Literary Criticism versus Public Criticism: Further Thoughts on the Matter of Biblical Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

The Biblical text, as it is known to us, is a literary text which is approached by the general reader as a literature manifested in a book format with a theological orientation. However, professional Biblical critics employ scientific analytical tools that might challenge the concept of a Biblical book as a complete work, presenting instead the Biblical literature as literary fragments with no concept of the whole. These two different approaches to the same text create a gap between the academic-professional analytical study of the Bible and the lay-theological reading of the Bible as a whole. Recently, a substantial change in the academic approach to the Scriptures has taken place and scholars intend to reach the general reader as well. However, the attempt to bridge between scholarship and a theologically oriented reading of the Bible as a whole seems to create a methodological confusion in the realm of scholarship. Thus, this essay seeks to explore the roots of the confusion through a clearer definition of the essence of Biblical professional criticism on the one hand, and a theological reading of the Bible as a whole, on the other.

A HOW TO READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT? THE ONGOING DEBATE BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND LAY READERS

Since the end of the 19th century Biblical criticism has distinguished itself through a strict methodological framework that focused on the history of the Biblical literature. The aim was to retrieve the origins of the historical settings of the atomic literary unit, assuming that the origin was a sporadic unit that

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gradually has been developed into the canon through a complex process of redaction. This method of Biblical analysis was applied not only to the Biblical narrative, but also took a similar approach to the study of the prophetic literature. The analytical method has depicted the narrative (specifically the Pentateuch) as a chain of isolated genres or tales and regarded the prophetic books as originally independent short utterances that are the kernels of this literary material. This critical-analytical method was clear and well defined both from the literary aspect and the philological criteria that determine the units (consult Gitay 2001: 101-128). Thus, Biblical scholarship mapped the historicity of the given text and the outcome of this massive work can be seen at the universities’ libraries where shelves upon shelves of books and journals compose a gigantic research literature written in a strict technical-professional manner for a limited circle of experts. These experts engage with a tiring technical language that deals with complex issues that relate indirectly to the Bible itself, focusing on matters of composition and transmission. The result was that scholarship has deepened our knowledge of the process of the literary transmission of the Biblical canon from orality through the written scroll to the printed Book. However, the outcome of this massive scholarship has been problematic regarding the lay readers of the Bible and its pious students who are interested in the Bible itself; in its meaning and theological lesson rather than in the actual history of the text.

A complex situation has been created. The circle of readers of the vast literature of careful philological and genetic investigation is confined to a close guild of professionals while the majority of the readers and the devoted students of the Scriptures—who search for the message and lesson—remain outside of the professional circle. These readers—who are sincere learners of the Bible—are mostly unfamiliar with the technical language and the terminology of analytical scholarship and have almost no interest in the literary problems revolving around the historicity of the literature. A gap between scholarship and readers of the religious schools, attendants of Churches or Synagogues has been created.

Subsequently, current Biblical scholarship did not stay indifferent to the interests of the community of readers who read the Biblical books in their given shape. Thus, Biblical critics are shifting the focus of research from the investigation of the historical origins of the setting of the atomic units to the book as a whole, seeking to look at the literary thematic design of the books in their canonical shape. This scholarly endeavour to reach the general readers is altering the analytical orientation from the search for authorship to the focus on audience (for the development, see Gitay ibid). The outcome of this shift in the critics’ focus has created a growing literature of synchronic studies of the Biblical literature affected by the community’s interest to read the books in their canonical form, as they are, and to focus on the religious message as a manifestation of the whole rather than the sporadic—fragmental literary units.
In accordance, the strict professional technical language and terminology that characterized the earlier diachronic scholarship of the historicity of the literature has been replaced by a readable non-technical and coherent style of writing.

Given this development in the direction of scholarship, a methodological session, presented at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, has set out its goal to monitor—as a self-review—the methodological matter of this shift to the synchronic study. There has been a particular concern to assess the place of Form-Criticism, the classical analytical method of investigation in the context of the diachronic study of the Biblical literature. It appears that the scholars who took part at the SBL meeting were determined to respond to the public interest in the canonical shape of the books and to update the Form-critical diachronic study of the Biblical literature, freeing it from its literary-historical bounding. This has been, in fact, the dramatic conclusion of Anthony F. Campbell in his article (which opens the volume following the editors’ introduction): “Form Criticism Future” (2003: 15-31). He writes as follows:

The meaning of a text emerges from the text as a whole, not substantively from the fragments that can be found in it (p 24)…
Modern Form Criticism…has a future—if its past is allowed a decent burial (p 31).

In short, we are experiencing a desperate call for the shifting of the scholarly target from authorship to the readers: “The meaning of the text is dependent on the reader” claims Edgar Conrad (1996: 325) tending therefore to transform the analytical-historical orientation to a syntactical (synchronic) presentation.

B ISAIAH AS A CASE STUDY: FROM ANALYSIS TO SYNTHESIS

The study of Isaiah may demonstrate the switch that revolves around the changes that took place from the process of reading the individual unit to the book as a whole. Given the literary design of the book (the entire 66 chapters) the book of Isaiah has been a subject of Form-critical investigation which divided the book into three major historical-literary parts each of which is separated into numerous literary units. The determination of these units is a subject of a complex technical philological analysis which is based on grammar, stylistic features and literary genres. Needless to say, this determination of the literary forms and their linguistic-stylistic characterization—the subject-matter of the scholarly endeavour—is far away from the general Church or Synagogue attendants who seek to read the prophetic message of Isaiah as a whole as a meaningful religious-theological manifestation of faith.
Scholars were not indifferent to the public interest and responded to the theological concern, aiming their exegesis in accordance, thus creating a dramatic shift in the scholarly orientation. In this regard, attention must be given to Peter Ackroyd’s essay: Isaiah 1-12: Presentation of a Prophet (1987: 79-104) which is a landmark in Canon criticism. This essay demonstrates the move from analysis to synthesis in the context of the study of Isaiah—from the literary fragments to the book as a whole, in order to provide a meaning for the compiler’s readers. Ackroyd considered the goal of the critic of Isaiah as to reveal

the basis for the acceptance of the present application of what is associated with the prophet to lie in a view of his authoritative status…the fulfilment of his [the prophet] word in events, in the continued vitality of that word in new situations…Authentication rests in continuing process by which prophetic word and receptive hearing interact (1987: 103-104).

That is to say, the critic aims to provide the meaning of the prophetic word through the relationship between the word, the book and the readers. The prophetic book is presented now in relevance to the readers. That is, the critic’s new goal is to coordinate the work—the book of Isaiah—as a fulfilment of the prophetic word with an emphasis on the readers’ (hearers’) values. Thus, Ackroyd seems to be mostly concerned with the process of the hearer’s reception of the fulfilment of the prophetic word as a message of the whole. The readers’ (hearers’) interaction is the “real” matter of the critic’s focus rather than the detailed search for the literary historicity of the prophetic material.

The following statement might demonstrate the matter further:

The book of Isaiah can be seen as presenting Isaiah as a prophet from the past—a past constructed by a later community in order to make sense of its present. That literary construction of a past is important for our own reconstruction of a past that makes sense from the perspective of our present (Conrad 1996: 324).

The perspective of the present in light of the focus on the past determines the meaning of the work as a whole. We read, Conrad proclaims, according to our present—our theological construction guides us in the reading of the past. We are not interested anymore in the literary history but in the present. Hence, our interpretation, according to Conrad, is the meta-historical meaning of the book as a whole in its present shape.

Similarly, W. Brueggemann informs us, in his programmatic introduction to his commentary on Isaiah 1-39 (1998) that in his interpretive endeavour he adapts the canonical approach not just as a means to discover the design of the book, but
to understand the final form of the complex text as an integral statement, offered by the shapers of the book for the theological reasons... The canonical approach draws upon historical-critical gains but moves beyond them toward theological interpretation. This later perspective is the one in which I have tried to work in this study (1998: 4-5).

That is to say, Brueggemann’s interpretive intention does not seek to search for the historicity of the material. Rather, his aim is theology-meta-history—which is determined through the theological values of his contemporary readers (ibid, 6-7). He works therefore as an interpreter who introduces the message of the book—as it is—as a gospel, in terms of his readers’ values. And the readers’ values have nothing to do with the literary history of Isaiah. For this purpose Isaiah—in its present shape—is taken as a whole, as a book of prophetic lesson regarding the contemporary reader.

Indeed, for the general reader the writings of such interpreters are fulfilling, responding to their interest. These writings are also less ‘tiring’ than the technical language employed by the professionals, and above all this exegesis endeavour is relevant for the current readers, which are given the message of the whole.

In short, the new trend in the study of Isaiah focuses on the book as a whole, as was pointed out by Rolf Rendtorff who wrote as follows: “Today scholars are beginning to move from analysis to synthesis in the interpretation of the book of Isaiah” (1997:109). The critics’ interpretive interest interacts with the readers’ perception, which is the book in its present shape.

However, this readers’ values-oriented exegesis raises a fundamental concern regarding the meaning of scholarship: whether scholarship is a response to the public concern, or does it result from a systematic investigation based on a theory of knowledge in its own right?

C THE IDEA OF LITERARY CRITICISM: WHO NEEDS IT?

A question might be asked: is the call for a theory of knowledge—divorced from the readers’ interest—legitimized in the context of a sensitive literature? That is to say, the call for literary criticism as a discipline might sound too rigid in the context of the study of literature or arts, fitting better to the region of the natural sciences. At the end of the day, one might claim, why not read and interpret literature as it is, as we the readers perceive and feel it?

Indeed, the leading literary essayist, the late Susan Sontag, was severely critical of literary criticism as she forcefully proclaimed in her famous essay: Against Interpretation (1964: 3-14). “Interpretation”, she wrote, “takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceed from there” (1964:13). Sontag concluded her essay as follows:
The aim of all commentary on art should be to make works of art more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is…rather than to show what it means. In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotic of art (1964: 14).

Sontag rejected the scholarly scientific approach to works of sensitive, emotional expressions. Instead, she searched for the feeling of the work.

An analogy regarding Isaiah might be the critics’ engagement to reveal the feelings and the taste of the readers of Isaiah, their religious-theological values as they experience them. Hence, the critic’s goal would be—given Sontag’s idea—to establish an intimate relationship between Isaiah and his (contemporary) readers. Therefore, following Sontag, a theory of literature in the course of the interpretive endeavour is an external artificial means that replaces the work itself, its Eros.

As a matter of fact, the reaction against literary criticism has affected a number of Biblicists to question its merit. Thus, Edgar Conrad has confessed that

For me, theory and method do not operate as canonical givens that dictate how I read (2002: 239).

Enough is enough. There are no strict methodological rules which dictate the “reading”; rather, the Humanities intend to enjoy flexibility and freedom of reading and interpretation, the claim is. Thus, the sophisticated scholars who arm themselves with methodology may not feel the text as the readers do. Subsequently, the employment of literary criticism connotes a sense that this disciplinary study is just a scholarly “game”. In accordance, Conrad announces that his work is not confined to theory and method “as canonical givens.” He tells us that as an interpreter of ancient texts, he does “encounter those texts as a reader” (2002: 239).

Indeed, this is the crux of the matter. At the end of the day, the argument is that the Humanities is not a ‘hard science’, hence it is like an invitation for an open reading: you read and interpret.

The literary criticism disciplinary debate regarding the interpretation of a work reflects, as a matter of fact, an old tension between the study of the Humanities and the natural Sciences. The first, the creation of human spirit, is not always viewed with such rigidity as the natural sciences. The question is, indeed, why intelligent readers need the commentators as mediators between them and the text; why they need professionals to tell them how to read? Tzvetan Todorov may shed light on this question as he writes: “a text can never state its whole truth” (1987:1). Consequently, we need the interpreter to bring out “into the open what is simply unconscious practice elsewhere” (ibid). Todorov concludes that it is in our best interest that criticism professionalises
interpretation. The matter is therefore professionalism; interpretation is a profession. As a result, interpretation is taught at universities and dissertations which interpret texts are written under the supervision of professionals and assessed by professionals.

What are these professionals of the Humanities doing? The relationship between the study of the Humanities and the Sciences might hold some answer. Michael Bakhtin’s remarks regarding the issue are helpful. He writes as follows:

Mathematical and natural sciences do not acknowledge discourse as an object of inquiry…The entire methodological apparatus of the mathematical and natural sciences is directed toward mastery over reified objects that do not reveal themselves in discourse and communicate nothing of themselves (cited in Todorov 1984: 15).

Something within the scientific objects must be converted into concrete by the scientists who develop their tools to communicate with the objects through their specific methodology. This might correspond to Aristotle’s definition of the realm of Rhetoric when he refers to the sciences (medicine and geometry in particular) as subjects, which require “technical knowledge of any particular defined genus” (Rhetoric 1355b). The issue is that each of which of the branches of the sciences that are studied and researched on the grounds of a specific technical knowledge, requires a specific “language” (methodology of its own). Nevertheless, the “human sciences” discourse (as Bakhtin calls it) has its own research agenda. Bakhtin writes:

In the human sciences, as distinct from the natural and mathematical sciences, there arise the specific problems of establishing, transmitting, and interpreting the discourse of others (ibid).

Literature as a science; is this serious? “Now, really, what a piece of extravagance all that is”! This is Matthew Arnold’s ridiculing assessment of John Ruskin’s scholarly investigation of Shakespeare’s names (cited by Frye 1957:9).

In this matter, Northrop Frye’s notion of literary criticism as is expressed in his famous ‘Polemical Introduction’ is illuminative:

Criticism is a structure of thought and knowledge existing in its own right, with some measure of independence from the art it deals with…The development of such a criticism would fulfill the systematic and progressive element in research by assimilating its work into a unified structure of knowledge, as other sciences do (1957:5, 11).

This concept of literary criticism is a fundamental concern for the interpreters who maintain that there must be some methodological criteria for interpreting
the texts of others, as interpretation is not merely a spontaneous act of reading and feelings and even not a response to the readers’ taste and values, but a science in terms of a unified structure of knowledge.

Indeed, “literary criticism”, Peter Brooks writes in his introduction to Todorov’s Poetics (1981:vii)

has in our century become a professional activity as never before….Literary criticism (and literary pedagogy) should not be simply the explication and interpretation of texts in vacuo, where the only common ground of critic and reader is their mutual interesting literature, but rather a discipline in its own right, whose principles and organizing features can be discovered and systematically presented (1981: viii, my emphasis).

Frye’s and Brooks’ call for a literary criticism as a structure of unified knowledge raises a fundamental question regarding the matter of Biblical literature: is Biblical literature—as other literary works—a subject of literary criticism as a discipline on its own right or is Biblical literature an exception? Is Biblical criticism a kind of literary art that seeks to absorb the literature into the community of readers? Or is it a discipline—that is, a theoretical structure of unified knowledge, “as other sciences do”?

The matter regarding the study of Isaiah is crucial given the new shift. The scholarly shift is based on an idea of the book as a whole, that is, a self-contained work. However, this literary assumption is not self-evident in respect to literary criticism. For literary scholarship the concept of a book as a whole is a matter of a critical literary determination rather than a literary instinct (compare Gitay 2005). Thus, the fundamental issue which lies behind this is whether there is any need to establish the idea of the book of Isaiah on the principles of literary theory, or whether it is preferable to take it “as it is”?

Taking the concept of the canonical shape of the book, as it is, for the sake of revealing the message of the prophetic word might imply that the interpreter perceives a literary situation in its religious-theological formation rather than monitoring the material on the literary-critical criteria of a book. Subsequently, the meaning of “synthesis” in the context of the study of Isaiah is a subject of a literary assessment. The question, in other words, is what is a book in regard to the sixty six chapters of Isaiah—in terms of literary criticism? The tension between the “synthesis” and the “analytic” revolves therefore around a wider question which is concerned with the issue of the essence and, in fact, the significance of literary criticism and theory of literature to the scholarly interpretive endeavour of the material that maintains the sixty six chapters of Isaiah.
D THE CONCEPT OF A BOOK: WHAT IS A BOOK?

The question: what is a book, what do the critics mean by interpreting the sixty chapters of Isaiah as a Book, may be irrelevant as far as the matter is the feeling of the work. However, there is a concern that the question “what is a book” is not just a matter of literary instincts. In this regard, Foucault’s worry regarding the idea of a work—as a designated literary unity—should not be dismissed concerning Isaiah as well:

The first is the idea of the work. It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyse the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships (1984:103).

What is a work? Foucault introduces the question as follows:

When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche’s works, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must be published, but what is ‘everything”?...And what about the rough drafts for his works?...the deleted pages and the notes at the bottom of the page? (ibid.)

This is the crux of the study of Isaiah. Are the “notes at the bottom of the page” an integral part of the work? Actually, the condition of Isaiah is more complex. The notes are not placed at the bottom of the page anymore, but in the process of copying the manuscript they were inserted into the page itself. This is the complex situation that creates the tension between analytical study and synthesis in the investigation of Isaiah; a tension which might be resolved through the establishment of the idea of a book in the context of Isaiah.

E THEORY AND INSTANCE

How are we working as literary critics? How can we, the critics of the Humanities, interpret a text of the others? The question is more problematic regarding ancient texts; are we able, as interpreters, to enter into the mind of the ancient discourse or should we give up and read such a text as a contemporary work, applying our contemporary reading? That might be indeed the case, as at the end of the day one might say, ironically or not, the reader is the only thing that is actually alive. In this regard, mention should be given to Terence Hawkes (1986) who examined the character and the background of a number of major critics of Shakespeare to show how their own political views came to be reflected in the “canonical” Shakespeare they created. This position leads to the modern shift of focus from the writer to the reader (compare Gurr 1988: 65).
The question regarding the study of Isaiah is: do we have a literary theory of the reading of Isaiah as a whole? Edgar Conrad is one of the few who motivates his call for the reading of the whole, ‘as it is,’ on certain literary assumptions, which might present a literary theory. Conrad’s comment on the position that “the redactor is being presented by redaction critics as an author, and this undermines the whole notion of redaction” (2002: 238) is demonstrated through his criticism of Christopher Seitz’s claim that Isaiah 36-39 belongs essentially to First Isaiah. Conrad assesses this conclusion as follows:

If Isaiah is seen as ‘authored’ from sources, then he [Seitz] is raising a question that is ultimately unanswerable for we do not have the data for determining the book of Isaiah’s prehistory. We only have the final form of the text; we know nothing about the history of its parts (1996: 310).

Conrad’s motivation for his interpretation of the total is based therefore on the projection of the presence, “as we see it,” as the sole evidence. His call for the reading of the whole is pursued on a theoretical claim that the touch of the final pen creates a work in itself. Consequently, Conrad concludes that we cannot speak about separated levels of redaction in Isaiah. He explains his approach as follows:

…our ability to rewrite a pre-history of the text of Isaiah is becoming more and more unlikely. The creative use of sources by an ‘author’ underscores the difficulty in our determination, for example, of what might once have been the original editing of First Isaiah, or even whether there was First Isaiah. To be sure, the ‘author’ of Isaiah used sources, but they were creatively used to construct something new, making their recovery not only improbable but also the accomplishment of that goal increasingly unimportant…What is available for study is not the history of a tradition nor the intention of an ‘author-redactor’ but the literary creation itself, the book of Isaiah (1996: 309-10).

A new work has been created given the final touch. Consequently, an analytical study of authorships of the various parts of the book is worthless—the claim is—because practically and theoretically the material outside the presence does not actually exist.

The theory dictated the interpretation. Indeed, this has been the problem of Job’s friends who adapted a theory of cause and effect in terms of God’s retribution. The fault was that they adapted the theory “as it is,” and accordingly judged Job, declaring him as a sinner (consult Gitay 1999: 1-12). However, Job happened to be righteous while they—the devoted defenders of the theory—were condemned by the supposedly creator of the theory:
Yahweh said to Eliphaz of Teman: I burn with anger against you and your two friends for not speaking truthfully about me as my servant Job has done (Job 42:7).

Nevertheless, in this particular context the theory itself actually did not collapse because it was the wrong theory as the specific instance did not match with the theory: Job suffered not because he committed a sin, but because he was being tested. As a matter of fact, he was awarded given his true and sincere speeches as the epilogue indicates (42:7). Hence, the theory regarding God’s retribution might still exist. The point is that theory must be in context and not disconnected from the instance.

The application to Isaiah is that at the moment that a theory of a work is presented the evidence (the instance) must be explored in its proper context to justify the particular implication. Otherwise, we deal with metaphysics versus the reality, conjectures versus established evidence. In this regard, it is worthwhile to listen to Stanly Fish’s remarks who wrote as follows:

…those who make fundamental arguments—arguments identifying general and universal standards of judgment and measurement—are inflexible, incapable of responding to or even registering the nuances of particular contexts, and committed to the maintenance of the status quo (2003:393).

The universal, the theory must not be divorced from the particular context. Consequently, when a theory regarding Isaiah as a work is presented, the instance must not be excluded.

In accordance, when applying a theory of the “last touch” it implies that the object does not exist, that is, there are no layers of authorships but the presence, which means that the “last touch” completely deletes the previous layers rather than covering them. Thus, the uncovered, which is the present text, is the only material that exists at all, and no “laboratory technology” will be useful in this context to convert the unseen into a concrete discourse.

However, the question is whether the proper theory is utilized in the context of Isaiah. That is to say, the problem which confronts the literary critic—in the context of the study of Isaiah—is not just the matter of the relationship between “the last touch” and the different authorships, but rather the intrinsic design of the work. Hence, in this context it might be useful to remind ourselves again of Foucault’s clarification regarding the fundamental task of literary criticism concerning the idea of a book:

It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyse the work
through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships (1984:103).

The task for the Human sciences (borrowing of Bakhtin’s terminology) how to interpret a text depends therefore on the determination of the work in line of Foucault’s critical guidance, referring to the concept of a work. The text exists on its surface but, regarding Isaiah, the text covers not its layers but its essence because the text might be mixed and subsequently undetermined as a literary work, and might represent a chain of sporadic speeches with no concept of a book as a self-maintained work that has a “head, body and legs”. Thus, without an idea of a work there might not be a proper interpretation.

The application of the claim that “we have what we have only”, “the text as it is” in terms of the study of Isaiah is that after the publication of the whole, the text itself plus the notes, scholarship must apply literary criticism as a discipline that systematically studies the structure of a given discourse, its formulation, its parts and the interplay of the parts into the whole and vice versa. Thus, the question of literary criticism as a matter of unified knowledge is crucial for dealing with the problem of defining the work. The issue is that a work, at the end of the day, is not a lawless accumulation of words. Rather, a work is architected through a specific harmonic intrinsic design that might be revealed through the employment of a proper literary methodology for defining the work’s structure and boundaries. And this act of determining the work is the critic’s fundamental task.

Furthermore, the motivation for the study of the text as it is, the presence, resembles the New Criticism. The New Criticism, as a literary method, claims that the work is all that we have and we don’t need “archaeology” to penetrate into sub-layers, which contribute nothing to the meaning of the work in its presence. This study of the whole is based on a theory of a literary work, specifically a poem, analysed in terms of its parts which architecturally design together the whole work, and vice versa.

Terry Eagleton’s assessment of the New Criticism is in place here:

New Criticism was the ideology of an uprooted, defensive intelligentsia who reinvented in literature what they could not locate in reality. Poetry was the new religion…The poem itself was an opaque to rational enquiry as the Almighty himself: it existed as a self-enclosed object, mysteriously intact in its own unique being…each of its part was folded in on the others in a complex organic unity which it would be a kind of blasphemy to violate (1983:47).

The text as it is is “holy”, and must be preserved as such without any literary “surgeries” or scholarly investigations of literary influences or literary genres. Nevertheless, there is a major problem when we apply the reading of the whole
to Isaiah. New Criticism operates under the premise of a self-maintained poem as the objective of the study. A poem’s size and design is controllable. However, the fundamental question for Isaiah scholarship is what do we have here? Is Isaiah (as a whole) such a poem? What is it indeed: a unified work or an anthology of sporadic speeches? Can Isaiah scholarship ignore the questions and claim that an intervention of a new pen—which is also a problematic assumption given the claim that we are unable to retrieve the pre-history of the book—has created in itself a work; a book as a whole, just in light of a theory of the “last touch”? It appears that there is here a potential dangerous risk in adapting the theory as “the Almighty himself” without carefully studying the instance.

Still the question remains: how the position of the whole refers to Isaiah “as it is”, that is, as a self-maintained book—which is supposed to have its own body—with “legs, head and hands” (compare Aristotle, Poetics 1451a)—without establishing the idea of a prophetic book? In this regard, it must be pointed out that Canon criticism—as referred to earlier—do not produce a methodology of its own, which is a literary discipline in its own right. There is a feeling that Form Criticism does not fit but there is no critical proposal in terms of literary criticism that substitutes Form Criticism.

F THE LITERARY CRITIC VERSUS THE PUBLIC CRITIC

Still, Canon criticism and the theological oriented studies of Isaiah are published. Hence, the relationship between the critical study of Isaiah and reader-oriented works must be re-established. The question is: what is the debate about? Again, Frye is able to clarify the controversy. He makes a distinction between what he calls the “public critic” and the “scholar”:

The public critic (Frye lists distinguished critics such as Lamb, Hazlitt, Arnold or Sainte-Beuve) is to exemplify how people of taste use and evaluate literature and thus show how literature is to be absorbed into society...his work is not a science, but another kind of literary art. He has picked up his ideas from a pragmatic study of literature, and does not try to create or enter into a theoretical structure (ibid 8).

Public criticism is a field of its own which aims to orient the readers’ literary taste and values.

The work of the scholars differs in its essence. Scholarship is the employment of literary criticism as a discipline in its own right which is based on a structure of unified knowledge that distances itself from the work itself, and its practical lessons, for the readers.

The application to the study of Isaiah is as follows: scholarship investigates the structure, the architecture, the intrinsic form, and the interplay
of the internal relationships, exploring the question whether Isaiah, say, is a literary work of unity or a chain of sporadic units which does not constitute a literary work of intrinsic literary design having a mutual relationship between the parts. This literary study is based on a theory of a literary work and a methodology of research. Thus, the literary criteria whether this is a work or not, should not be arbitrary as they must be accepted by the community of literary researchers on the basis of a structure of unified knowledge. This is not any more a matter of a pragmatic presentation oriented to educate the readers’ taste or values, but a systematic critical study which conceptualizes into a theory the literary criteria that establish a work.

Nevertheless, it must be clear that public criticism’s focus on the readers is an important area of criticism which plays a crucial role in orienting and educating the public in the reading of literature in general, and given our subject, Biblical literature in particular. These two sorts of criticism do not compete and one should not reject the other as they both respectively play an important role of their own.

**G CONCLUSIONS**

To summarise, there are a number of communities of readers. There are communities of theologians and there are communities of scholars of Religion who consider Religion as a manifestation of a human phenomenon. These communities sustain, given their constitution, different aims and subsequently different strategies of interpretation. The question regarding these communities is what are they doing to Isaiah? They both deal with a text; how do they interpret and to whom is the crucial concern. Are they making a distinction between the communities or mixing scholarship with public criticism? As a matter of fact, we are witnessing a growing tendency to publish in designated scholarly critical publications material which is in the context of public criticism; a situation that adds to the scholarly frustration regarding the aim of interpretation. The problem of public criticism’s intrusion into the realm of scholarship—specifically in the course of methodological doubts—is that it creates confusion regarding the place of literary criticism as a discipline in its own right. The bottom line is that literary criticism and public criticism are two distinct modes of criticism and public criticism in spite of its friendly mode of presentation is not a substitution for scholarship. Thus, the merge of the two different approaches to interpretation in the context of Isaiah presents a problem regarding the meaning of interpretation specifically that the two interpretive avenues, literary criticism (scholarship) and public criticism (education) are not synchronized given their different agendas and different interpretive concerns.

Recently, Isaiah scholarship has experienced difficulties, reaching a sort of confusion expressed through the concern for the public audience and the
feeling of ineffectiveness regarding “pure” scholarship that reaches a limited circle of readers and is untouched by the concrete reality. However, this sort of confusion should not compromise scholarship which needs to maintain its sovereignty as a discipline on its own right.

Nevertheless, scholarship specifically in a stage of feeling “useless” must clarify its discipline and seek to ensure its validity. Scholars are required to keep assessing their discipline, questioning whether they are on the right track in terms of their methodology; is their theory matching the evidence of the empirical research in the investigation of the internal design of the work, in our case of Isaiah? Are they open to new avenues of research or to new dimensions given the utilization of interdisciplinary studies that might lead to fresh avenues of inquiries? These are potential directions in reviving the validity of scholarship.

The empirical research that is performed in light of specific literary frames, which systemize structures of knowledge indicates whether a certain literary theory actually works or not in the evidence of a particular content. The scholarly conclusions might reveal that in a specific instance when a theory of a work does not match with the context—which is revealed through a detailed intrinsic analysis of all the parts as a design of the whole and vice versa—this specific literary theory might be replaced through a process of a paradigm shift. The process is slow but is a necessity otherwise scholarship itself might be questionable.2

The bottom line is that the literary critical study of Isaiah is inclusive and depends on a unified structure of knowledge as other disciplines of knowledge work. Indeed, such a presentation of scholarship is designated to a limited circle of professionals. Nevertheless, professional criticism must be dynamic and cannot freeze in its place.

The growing frustration regarding the employment of a specific methodology of research concerning Isaiah, for example, must be answered, but not through a scholarly compromise. Rather, it requests a reassessment of the methodology of research. This methodological re-evaluation cannot squint to a particular interested audience, serving their interests, but must be based on the systemization of a unified structure of knowledge.

The public critics, on their side, are not bound to a specific theory of unified structure of knowledge, but are concerned with the pragmatic issues revolving around their readers. Here lies the significance and the contribution of public criticism as a teaching guidance for readers who seek interpretation in

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2 References might be made to the realms of Rhetoric and Orality which might affect the current scholarly paradigm (consult Gitay 2001: 101-128 and 2003: 74-97).
the context of their particular community as a response to individual or social concrete concerns.

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