

BRINGING *the*

HIDDEN

to *Light*

Studies in Honor of
STEPHEN A. GELLER

Edited by
Kathryn F. Kravitz and Diane M. Sharon

Preface

The essays in this volume were contributed by colleagues, friends, and students of Stephen A. Geller to mark the occasion of his 65th birthday.

Stephen Allen Geller was born on August 30, 1938, in Albany, N.Y. His father, Irving, died when Stephen was a child, and he and his sister, Barbara, were raised by their mother, Eva. Stephen attended Hebrew School from the age of 6 and enjoyed it from the beginning. He recalls strict Mr. Auerbach, who drummed into him a love of Hebrew grammar and language and Ms. Helen Ott, who introduced him to German language and literature at Albany High School. He continued his Jewish studies at Temple Israel under Rabbi Herman Kievel.

Geller went to Cornell University in 1956, where he majored in German Literature, spending his junior year at Heidelberg. While there, he also took courses in Semitics and Bible, attending lectures by Gerhard von Rad, among others. Geller entered the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1960, at that time one of the few places offering higher studies in Judaism and Jewish culture. He studied Bible at JTS and, at the same time, began the study of Akkadian and other ancient languages at Columbia University. Upon receiving ordination in 1965, Geller entered the Ph.D. program in the Department of Near Eastern Literatures and Civilizations at Harvard, where he studied with Frank M. Cross, among others. He received his doctorate in 1976; his dissertation, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*, was published in the Harvard Semitic Monographs series in 1979.

Geller taught in the departments of Hebrew and History at York University in Toronto from 1970 to 1972. He returned to JTS in 1972, becoming a colleague to his former teachers in the Bible Department as well as to his fellow scholars Raymond Scheindlin and Tzvi Abusch, two lifelong friends. In 1980, he moved to Dropsie College in Philadelphia and then to Brandeis University, where he was a visiting professor from 1988 to 1990. In 1991, he returned to JTS and the renamed Department of Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages. In 2003, he was named the Irma Cameron Milstein Professor of Bible.

Trained in the historical and comparative methods of criticism, Geller became interested in the “literary approach” which, modeled on the “New Criticism,” sought to apply the methods of literary analysis to the Hebrew Bible.

His attention to language at every level is reflected in his work throughout his career. He has addressed such topics as “The Dynamics of Parallel Verse” in Deuteronomy 32, the “Language of Imagery in Psalm 114,” and the literary uses of “Cleft Sentences with Pleonastic Pronoun.” But what especially distinguishes his literary studies of biblical texts is his search for an interpretation that encompasses the emotional and religious meanings that a text might be presumed to have had at the time it was written. Combining a historical orientation with deep exegeses of individual texts, he has focused on the contribution that the literary approach might make to the study of biblical religion. He has developed what he terms a “literary theology,” in which, by examining the literary devices in the passage under consideration, he has been able to formulate emerging religious ideas that the ancient writers did not express in systematic treatises. His method is illustrated in his studies of texts that represent the major religious traditions of the Hebrew Bible; these studies have been collected in *Sacred Enigmas*, published in 1997.

The clarity and grace of Geller’s own writing is amplified by his wit—which is also reflected in his conversation as well as in his preference for restoration comedy and Oscar Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest*. He enjoys walks in the country, in both old and New England, and is an avid collector of art and antiques. He is presently at work on a further exploration of literary theology in a commentary on the book of Psalms. The contributors and editors of this volume wish him well and look forward to reading his future work.

Publications of Stephen A. Geller

Books

- Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*. Harvard Semitic Monograph 20. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979.
- Editor, *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature*. Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983. [Coedited with Edward L. Greenstein and Adele Berlin.]
- Sacred Enigmas: Toward a Literary Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Articles

- "The Dynamics of Parallel Verse: A Poetic Analysis of Deuteronomy 32:6–12." *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 35–56.
- "The Struggle at the Jabbok: The Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982): 37–60.
- "Theory and Method in the Study of Biblical Poetry." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 73 (1982): 65–77.
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- "Were the Prophets Poets?" *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 211–21.
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- "Cleft Sentences with Pleonastic Pronoun: A Syntactic Construction of Biblical Hebrew and Some of Its Literary Uses." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 20 (1991): 15–33.
- "Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch." *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 99–124.
- "Hebrew Prosody and Poetics: I. Biblical." Pages 509–11 in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by A. Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- "Some Sound and Word Plays in the First Tablet of the Old Babylonian *Atramḥasis* Epic." Pages 63–70 in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume I*. Edited by Barry Walfish. Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993.
- "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4." *Prooftexts* 14 (1994): 103–39.
- "The God of the Covenant." Pages 273–319 in *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*. Edited by Barbara Nevling Porter. Chebeague, Maine: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000.
- "Nature's Answer: The Meaning of the Book of Job in Its Intellectual Context." Pages 109–32 in *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*. Edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- "Wisdom, Nature and Piety in Some Biblical Psalms." Pages 101–21 in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen*. Edited by Tzvi Abusch. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002.
- "The Religion of the Bible." Pages 2021–40 in *The Jewish Study Bible*. Edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
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"Manna and Sabbath: A Literary-Theological Reading of Exodus 16." *Interpretation* 59 (2005): 5–16.

Forthcoming

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"The Genealogy of Faith." Based on a paper read at the University of Chicago, 2004.

"The Prophetic Roots of Religious Violence." Conference volume of the Conference on Religion and Violence Held at Wellesley College and Boston University, February, 2006.

"Sabbath and Creation: A Literary-Theological Study, Part 2." *SBLSymS*.

"The 'Still, Small Voice': 1 Kings 19 and the Roots of Intolerance in Biblical Religion." *Festschrift for Raymond P. Scheindlin*.

"Syntax and Meaning in Psalm 93." *Festschrift for Jeffrey Tigay*.