

"The volume contains numerous shocks of illumination. . . .  
No one has set forth so clearly, so subtly, or with such cogent  
energy as Frye the literary aspect of our biblical heritage."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

# THE GREAT CODE

THE BIBLE AND  
LITERATURE

---

NORTHROP  
FRYE

A HARVEST/HBJ BOOK

*Northrop Frye*



# THE GREAT CODE

*The Bible and Literature*



A Harvest/HBJ Book  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers  
San Diego    New York    London

Copyright © 1982, 1981 by Northrop Frye

All rights reserved. No part of  
this publication may be reproduced or  
transmitted in any form or by any means,  
electronic or mechanical, including photocopy,  
recording, or any information storage and  
retrieval system, without permission  
in writing from the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part  
of the work should be mailed to:

Permissions Department,  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 8th Floor,  
Orlando, Florida 32887.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Frye, Northrop.  
The great code.

"A Harvest/HBJ book."

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

I. Bible and literature. I. Title.

PN56.B5F7 1983 809'.93522 83-8377

ISBN 0-15-636480-8

Printed in the United States of America  
First Harvest/HBJ edition 1983

E F G H I J

HBJ

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book (with its successor) has been on my mind for a long time, during which I have given lectures on Biblical topics at various places, including McGill (Divinity School), Minnesota, Cincinnati, Cornell, and several universities in Scandinavia. I am grateful for the patience and attention of audiences who listened to early versions of some of the ideas propounded here, some versions too crude in retrospect to bear thinking about. I owe even more to my students, as I trust my Introduction makes clear.

A scholar in an area not his own feels like a knight errant who finds himself in the middle of a tournament and has unaccountably left his lance at home. In such a situation he needs encouragement as well as help. Encouragement has come from many quarters: from Professor William Blissett and Barker Fairley, the two friends referred to in the Introduction; from Professor Cyrus Hamlin, who read the whole manuscript; and from many other colleagues, along with much timely help from my research assistants, among whom I may mention Willard McCarty and Michael Dolzani. Bob Sandler, and also Bill Somerville and his colleagues at the University of Toronto Media Centre, have worked wonders in transferring much of the material of this book to the very different format of television.

Two of my obligations extend beyond the orbit of words altogether. One is to my secretary, Mrs. Jane Widdicombe, for her

unfailing patience and good humor in coping with the whims of two unpredictable word processors, one of them the author. The other is to my wife Helen, who has quietly watched over the coming and going of so many books.

N.F.

## Introduction



This book attempts a study of the Bible from the point of view of a literary critic. Originally I wanted to make a fairly thorough inductive survey of Biblical imagery and narrative, followed by some explanation of how these elements of the Bible had set up an imaginative framework—a mythological universe, as I call it—within which Western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating. I have not lost sight of this aim, but it has receded through a process I had experienced before, when its result was the *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Certain preliminary questions, which I had thought would be confined within an introductory chapter or two, expanded, first into an enormous Hegelian preface, and finally into a volume in its own right. After considerable thought, I have decided to remove the ominous heading “Volume One” from the title page, because I should want any book I publish to be a complete unit in itself. But a second volume is in active preparation nonetheless, and this introduction is partly to it as well.

The present book is not a work of Biblical scholarship, much less of theology: it expresses only my own personal encounter with the Bible, and at no point does it speak with the authority of a scholarly consensus. To the question why it should exist at all I have no direct answer, only an explanation of how it came into being. My interest in the subject began in my earliest days as a junior instructor, when I

found myself teaching Milton and writing about Blake, two authors who were exceptionally Biblical even by the standards of English literature. I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads: the most conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning. So I offered a course in the English Bible as a guide to the study of English literature, and as the most efficient way of learning about it myself.

My first aim was only to provide students with enough information about the Bible to enable them to see what kind of literary influence it has had. This would have resulted in, essentially, a "footnote" course, concerned with allusion and texture. Blake's line "O Earth, O Earth return," for example, though it contains only five words and only three different words, contains also about seven direct allusions to the Bible. And in many nineteenth-century authors the cadences of the 1611 translation are constantly echoed, giving an effect rather like that of the echoes of popular proverbs in writings of other cultures. But allusion and texture were not a satisfactory basis for a teaching course, and I had to move to more solid ground.

I examined similar courses in other universities, and found that many of them were called something like "The Bible as Literature," which the reader will have noted is not quite the subtitle of this book. They were based mainly on materials in the Bible that resembled the student's other literary experiences, such as the Book of Job or the parables of Jesus. Naturally these parts of the Bible were important to me as well, but the assumption seemed to be that the Bible was, or could be treated as, a kind of anthology of ancient Near Eastern literature, and such an approach violated all my instincts as a critic. Those instincts told me that the critical operation begins with reading a work straight through, as many times as may be necessary to possess it in totality. At that point the critic can begin to formulate a conceptual unity corresponding to the imaginative unity of his text. But the Bible is a very long and miscellaneous book, and many of those who have tried to read it straight through have bogged down very soon, generally around the middle of Leviticus. One reason for this is that the Bible is more like a small library than a real book: it almost seems that it has come to be thought of as *a* book only because it is contained for convenience within two covers. In fact what the word "Bible" itself primarily means is *ta biblia*, the little books. Perhaps, then, there is no such entity as "the Bible," and what is called "the Bible" may be only a confused and inconsistent jumble of badly established texts.

However, all this, even if true, does not matter. What matters is that "the Bible" has traditionally been read as a unity, and has influenced Western imagination as a unity. It exists if only because it has been compelled to exist. Yet, whatever the external reasons, there has to be some internal basis even for a compulsory existence. Those who do succeed in reading the Bible from beginning to end will discover that at least it has a beginning and an end, and some traces of a total structure. It begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse, and it surveys human history in between, or the aspect of history it is interested in, under the symbolic names of Adam and Israel. There is also a body of concrete images: city, mountain, river, garden, tree, oil, fountain, bread, wine, bride, sheep, and many others, which recur so often that they clearly indicate some kind of unifying principle. That unifying principle, for a critic, would have to be one of shape rather than meaning; or, more accurately, no book can have a coherent meaning unless there is some coherence in its shape. So the course turned into a presentation of a unified structure of narrative and imagery in the Bible, and this forms the core of the present book.

For my purposes the only possible form of the Bible that I can deal with is the Christian Bible, with its polemically named "Old" and "New" Testaments. I know that Jewish and Islamic conceptions of the Bible are very different, but that is practically all that I do know about them, and it is the Christian Bible that is important for English literature and the Western cultural tradition generally. For quotations I use the "Authorized Version" of 1611, abbreviated as AV, except where it is wrong or inadequate. I use it not because of the beauty of its cadences: conventional aesthetic canons of that sort I wanted to get rid of at the start. Nor is it only because of its central place as the most familiar and accessible version. Most copies of the AV in general circulation not only omit the Apocrypha, which was part of the 1611 enterprise, but, while they include the dedication to King James, which is only a perfunctory piece of rhetoric, they also omit the "Address to the Reader," where the translators set forth very honestly what they were trying to do and what their translating policy was. I use their version because, as they explain in that Address, they were not trying to make a new translation but a traditional one. In other words the AV is a translation centrally in the Vulgate tradition, and so comes very close to the Bible familiar to writers in Europe from the fifth century on. The differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic versions of the Bible, which have been greatly exaggerated in any case, are of very little importance for a



book like this. I am not concerned with the true meaning of such words as *episcopos* or *ecclesia*, but, for the most part, with nouns so concrete that it is practically impossible for any translator to get them wrong.

The course proved useful (I am still teaching it), and it was obvious that a book along the lines of the course was badly needed. This suggested a kind of handbook or introductory study, and the present volume still retains its original aim of introducing the general reader to a knowledge of the Bible and to some of the applications he can make of such knowledge in the rest of his reading. But the original aim has become overlaid with other issues. In a sense all my critical work, beginning with a study of Blake published in 1947, and formulated ten years later in *Anatomy of Criticism*, has revolved around the Bible. Hence the total project is, among other things, a restatement of the critical outlook I have been expounding in various ways for years. I feel that it is now very far from being what I was afraid at first it would turn into, a rewritten version of the *Anatomy*, but I apologize in advance to readers who may often feel that they have been here before. All I can say is that I am aware of the dangers of restating what I have said elsewhere in a different context, and that the repetitions unavoidable here are not wholly that. In this volume such features as the categories of metaphor, the ladder of "polysemous sense," the conception of literal meaning, and the identification of mythology and literature are presented in what I hope is a new framework.

Two very good friends and colleagues of mine on the Toronto campus understood my situation, and made a point of reminding me whenever they saw me that I had still to write "a big book on the Bible," as one of them called it. The immediate obstacle there was my lack of scholarly competence in the primary fields. I am not a Biblical scholar, and anyone who was one could say of my Hebrew and Greek what Samuel Johnson said, with far less justice, of Milton's two Tetrachordon sonnets, that the first is contemptible, and the second not excellent. Yet even these were only the shallow waters. A scholarly book was out of the question: too many scholarly fields were relevant.

I have begun with a reference to my teaching because the present book has grown directly out of my teaching interests rather than out of scholarly ones. But then all my books have really been teachers' manuals, concerned more with establishing perspectives than with adding specifically to knowledge. Certainly this book shows all the

tactics of teaching, including the use of paradox and the pretense of naïveté. By that I mean that simplifying and oversimplifying are much the same thing from two points of view, the student's and the scholar's, and this book is addressed to the student's position. The ideal of the scholar is to convey what he knows as clearly and fully as he can: he lays down his hand and remains dummy, so to speak, while the reader plays it. The teacher may do some of his work as a scholar on a popularizing level, retailing established information to less advanced students. This conception of teaching as secondhand scholarship is common among academics, but I regard it as inadequate.

The teacher, as has been recognized at least since Plato's *Meno*, is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student's mind, and his strategy in doing this is first of all to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows. That is why it is the teacher, rather than the student, who asks most of the questions. The teaching element in my own books has caused some resentment among my readers, a resentment often motivated by loyalty to different teachers. This is connected with a feeling of deliberate elusiveness on my part, prompted mainly by the fact that I am not dispensing with the quality of irony that all teachers from Socrates on have found essential. Not all elusiveness, however, is merely that. Even the parables of Jesus were *ainoi*, fables with a riddling quality. In other areas, such as Zen Buddhism, the teacher is often a man who shows his qualifications to teach by refusing to answer questions, or by brushing them off with a paradox. To answer a question (a point we shall return to later in the book) is to consolidate the mental level on which the question is asked. Unless something is kept in reserve, suggesting the possibility of better and fuller questions, the student's mental advance is blocked.

And just as the "scholarly/unscholarly" antithesis had somehow to be got over, whether evaded or transcended, so the "personal/impersonal" antithesis had to be got over too. Academics, like other people, start with a personality that is afflicted by ignorance and prejudice, and try to escape from that personality, in Eliot's phrase, through absorption in impersonal scholarship. One emerges on the other side of this realizing once again that all knowledge is personal knowledge, but with some hope that the person may have been, to whatever degree, transformed in the meantime. I was attracted to the

Bible, not because I thought it reinforced any "position" of mine, but because it suggested a way of getting past some of the limitations inherent in all positions.

A literary approach to the Bible is not in itself illegitimate: no book could have had so specific a literary influence without itself possessing literary qualities. But the Bible is just as obviously "more" than a work of literature, whatever "more" means—I could not feel that a quantitative metaphor was much help. I have spoken of my wish to get clear of conventional aesthetic canons, but "unity" is one of those canons, and the Bible's disregard of unity is quite as impressive as its exhibition of it. Ultimately, as we should expect, the Bible evades all literary criteria. As Kierkegaard said, an apostle is not a genius—not that I ever found "genius" a very useful word either. My experience in secular literature had shown me how the formal principles of literature had been contained within literature, as the formal principles of music, embodied in sonata, fugue, or rondo, have no existence outside music. But here is a book that has had a continuously fertilizing influence on English literature from Anglo-Saxon writers to poets younger than I, and yet no one would say that the Bible "is" a work of literature. Even Blake, who went much farther than anyone else in his day in identifying religion and human creativity, did not call it that: he said "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art," a phrase I have used for my title after pondering its implications for many years.

I realized early in my critical life that evaluation was a minor and subordinate function of the critical process, at best an incidental by-product, which should never be allowed to take priority over scholarship. It is often said that choosing one poet to talk about rather than another implies a value judgment; this is true, and indicates where value judgments belong: in the area of tentative working assumptions, where they can be subject to revision. They are not the beginning of the critical operation properly speaking. Accepting the usual value judgment on Shakespeare, and finding that value judgment confirmed by experience, may prompt one to continue studying Shakespeare; but the resulting scholarship will never be founded on the value judgment. Still less are they the end of it: the answer to the question Why is *A* more rewarding to talk about than *B*?, so far as there is an answer, can be found only in the further study of *A*. Further study of *A* could eventually lead us through literature into the broader question of the social function of words. Evaluation, which stops of necessity with the category of literature, blocks that

expansion. The Bible by-passed this obstruction, mainly because all questions of value in its regard were so palpably futile. Thus it began to lead me outside literature into the larger verbal context of which literature forms a part.

There have always been two directions in Biblical scholarship, the critical and the traditional, though often they have merged. The critical approach establishes the text and studies the historical and cultural background; the traditional interprets it in accordance with what a consensus of theological and ecclesiastical authorities have declared the meaning to be. I could not find the clues I wanted in critical Biblical scholarship, so far as I was acquainted with it. The analytical and historical approach that has dominated Biblical criticism for over a century was of relatively little use to me, however incidentally I may depend on it. At no point does it throw any real light on how or why a poet might read the Bible. I have suggested elsewhere that textual scholarship has never really developed the "higher" criticism that made such a noise in the nineteenth century. Instead of emerging from lower criticism, or textual study, most of it dug itself into a still lower, or sub-basement, criticism in which disintegrating the text became an end in itself. As a result its essential discoveries were made quite early, and were followed by a good deal of straw-thrashing.

There are any number of books, for example, telling us that the account of creation with which the Book of Genesis opens comes from the Priestly narrative, much the latest of the four or five documents that make up the book. A genuine higher criticism, I should think, would observe that this account of creation stands at the beginning of Genesis, despite its late date, because it belongs at the beginning of Genesis. That would lead to an integrated study of the Book of Genesis, and eventually of the whole Bible, as it now stands, concerning itself with the question of why the Bible as we know it emerged in that particular form. The Bible does not, for all its miscellaneous content, present the appearance of having come into existence through an improbable series of accidents; and, while it is certainly the end product of a long and complex editorial process, the end product needs to be examined in its own right.

There remained the more traditional approaches of medieval typology and of certain forms of Reformation commentary. These were more congenial to me because they accepted the unity of the Bible as a postulate. They do tell us how the Bible can be intelligible to poets, and we can understand from them why, for example,

Claudel would have turned to the Victorine typological school and made it a seminal influence on his poetry. But again, as a twentieth-century writer addressing twentieth-century readers, there seemed to me a need for a fresh and contemporary look at the Bible as an element in our present literary and critical concerns.

In my *Anatomy of Criticism* I remarked that literary criticism was approaching the area of the social sciences. The statement was strongly resisted, as it cut across the conditioned reflexes of most humanists at the time, but language since then has been taken to be a model of investigation in so many fields, and the theory of language has revolutionized so many approaches in psychology, anthropology, and political theory, to say nothing of literary criticism itself, that no one can any longer regard the humanistic concern with language as separable or even distinguishable from other concerns. In many respects this simply opens up a new field of ignorance for me, and in any case many seminal questions in contemporary criticism would overcomplicate this introduction and must be left for later discussion. Some current critical issues seem to me to be temporary, leading only to some kind of paradoxical or irrational dead end. But the genuine issues are, I think, closely related to the study of the Bible, and in fact are hampered by not being related more closely to it.

Man lives, not directly or nakedly in nature like the animals, but within a mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from his existential concerns. Most of this is held unconsciously, which means that our imaginations may recognize elements of it, when presented in art or literature, without consciously understanding what it is that we recognize. Practically all that we can see of this body of concern is socially conditioned and culturally inherited. Below the cultural inheritance there must be a common psychological inheritance, otherwise forms of culture and imagination outside our own traditions would not be intelligible to us. But I doubt if we can reach this common inheritance directly, by-passing the distinctive qualities in our specific culture. One of the practical functions of criticism, by which I mean the conscious organizing of a cultural tradition, is, I think, to make us more aware of our mythological conditioning.

The Bible is clearly a major element in our own imaginative tradition, whatever we may think we believe about it. It insistently raises the question: Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage like the "great Boyg" or sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all our efforts to walk

around it? Giambattista Vico, a thinker to whom I will refer again in a moment, worked out an elaborate theory of culture as he saw it, confining himself to secular history and avoiding the whole of the Bible. This was doubtless for prudential reasons, but there is no such excuse today for scholars who, in discussing cultural issues originally raised by the Bible and still largely informed by it, proceed as though the Bible did not exist. It seems to me that someone not a specialist in the Biblical field needs to call attention to the Bible's existence and relevance. Some of my suggestions may be based on nothing more than a *post hoc propter hoc* fallacy, but until the *post hocs* have been looked at more closely we cannot know how many of them are only that.

Many issues in critical theory today had their origin in the hermeneutic study of the Bible; many contemporary approaches to criticism are obscurely motivated by a God-is-dead syndrome that also developed out of Biblical criticism; many formulations of critical theory seem to me more defensible when applied to the Bible than they are when applied elsewhere. Naturally, if such statements are true now, they must have had counterparts in the past. In English literature the canons of criticism were established mainly by Samuel Johnson, who followed the normal Protestant practice of keeping the poetic aspect of the Bible in a separate compartment from secular literature. It was the Romantics who realized that such a separation was irrational. Coleridge's brilliant insights into Biblical typology make it clear that he would have made things much easier for his students, and more productive for his influence, if he had provided an interconnected statement of his views on that subject. Such a statement would not have had to be the massive encyclopedic treatise on the Logos which he meditated, and which perhaps no single scholar could have completed. Ruskin's work, too, would surely have been far less diffuse if his conceptions of Biblical typology had been more systematically worked out. There was a misguided vogue fifty years ago for attacking the Romantics on this point, asserting that they confused literature and religion; but critical theory is coming back into focus, and many contemporary critics are well aware of the relevance of Biblical criticism to secular literature. Of these, three in particular, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Walter Ong, have been influential on this book, if not necessarily always in ways that they would endorse.

In the last two decades a great many books have been written on the relevance of Oriental religion to contemporary Western modes of thought, in psychology, philosophy, even in physics. Meanwhile a

good deal of the Orient is committed to Marxism, which is the direct heir of the revolutionary and socially organized forms of religion derived from the Bible. Recently a Chinese student, a teacher in his own country and about to return there, asked me how he could explain the cultural importance of Christianity for the West to his students in a way that would be intelligible to them. I suggested that they would have some understanding of Marxism, that Marx's spiritual father was Hegel, and that therefore his spiritual grandfather was Martin Luther. As for the other half of this cultural exchange, one naturally welcomes the increased interest in Buddhist and Hindu and Taoist modes of thought in the West, but perhaps these would be even more illuminating for us if we understood better what kind of counterparts they have in our own tradition. No serious treatment of this subject can be attempted here, but a book on the imaginative aspect of the Bible may suggest some leads to it.

As a teacher I know how emotionally explosive the material I am dealing with is, and how constantly it is the anxieties of the reader that make the primary response to whatever is being said. There are fewer mental blocks in studying religious traditions outside our own. Naturally, in teaching a course under the rubrics of academic freedom and professional ethics, one has to avoid any suggestion of leading the student toward or away from any position of what is called belief. The academic aim is to see what the subject means, not to accept or reject it. The great majority of my students understood this principle at once: those who had difficulty with it showed an invariable pattern of resistance. If they felt already committed to a position of acceptance, they were afraid of being led away from it; if they were antagonistic to such a position, they were afraid of being led toward it.

This raised the question in my mind: Why are belief and disbelief, as ordinarily understood, so often and so intensely anxious and insecure? The immediate answer is that they are closely connected with the powers of repression I referred to earlier as being the teacher's first point of attack. What we usually think of as acceptance or rejection of belief does not in either case involve any disturbance in our habitual mental processes. It seems to me that trying to think within the categories of myth, metaphor, and typology—all of them exceedingly "primitive" categories from most points of view—does involve a good deal of such disturbance. The result, however, I hope and have reason to think, is an increased lucidity, an instinct for cutting through a jungle of rationalizing verbiage to the cleared area of insight.

Information does have to be conveyed in teaching, of course, but for the teacher the imparting of information is again in a context of irony, which means that it often looks like a kind of game. When the subject to be taught is literature, this element of game takes on a special appearance. Literature continues in society the tradition of myth-making, and myth-making has a quality that Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*, a putting together of bits and pieces out of whatever comes to hand. Long before Lévi-Strauss, T. S. Eliot in an essay on Blake used practically the same image, speaking of Blake's resourceful Robinson Crusoe method of scrambling together a system of thought out of the odds and ends of his reading. I owe a great deal to this essay, somewhat negatively, because I soon realized that Blake was a typical poet in this regard: he differed from Dante only in that Dante's *bricolage* was more widely accepted, and differed from Eliot himself, in this respect, hardly at all.

In a way I have tried to look at the Bible as a work of *bricolage*, in a book which is also that. I retain my special affection for the literary genre I have called the anatomy, especially for Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, with its schematic arrangements that are hardly those of any systematic medical treatment of melancholy, and yet correspond to something in the mind that yields a perhaps even deeper kind of comprehension. Such books as Burton's have an extraordinary pulling power: I understand very well what Samuel Johnson meant by saying that Burton's was the only book that got him out of bed earlier than he wanted to. If I cannot match that, I have at least been more liberal with charts and diagrams than usual.

What follows attempts to extract the introductory and prefatory part of what I have to say about the Bible's relation to Western literature. A book concerned with the impact of the Bible on the creative imagination has to by-pass the much more fully cultivated areas of faith, reason, and scholarly knowledge, though it must show some awareness of their existence. As a result, issues that the reader may feel are entitled to much fuller treatment often have to be cut to a sentence or two. The first chapter is concerned with language—not the language of the Bible itself, but the language that people use in talking about the Bible and questions connected with it, such as the existence of God. Kenneth Burke calls such language the rhetoric of religion. This opening chapter establishes a context for discussing the Bible as an imaginative influence, and seems to me a necessary introduction for that reason, even though its direct contact with the Bible may seem slight at first reading.



There follow two chapters on myth and metaphor, defining those terms within the area of criticism, and concerned mainly to establish the point that myth and metaphor answer the question: What is the literal meaning of the Bible? The general thesis is that the Bible comes to us as a written book, an absence invoking a historical presence "behind" it, as Derrida would say, and that the background presence gradually shifts to a foreground, the re-creation of that reality in the reader's mind. The fourth chapter on typology concludes the first part by adding a temporal dimension to the argument, and connects it with the traditional way in which Christianity has always read its Bible.

The book fell accidentally into the "double mirror" pattern it describes as existing in the Christian Bible itself, and the second part deals with a more direct application of its critical principles to the structure of the Bible, but in reverse order. We start with what I isolate as seven phases of what is traditionally called revelation: creation, exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse. Two forms of apocalyptic vision are postulated, making eight in all, the eighth bringing us back to the central thesis of the role of the reader. Then comes an inductive survey of, first, the imagery, and then the narrative structures of the Bible, which is the point from which the book took its origin. The final chapter makes a second approach to the "rhetoric of religion," and includes a brief sketch of a "polysemous" or multileveled conception of meaning as applied to the Bible. The latter attempts to suggest some answers to questions about the direction in which we go from the "literal" meaning.

I should hope that a further study would bring us closer to commentary in more detail on the text of the Bible. Ruth, the Song of Songs, and the folktale material in the Apocrypha have a particularly obvious literary reference and yet get very short shrift here. Most readers of this book are assumed either to have relatively little familiarity with the Bible, or, if they are familiar with it, to be unaccustomed to relating it to imaginative rather than doctrinal or historical criteria. I am not, of course, claiming that imaginative criteria have a monopoly of truth or relevance, only that they are the only ones consistent with my specific assumptions.

At one end of the spectrum of possible readers for this book are those so deeply committed to the existential and the religious issues of the Bible that they would regard such a book as this as a mere exercise in sterile dilettantism. At the other end are those who assume that the Bible must be some kind of "establishment" symbol, bound