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Book Reviews

Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies. Edited by Roland Boer. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007. Pp. viii + 238.

In recent years, the growing interest in the work of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has been evident in the numerous publications of biblical scholars inspired by Bakhtin's life and work. The collection of essays gathered in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory* is a product of the ongoing conversation generated by the Society of Biblical Literature group on "Bakhtin and Biblical Imagination," which devoted a session to the question of genre at the 2004 annual meeting in San Antonio. In addition to those who presented their papers in the meeting, the volume has also included some additional contributors to join the ensuing dialogue.

The underlying principle of this volume is a shift that has taken place in the way biblical studies understand genre. Instead of understanding genre as fixed, biblical scholars have begun to view it as fluid. In other words, genres are no longer static entities to be classified but dynamic units that represent particular perspectives and worldviews. As one of the volume's contributors states by citing Bakhtin's own words, genres are "always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre" (121). A great example to illustrate this point comes from Carleen Mandolfo's essay. Using the contemporary retelling of the original *The Wizard of Oz* in the Broadway musical, *Wicked*, Mandolfo demonstrates how genres are fluid and can be altered in light of a new context (71), and applies this insight to the way in which the lament genre is transformed in the book of Lamentations to meet the needs of the community devastated by the destruction of Jerusalem (see also Christopher Fuller's insightful essay in this volume on the use of genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew to overturn the cultural and narrative expectations of the reader).

Building on Bakhtin's understanding of the social context or social construction of genre, a second underlying principle of this volume relates to the shared resolve of the contributors to focus on the effect of genres. This is particularly evident in Christine Mitchell's essay that examines the Chronicler's application of folktales and the Deuteronomistic framework to explore the role of power and *eros* in considering the effect of genres. A similar point is made by David Valeta in his essay on the interaction of languages in the book of Daniel. Valeta argues that the polyglossia in Daniel contributes to its parodic nature and serves as an important tool for people in oppressive situations to "define their identity and to subvert the violence of power" (105).

After a brief introduction by the editor, Roland Boer, the essays compiled in

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Bakhtin and Genre Theory provide a rich array of perspectives on the way in which Bakhtin's insights on genre may "enliven, leaven even, contemporary work on genre in biblical studies" (3). The contributors utilize key Bakhtinian concepts such as dialogue, polyphony, heteroglossia, chronotype, and carnival to reflect theoretically on genre in biblical studies. More importantly, essays within this volume serve as windows on a wide range of texts from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and—in the instance of Bula Maddison—Toni Morrison's use of the Bible in her novel, *Beloved.*

The first two essays by Martin Buss and Carol Newsom are more theoretical in nature, but both eloquently reflect on the paradigm shift in how genre is understood within biblical studies (Newsom's case study of apocalypse is also nicely complemented by Michael Vines' essay in the volume on apocalypse and chronotype). These introductory essays set the scene for the subsequent contributors to consider this alternative understanding of biblical genres in a number of creative and engaging ways.

In addition to the essays mentioned before, essays by Barbara Green and Judy Fentress-Williams focus on dialogue as a determining factor in biblical genres. While Green explores the effect of the dialogic utterance on the characterization of Jonathan in relation to Saul and David, Fentress-Williams identifies dialogic connections between the Jacob and Tamar account in Genesis 38 and the rest of the Joseph narrative in Genesis 37-50 (for instance, clothing as a means to conceal or reveal identity). Related to these two essays is also Paul Anderson's contribution on the Johannine dialogues of misunderstanding or misunderstanding dialogues.

The contributions, which all exhibit excellent literary analysis and high-quality exegesis, are followed by detailed and thoughtful responses by Keith Bodner and Vernon Robbins.

As one of the respondents, Robbins, points out that some of the contributors engage Bakhtin more overtly than others; Bula Maddison's essay on Toni Morison's *Beloved* is justifiably being singled out as doing a superb job in using Bakhtin's notion of "dialogized heteroglossia" to describe the multiple language-worlds represented within two contending chronotypes in the novel (201). However, it is obvious that all of the contributors are deeply infused in the Bakhtinian thought-world, offering practical examples of how Bakhtin's most exciting and thought-provoking ideas may shed new light on the biblical genres examined in this volume.

It is important to note that *Bakhtin and Genre Theory* does not purport to serve as an introduction to Bakhtin's work, and probably is most helpful for readers already familiar with Bakhtin's core concepts and ideas. This volume is hence most valuable as a more advanced engagement of Bakhtin's work.

Bakhtin and Genre Theory succeeds in its objective to offer a space in which the intersection between Bakhtin and biblical studies may be further explored. This volume is a truly interdisciplinary venture that offers new and exciting ways to explore the dynamic nature of biblical genres and its effect on audiences then and now.

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