety’, and in no way a competitor with the various necessary critical dismantlings and suspicions that flesh out the material from which a final text emerges. As many of the intriguing essays in these pages will show, this is a method that forbids us to adopt either a bland attitude to the text as it is or to look for a more primitive layer of tradition from which we can deduce a ‘real’ meaning. Texts are there to be read, to be used; they are political and rhetorical and never innocent of the clash of interests. But for John this does not mean that they are no more than the deposit of long past ideological battles. When he turns to the theological placement of all this, it is clear that he takes quite seriously the remarkable claim made by Jews and Christians that such a text, read in, by, and to a community in ritual settings, can deliver a transforming and liberating intervention in the human world—the Word of God. Scriptural revelation is something that we understand not by ignoring either the history of a text or the character that it has finally taken as a unit whose different elements deliberately reflect on and speak to each other, but by trying to read at one and the same time the process and the outcome, the diversity and the unity.
Intertextuality

Intertextuality: Method and Theory in Job and Psalm 119

Will Kynes

— ‘How do you define intertextuality?’
— ‘How do YOU define humanity?’

The snippet of ‘conversation’ cited in the epigraph comes from my attempt to get a computer program to write this chapter for me. It might have worked, because Cleverbot has scored 59 per cent on the Turing Test, meaning it was able to fool users into thinking they were interacting with a human more than half the time. Cleverbot’s output is so easily confused with human conversation because the program functions by taking lines earlier users have input and repeating them in a similar context, making everything Cleverbot ‘says’ human language; users are not interacting with a computer as much as with all those humans who have ‘spoken’ to the computer in the past.

Thus, Cleverbot is computerized intertextuality. As ‘intertextuality’, originally formulated by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, was developed by her fellow poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes (thus contributing to what is now known simply as ‘Theory’), it came to express the belief that all texts, all of life even, are composed of words that have already been said. Authors fade into insignificance as their works become locations for this textual repetition, merely a few inches of sticky real estate on an infinite intertextual web stretching across space and time. With the ‘death of the Author’ comes the loss of intentional agency in texts, and little (if anything) remains to separate them from what Cleverbot spits out. Barthes (1977: 146), for example, reduces the author to a hand, writing words on a page. What texts mean cannot exist in

2 See <http://cleverbot.com/).
3 This is evident in Kristeva’s description of text as ‘ideologeme’, which inserts the text into ‘the historical and social text’ (Kristeva 1981: 37, emphasis mine). This view is most famously presented in the dictum of Jacques Derrida (1976: 158): ‘there is nothing outside of the text’.
their automaton creators, but even readers are entwined in the intertextual web, their responses also determined by their textual surroundings, so the ability to draw any meaning from texts is put into question. We could imagine two Cleverbots infinitely ‘talking’ to each other and get an idea of the meaningfulness with which intertextuality threatens existence.

This theoretical version of intertextuality has not been widely embraced in its fullest form, unsurprisingly. Even Kristeva, who coined the term, slipped at times into a more methodological discussion of texts, which set aside the more radical implications of the theory in order to discuss what authors had done with earlier texts. Following her example, a second circumscribed version of intertextuality has developed, which examines connections between actual texts as an aid to their interpretation. This intertextual ‘method’ could again be divided into two versions, which are often referred to as ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’. ‘Diachronic’ is best understood as a sequential approach, in which the relative dates of texts are important because one author is referring to the work of another, and ‘synchronic’ is best considered a simultaneous mode of reading texts ‘all at one time’, in which readers are free to pursue textual resonances irrespective of direct historical relationships between them, because ‘the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed’ (Barthes 1977: 148).

Thus, in the example above, a diachronic approach would not only identify what I have alluded to (my conversation with Cleverbot), but also, setting itself apart from mere source hunting, discuss why I have incorporated that earlier text into my own (to illustrate the various types of intertextuality). The synchronic approach, reading texts ‘all at one time’, could compare my conversation with Cleverbot with the following passage:

Applications of intertextuality as an interpretative method amount to what we might call a ‘soft’ understanding of the concept—simply adding another method to the toolbox of the biblical critic. But the original idea is a ‘hard’ one: a theory about texts in general, and indeed about how human beings understand the world as a whole, for which intertextual ‘readings’ of specific texts are merely evidence or illustration. (Barton 2013: 9, emphasis mine)

Neither of these texts involves an intentional allusion to the other because John Barton wrote beforehand and a computer program cannot intend (though perhaps this is a matter for further philosophical debate). Nevertheless, awash in the sea of language, the intersection of these two texts is still quite meaningful (significant?) for me as a reader. The fact that a computer, by chance or clever programming, has produced a definition of intertextuality similar to that of the honoree of this Festschrift is itself a telling testimony to the potential of unintended textual intersections to convey meaning, like that between my question about intertextuality and the question of an earlier Cleverbot user about humanity that the computer dredged up.

As the admittedly simplified account I have given of them above demonstrates, each of the three versions of intertextuality (the theoretical and the diachronic and synchronic methodological versions) approaches texts differently and draws from them different results. The diachronic approach employs ‘traditional’ views of authors and their intentions to extract concrete exegetical insight from the limited identifiable references from a later text to an earlier one. The synchronic one practices a more ‘progressive’ approach to address the meaning readers may discover by ‘rubbing texts together’ (Culler 1981: 118). The theoretical version is less of an approach to texts and more of a ‘mindset’, a philosophy that leaves texts behind to make more abstract and radical pronouncements about meaning and life in general. Since these divergent approaches are all covered by the same umbrella term, ‘intertextuality’, there has been significant jostling between the supporters of each to take the term firmly for their view and push the others into the rain, though, at times, they have all attempted to trade in this crowded umbrella for a new one. This antagonism has obscured the fact that all three concepts may be pursued in mutually beneficial ways.

In biblical studies, this jostling has generally been between the two methodological approaches, with the diachronic version finding broader acceptance in the historically oriented field, while the theoretical discussion has been muted. Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood (2011: 31) argue that this reflects the nature of biblical scholarship itself, with its ‘susceptibility to methodolatry and methedone addiction’. They chide biblical scholars for

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4 ‘Thus Barthes’ attempt to give life to the reader through the death of the Author endangers the reader as well (Irwin 2004: 233–4).
5 She even claimed that the particular edition a scholar used was important. Several scholars note this incongruous interpretive move. See, for example, Culler (1981: 106–07). Mary Orr (2003: 21–32) argues that Kristeva’s understanding of intertextuality was not as radical as is often assumed.
6 See, for example, Macy (2000: 204). There is some slippage in the application of these terms from their origins in the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1983: 79–98), which can be unhelpful, particularly when they are equated with ‘historical’ and ‘literary’, respectively.
7 For the distinction between ‘meaning’, which resides in texts by virtue of authorial intent, and ‘significance’, which is drawn from texts by readers, see Hirsch (1967: 8). See also Barton (2007: 86).
8 For the ‘traditional’ versus ‘progressive’ dichotomy, see Flett (1991: 3).
9 Kristeva (1984: 59–60) herself discarded ‘intertextuality’ for ‘transposition’. Graham Allen (2011: 214) notes how the concept has been renamed several times. In biblical studies, the two most common suggestions to rename diachronic intertextuality are ‘inner-biblical exegesis’ and ‘inner-biblical allusion’ (e.g., Miller 2011: 305). Neither of these is satisfying because both restrict intertextual connections to the biblical canon.
10 Barton (2007: 188) observes in biblical criticism ‘a constant crisscrossing of synchronic and diachronic dimensions’. For example, the diachronic search for sources underlying biblical texts was motivated by inconsistencies perceived when it was read synchronically (Barton 2000: 36). Barton (2013: 15–16) also suggests that methodological approaches can be used to illustrate the theoretical version of intertextuality.
not engaging with Theory beyond taking its ideas, such as intertextuality, and ‘domesticating’ them into method (35). Following their lead, Barton (2013: 12) has warned biblical scholars that the use of ‘soft’ versions of intertextuality ‘may lead to misunderstanding in any attempted dialogue with critics outside the biblical world, who may treat biblical scholars’ work as naïve and inexpressible, thinking that it is meant to relate to areas of literary theory of which it is in fact innocent’.

Space is not available here to survey these debates over the proper application of the term ‘intertextuality’ in biblical studies. Elsewhere, I have attempted to respond to the charge that diachronic intertextuality is no more than ‘the banal sense of “study of sources”’ (Kristeva 1984: 59-60), which should drop the name ‘intertextuality’ because it is untrue to Kristeva’s original intent, by arguing that the charge of banality is subjective and exaggerated. Furthermore, the recourse to Kristeva’s original intent to define the term in perpetuity is contradicted by the nature of progressive intertextuality, the practice of Kristeva herself, and the way words actually work (Kynes 2012: 21–3). Here, however, inspired by Barton’s comment (as my thinking about biblical interpretation often is), I would like briefly to examine how ‘intertextuality’ is now understood outside of the world of biblical scholarship, to see how the methodological and often diachronic approach often practised in biblical studies might be perceived.

RECENT LITERARY CRITICISM ON INTERTEXTUALITY

A synchronic (in the Saussurean sense) sampling of literary critical work from the last four years from authors who explicitly align their approaches with ‘intertextuality’ reveals some surprising results. Literary critics are examining topics like the ‘response’ of James Joyce ‘to his precursor’ Gustave Flaubert. They are studying the intertextual connections in Shakespeare and other Jacobean dramatists with Italian literature and intellectual culture, and demonstrating how they ‘encouraged spectators to recall specific sources and cultural discourses’. There is interest in ‘the full range of relationships’

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11 For a recent overview, though one that deals primarily with the methodological side of the debate, see Miller (2011).
12 Baron (2012: 3). Though her study involves detailed discussions of allusions and even incorporates biographical evidence, she argues that, for studying James Joyce, these types of observations are part of intertextuality, but do not exhaust its potential, which has a ‘far-reaching ambit, or infinite compass’ (10–11).
13 Redmond (2009: 129). Even in his synchronic comparison of Shakespeare’s intertextual use of Italian sources with that of his contemporaries, he argues ‘direction of influence’ is important (25).
14 Kenny (2011: 58). He notes that intertextuality also designates ‘how readers have always inevitably interpreted [Rabelais’] texts by applying other texts they have read, including ones from after Rabelais’s lifetime’ (58), but he leaves this facet of interpretation unexplored.
15 Lemaster (2010: 801). This apparently diachronic feature of her intertextual study is combined with a synchronic ‘reading back’ of Lee’s work through Roy’s to provide ‘reciprocal illumination’ (791).
16 Even Barthes (1977: 147) observes, albeit dismissively, that by limiting the meaning of a text so it can be ‘explained’, the concept of the Author ‘suits criticism very well’.
17 For a discussion of Theory’s decline but not its irrelevance, see Moore and Sherwood (2011: 2–27), and for attempts to hasten its demise, see, for example, Eagleton (2003) and Patil and Corral (2005).
ideas of influence and imitation, has made its impact even though many literary critics have left the infinite abstraction of Theory, banal in its own way, and returned to methodological approaches to texts and their authors. Thus, there is hope for meaningful dialogue between biblical and literary scholars on intertextuality, particularly if they heed Barton’s warning and acknowledge the influence of intertextual Theory on their work.

FROM ‘SWEET’ TO ‘SICKENING’: PSALM 119 AND JOB

As the consummate post-Theoretical move, to demonstrate the gains provided to the ‘soft’ study of biblical intertextuality by its ‘hard’ forebear, I will put it into practice as a method of interpretation. Job is an ideal textual example because it is so criss-crossed with connections to other texts that even nineteenth-century interpreters, long before Kristeva, noted its involvement in a broader textual dialogue. T. K. Cheyne, for example, provided a thorough inventory of biblical parallels in Job. Just for the Psalms, he listed seventeen parallels, which he divided into those from ‘undeniably later psalms’ which were ‘inspired by the parallels in Job’ and those from psalms of disputed date, which, with the exception of those in Psalm 88, were ‘known to and imitated by the authors of Job’ (Cheyne 1887: 84, 88). This is, of course, pure ‘source-hunting’, the type about which Kristeva and other theoretical intertextualists like to complain. Banality, however, is in the eye of the beholder. For Cheyne (1887: 88–9), these textual connections contributed to an argument that Job was written during the exile, and this has had significant effects, not only on the interpretation of Job, but of Israelite religion more broadly.

The development of intertextuality enables a more sophisticated reevaluation of the textual parallels discovered by the ‘source hunters’ a century ago. By way of example, I will assess Cheyne’s repeated mention of parallels between Job and Psalm 119, an intertextual connection that has not previously been examined in any depth. Cheyne lists four parallels between Psalm 119 and Job, and, because he considers Psalm 119 one of the ‘undeniably later psalms’, he declares without question that these parallels were inspired by Job. This judgement, however, does not withstand an analysis that, informed by the development of intertextuality, looks less at the influence of an earlier text on a later one, and more at the interpretation of a textual precursor by a later author (Clayton and Rothstein 1991: 3–7). It is thus evident that, as Patricia Tull (2000: 67) observes, ‘As long as the concept of “influence” reigned, opportunities to examine the many ways in which later

19 Bateson Wright (1883: 11) similarly claims the psalm ‘is evidently much indebted’ to Job.

20 Carol Newsom (1996: 388) notes the ‘ironic echo’ of Ps. 119:50 in this verse, but Georg Fohrer (1963: 171 n. 19) claims Psalm 119 is dependent on Job here, as does Alfrons Deissler (1955: 150), primarily on the basis of Job’s ‘greater literary originality’. This contributes to Deissler’s argument that the psalm is the product of a late post-exilic wisdom school (287).
21 Job again uses יהוֹמָכ while the psalmist uses יהוה.
22 Job returns to the imagery of ‘loathsome’ food from 6:7. For this translation of יהוֹמָכ, see Fohrer (1963: 158) and Horst (1968: 111). The Targum, however, translates Job in agreement with the psalm, so the change could merely be a scribal error (Holtscher 1952: 22–3), though its correspondence with Job’s proclivity for parody suggests otherwise.
determined, but also a concept of authorial intent for its meaning.\textsuperscript{23} But it is also one that cannot be understood fully from the perspective of influence, since it focuses not on the impact of precursor texts or their authors on later texts, but on later authors' use of earlier texts to further their rhetorical aims.\textsuperscript{24}

Once parodies between texts like these are identified, they silder together so that 'a current of sense' flows between them (Johnson 1976: 586), and thus both inspire the search for and inform the interpretation of other connections. So I now return to the other two parallels Cheyne mentions. In the first, the psalmist laments, 'My soul melts away \(\text{התפתחות אולם} \) for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word' (Ps. 119:28), and Job similarly cries, 'My friends scorn me; my eye pours out \(\text{حلول אולם} \) tears to God' (Job 16:20). The verb \(\text{حلول} \) appears only three other times in the Hebrew Bible (Prov. 19:13; 27:15; Eccl. 10:18) but nowhere else in the context of lament.\textsuperscript{25} In Cheyne's final parallel the psalmist complains against the arrogant—The arrogant smear me with lies \(\text{profession אולם} \), but with my whole heart I keep your precepts' (Ps. 119:69)—and Job says the same of his friends—As for you, you whitewash with lies \(\text{ profession אולם} \); all of you are worthless physicians' (Job 13:4). This image of smearing with lies is unique to these two passages. The former parallel is rather weak, so I would be unwilling to suggest dependence if not for the other connections between Job and the psalm. The second is much stronger, and if, as the parodies above suggest, it is read as Job alluding to the psalm, it has the effect of associating Job's friends with the 'arrogant' from the psalm and Job with the righteous psalmist.

When read intertextually for their hermeneutical significance and not merely for their historical contribution to the dating of Job and the psalm, the parallels Cheyne has identified demonstrate the subtle and yet forceful way Job uses allusions to the Psalms to further his arguments against both the friends and God. This, in turn, questions the historical relationship between the texts Cheyne suggested, instead making Job's dependence on the psalm more likely. Cheyne, however, has not exhausted the connections between the texts.

When Job laments, 'What I dread \(\text{創造 אולם} \) befalls me' (3:25), this communicates his loss of hope even more poignantly when compared to the psalmist, who can still confidently entreat, 'Turn away the disgrace that I dread \(\text{創造 אולם} \), for your ordinances are good' (Ps. 119:39).\textsuperscript{26} Then, in Ps. 119:73 and Job 10:8, while the psalmist sees his creation as a ground on which to request understanding of God's commandments,\textsuperscript{27} Job considers his creation a basis for his complaint against God's destruction.\textsuperscript{28} The closely paralleled initial phrase indicates Job is alluding to the psalm.\textsuperscript{29} When, a few verses later, Job accuses God of 'hiding' \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) life, steadfast love, and care 'in your [God's] heart \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) (10:12–13) so that the deity can incriminate and destroy him, he parodies the psalmist's declaration, 'With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) from your commandments \(\text{وضوع אולם} \): I treasure \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) your word \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) in my heart \(\text{وضوع אולם} \), so that I may not sin \(\text{켁 אולם} \) against you' (Ps. 119:10–11). Whereas the psalmist hides God's word in his heart so that he might not sin against the deity, Job suggests that God has hidden God's favour for him in God's heart so that the deity might wrong him. In the following verse of Job, he says, 'If I sin \(\text{/topic אולם} \), you watch me and do not acquit me of my iniquity' (10:14). Who, Job seems to ask, is watching you, God, when you sin against me? Further, as Job demonstrates by a further allusion to this passage from Psalm 119, he has not sinned. He claims, 'I have not departed \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) from the commandment \(\text{وضوع אולם} \): I have treasured \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) in my bosom the words \(\text{وضوع אולם} \) of his mouth' (23:12). This concludes a cluster of character-confirming psalmic allusions.\textsuperscript{30} Though the psalmist only requests God's help in not straying from the deity's commandments, Job declares his consistent fidelity.

I have focused on Job's speeches in the dialogue here because this is where Job's allusions to the psalm are the strongest, but weaker intertextual resonances with Psalm 119 appear elsewhere in the book.\textsuperscript{31} Some of the parallels I have discussed may not have been intended by the Job poet, and so may not be allusions, but if, as the parodies in Job 6 suggest, the author knew the psalm, then all are possible, and, in light of the rarity of the shared language, the meaning they offer the dialogue as allusions, and the Job poet's evident penchant for psalmic allusions, also all seem probable. But intertextuality has taught us that even if they did not exist in the mind of the author, they still exist for readers as these texts enter the ineluctable textual interconnectivity of language. In fact, the reappearance of these rare words and phrases either proves that one of these authors knew the work of the other (or a very

\textsuperscript{23} Even Linda Hutcheon (1985: 88, 40), who denies a 'Hirshian view of the real author's meaning', must resort to the 'encoded or inferred intention' embedded in the text to discuss parody.

\textsuperscript{24} See Kynes (2011: 276–310).

\textsuperscript{25} Akkadian and Ugaritic parallels suggest it may even be a different verb, which means 'to be sleepless' (Pohier 1963: 281).

\textsuperscript{26} The verb \(\text{อาคาร} \) is only found five times in the Hebrew Bible, and only elsewhere in Deut. 28:60 immediately following \(\text{ וכל אולם} \).

\textsuperscript{27} 'Your hands have made and fashioned me \(\text{وضوع נבטי אולם} \): give me understanding that I may learn your commandments' (119:73).

\textsuperscript{28} 'Your hands fashioned and made me \(\text{وضوع נבטי אולם} \): and now you turn and destroy me' (10:8).

\textsuperscript{29} The midrash mentions the similarity between Ps. 119:73 and Job 10:8, 10, 11 (Braude 1959: vol. 2, 265).

\textsuperscript{30} Job 23:10 // Ps. 1:1; 6: 139:23–24; Job 23:11 // Ps. 73:2. 'For one brief moment, Job is once again at home with his inherited religious language and can use it to express his unity with God' (Newsom 1996: 509). Similarly, Cline (1989: vol. 2, 598).

similar common source) or that intertextual Theory is right about the unavoidable and often unconscious recycling of texts, and, indeed, it probably does a little of both, since the two need not be mutually exclusive. As the literary criticism surveyed above suggests, intentional allusions are part of a broader understanding of intertextuality.

Though my intertextual approach has been primarily diachronic and methodological and therefore focused on how the author of Job used earlier texts, it has also considered the reader, but only inasmuch as the author of Job is a reader. His reading of Psalm 119, expressed through Job’s reading, makes the psalm a weapon with which to attack God for the deity’s aberrant antagonistic behavior. It adds potent rhetorical force to Job’s complaint by parodying the psalmist’s affirmation of his faithfulness to and love for God’s praiseworthy word and commandments in the consummate Torah Psalm, in order to accuse God (and the friends) of violating the divine word that Job has faithfully upheld. Job uses the psalm as a standard by which to prove his innocence and charge God with guilt. Because Job’s argument aims at his vindication, leaving it there with a mere rejection of God’s goodness would serve little purpose. The intention must be to persuade God to act in accordance with the psalm, keeping his ‘word’ and acting out the basic goodness Job must believe still remains behind the hostility. By speaking of God’s ‘word’ in human words, the psalmist makes it available to be taken up and used in new ways, even against God.

Although diachronically the psalm was earlier than Job’s use of it, synchronically its own significance for subsequent readers is affected by the intertextuality, which draws into question any reading of the psalm as an expression of easy confidence in God’s ‘word’. What if God decides to act the way he did towards Job? By incorporating the psalmist’s own words into his lament, Job magnifies the aspects of lament in the psalm, which also involve appeals to God’s ‘word’ (e.g., Ps. 119:169–170).

This methodological study also offers theoretical insight. If God’s ‘word’ can be employed against God himself, whether that be the abstract ‘word’ in the psalm or the concrete words of the psalm, then this suggests both a distance between God and God’s word (since God can appear, at least, to act in violation of God’s ‘word’) and an identification between them (since God can be expected to act according to God’s ‘word’). Since God is the ultimate

Author, this illuminates the relation of human authors to their texts. Like God, authors ‘reveal’ themselves in texts and yet transcend them. They cannot be reduced to texts; a ‘human-all-too-human’ remainder always exists (Burke 2002: 193). It does all come down to how you define humanity. This contradiction between the transcendent and the empirical (Burke 2002: 201) is at the heart of interpretation, of the conflict between Theory and method, and of Job’s wrestling to reconcile the just God of his faith with the unjust one of his experience.

It is an honour to dedicate this chapter to John Barton. His scholarly clarity and personal kindness have had a great influence on me. I am sure intertextual connections to his work (both intentional and unintentional) will be found throughout my own for years to come.

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32 Similarly, ‘The only reader in Kristeva is the writer reading another text’ (Clayton and Rothstein 1991: 21).

33 The referent of ‘Torah’ in the psalm is debated. Kraus (1993: vol. 2, 413–14) offers several options, ranging from a proto-canon to priestly instruction in the Temple. Foerker (1963: 366) suggests that, at least in Job 23:12 and Ps. 119:11, Job and the psalmist are not referring to the Law in the narrow sense, but general ethical demands (‘der Lebensweisheit’; cf. Prov. 2:1; 7:1).

34 Which Barthes (1977: 146) affirms even as he denies the existence of both divine and human authors.


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