

Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms Through the Lens of Intertextuality*.  
Studies in Biblical Literature 26. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.  
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As a revision of her doctoral dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary, this book displays the usual limitations of that genre. Though trendy in nature, the book reflects a significant personal journey into the larger field of literary criticism. It is a serious attempt to move beyond the methodology of form criticism, which has dominated the study of the Psalms in times past. Tanner explores the Psalms in relation to other texts within the Bible as a whole, in the light of current discussions of intertextuality in secular literature.

Tanner anchors her study in the post-structuralist literary theory of Julia Kristeva, who focuses on the text as “a mosaic of quotations” that absorbs and transforms other texts. She does not limit herself to Kristeva’s system of literary criticism, however. Rather she places Kristeva’s work within a larger context, which includes the writing of Harold Bloom, Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler, and Gérard Genette. Though this methodological decision provides the occasion for the writing of the book, it brings problems of its own. Kristeva’s definition of a text as “a zone of marks and intervals whose decentered inscription puts into practice a polyvalence that cannot be reduced to a unity” (p. 6) is so abstract as to be useless in this particular study. Moreover, the concept of “bricolage” adds little that is not already conveyed in more familiar terminology concerning themes or motifs presented as “a mix of materials” (p. 53). The Psalms are not the product of a primitive writer who lacks tools “conceptualized and procured specifically for his project,” as the term *bricoleur* suggests. The Psalms are carefully contrived numerical and musical compositions of a highly sophisticated nature. The appearance of what Tanner describes as “a disorganized tangle of disassociated poems” (p. 54) says more about the sorry state of affairs on the part of modern interpreters of this body of literature than it does about the literature itself.

The study consists of a discussion of the Psalms as a whole (chapter 2), which is followed by four exegetical studies: Psalm 90 (chapter 3); the Yahweh-*Malak* Psalms (47, 93, and 95–99) (chapter 4); Psalm 112 in relation to Proverbs 31:10–31 (chapter 5); and Psalm 88 in relation to Judges 19 (chapter 6). The last two chapters present a welcome contribution of “feminine investigation” to the study of the Psalms.

In her discussion of the Psalms as a whole, Tanner makes her case for intertextual study of the Psalms. In the first place, “the metaphorical imagery makes the text open to multiple interpretations by the reader” (p. 50). In particular, it is useful to set the poems here “side-by-side with narratives either in the Bible or in the life of the ancient or modern reader” (p. 52). As Tanner observes, the superscriptions of approximately 77 percent of the Psalms invite

the reader to explore such a relationship, in spite of the fact that these comments were apparently added by the hand of a later editor. A second type of intertextuality within the biblical text is the use of the Psalms within the New Testament. Here Psalm 22 provides a particularly useful example in relation to the passion narrative in the Gospel of Mark. In like manner, Psalms 8 and 110 are explored in relation to 1 Cor 15:12–34 and Eph 1:2–23. Tanner carries the discussion still further in terms of Paul's use of Psalm 19 and the catena of quotations from the Psalms in Romans 3:10–18. Although Tanner criticizes those who "make connections in random readings of texts" in their attempts to explore the intertextual process (p. 72), she does not avoid that problem altogether in her own study of the specific psalms she has selected.

Tanner's study of Psalm 90 is the strongest chapter in her book. Starting with a poem by Walt Whitman, she demonstrates dual understanding of a poem with and also without an historical referent. She then demonstrates how the connection with Moses adds peculiar depth in meaning to Psalm 90. Her use of traditional scholarship in light of her own thesis from modern literary theory is handled deftly. She rejects von Rad's conclusion with these words: "On the contrary, if this psalm is read with the superscription, then the 'divine act of salvation' is not missing at all but is grounded in this unique discourse between God and Moses in Exodus 32" (p. 97). Tanner suggests that, "one strong possibility is that their intent with this superscription was to imagine how Moses might speak again at a crucial point in Israel's theological and historical life" (p. 98).

Tanner's study of the *Yahweh-Malak* Psalms is equally impressive except for the critical assessment of G. Ernest Wright's position "that history overtakes all myth" (p. 121), which is overstated. Tanner's conclusion on the matter is not all that distant from Wright's position on the matter, "In Israel, both the mythic and the historical elements are fully present and create a new location in time and space in which the theology of enthronement resides" (p. 121). In somewhat similar manner, Tanner's criticism of Paul Hanson's interpretation of the movement toward apocalyptic visions as "a bit simplistic" (p. 130) is itself too simplistic. The movement she presents of the three motifs of enthronement–kingship, divine warrior, and creation are not that different from what Paul Hanson has described. As shown in the book of Daniel, "the image is completely cosmic" in the end product (p. 132).

I found Tanner's study of Psalm 112 in relation to Proverbs 31:10–31 most stimulating. She would have greatly strengthened her case, however, had she carried her method of intertextuality a step further to include the story of Ruth. The term "virtuous woman" (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible—in Prov 12:4; 31:10 and Ruth 3:11. In Codex L (Leningrad), the reader turns only a single page to get from the statement about the "virtuous woman" in Prov 31:10 to the description of Ruth on the lips of Boaz in Ruth 3:11—"all my fellow townsmen know that you are a 'virtuous woman.'" Moreover, the Hebrew word חַיִל appears together with the verb עָשָׂה in both contexts (see Prov 31:29

and Ruth 4:11). In the former instance, the husband of the “virtuous woman” describes her as follows: “Many women have done excellently (עשו חיל).” In the latter instance, “all the people who are at the gate, and the elders” say of Ruth, “May Yahweh make (Ruth) who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper (ועשה-חיל) in Ephratah and be renown in Bethlehem” (Ruth 4:11). If Psalm 112 is interpreted in light of the story of Ruth, it is not at all difficult to see a fitting female referent for the righteous one exalted in the psalm—and, indeed, in the psalms in general. The warrior of ancient Israelite tradition and the suffering servant come together in the person of Ruth as the valiant woman, who in many ways is presented as one who is greater in her faith than even Abraham.

My initial response to Tanner’s concluding study of Psalm 88 in relation to the story of the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19 was somewhat negative. At first I thought she was pressing her case a bit too far. But the more I read, the more impressed I was. The story in Judges does “give us a context from which we can hear Psalm 88 and hear it in a different way” (p. 172). This is an excellent study, which sheds considerable light on a difficult text.

I found it distracting to find so many minor typological errors throughout the book, such as:

- p. 7 “any given text are a signs” [rather than “text are signs”]
  - p. 8 “as an technical” [rather than “a technical”]
  - p. 9 “a organic *bricolage*” [rather than “an organic”]
  - p. 36 “no where” [rather than “nowhere”]
  - p. 58 “comprehensivein scope” [rather than “comprehensive in”]
  - p. 62 “Markian” [rather than “Markan” (as later on this same page)]
  - p. 63 “with person of Jesus” [rather than “with the person of”]
- Note that the concluding sentence of the second paragraph is not a sentence.
- p. 73 “or even which of the texts were written” [rather than “was written”]
  - p. 113 words omitted within brackets [line 5]
  - p. 118 “a historical allusion” [rather than “an historical allusion”]
  - p. 162 “a priest placed in pit near” [rather than “placed in it near”]
  - p. 165 “of Saul ancestors” [rather than “Saul’s ancestors”]
  - p. 170 “a new a way to see” [rather than “a new way to see”]
  - p. 171 “McCann among others have noted” [rather than “McCann, among others, has noted”]
  - p. 172 “Judges give us” [rather than “Judges (19) gives us”]
  - p. 173 “and fed on hate” [rather than “feed on hate”]

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