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## **What Remains of the Old Testament? Its Text and Language in a Postmodern Age**

David J.A. Clines  
University of Sheffield

I borrowed my title from Herman Gunkel, who wrote an essay with that title, which then became the lead article in a book of his essays translated as *What Remains of the Old Testament*.<sup>1</sup> The original title had a question mark at the end, meaning, What remains of the Old Testament once the biblical critics have done their worst and now that 'much of the Old Testament which was a matter of faith for past generations has ceased to hold that position in our minds'?<sup>2</sup> I am restoring the question mark not in Gunkel's sense, but as a sign of the postmodern, which specializes in questioning the values of the modern—of which Gunkel was such an admirable exponent.

As I begin, let me ask of my audience, Has any among you a copy of the Hebrew Bible with you, by any chance? Thank you, dear madam. Has anyone brought a copy of the Old Testament? Thank you, kind sir. Most of you will no doubt have such volumes on your bookshelves. Now it is my sad duty to inform you that—you have been the victims of a confidence trick. What you are holding in your hands is no such thing. What you have been sold for good money is not actually a copy of the Hebrew Bible itself but a very late and quite corrupt version of the Hebrew Bible, not a copy of a real Old Testament but a very inadequate translation of the Old Testament from a defective text. All you have is *what remains of the Old Testament*. None of us has actually ever seen a copy of a Hebrew Bible or of an Old Testament, and yet, *mirabile dictu*, not many of us really care very much. We manage to live quite satisfying lives, some even perhaps becoming notable Bible scholars in the process, without giving much of a thought to such matters, and those beautifully bound volumes sustain the illusion that we are indeed in possession of what they profess to contain.

It is my first aim in this lecture to show that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is indeed quite defective and to estimate just how defective it is. It is my second aim, likewise, to show how defective our knowledge of the vocabulary of biblical Hebrew is and to estimate just how defective it is.

### **1. The Text of the Hebrew Bible**

If we should ask, How good a text of the Hebrew Bible do we have, really, and what is the quality of 'what remains of the Old Testament', textually speaking?, two thoughts

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* (trans. A.K. Dallas; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928). The chapter was originally published in *Die Deutsche Rundschau* 41 (1914), and soon after reprinted as a separate booklet *Was bleibt vom Alten Testament?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1916), 34 pp.

<sup>2</sup> *What Remains of the Old Testament*, p. 13.

immediately come to mind. The first is our general impression of the care with which the Masoretic text has been transmitted, the extraordinary measures taken to ensure its accurate preservation in all its details. The second is our conviction that emendation of the Masoretic text, though widely practised a hundred years ago, should be undertaken only as a last resort when we are incapable of making sense of the text before us. We certainly do not think that we have in our hands a faulty text, nor do we act—as exegetes, as commentators, as lexicographers—as if we were dealing with a highly questionable text.

We have had in our hands, however, in the Masoretic text itself the best evidence for its defectiveness we could ask for: the existence of variant parallel texts. Without stepping outside the Masoretic text itself, without recourse to ancient versions, without invoking conjectural emendations, you have in your possession priceless data for assessing the accuracy of the text.<sup>3</sup>

#### a. Masoretic Texts in Double Transmission

Among the passages in double transmission are the following:

2 Sam. 22 = Psa. 18  
Ezr. 2.1-67 = Neh. 7.6-68  
2 Kgs 18.13-20.19 = Isa. 36-39  
2 Kings 24.18-25.30 = Jer. 52  
Isa. 2.2-4 = Mic. 4.1-3  
Psa. 14 = Psa. 53  
Psa. 40.14-18 = Psa. 70

Now everyone knows that these parallels display variants, but no one, as far as I know, has fully appreciated the significance of their variants for the text criticism of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Because my focus here is strictly on the text and its transmission, I will not look at parallel passages where we may suspect editorial intervention in the text. Such is the case, for example, at the beginning of the parallel between 2 Kings 18-20 and Isa. 36-39.

<p><a href="#">2 Kgs 18.13</a> <u>And in</u> the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.</p>	<p><a href="#">Is. 36.1</a> <u>And it came to pass in</u> the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.</p>
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<sup>3</sup> There is nothing novel in this observation, though I have yet to find any scholar who has enumerated and quantified the variants.

<sup>4</sup> Helmer Ringgren, 'Oral and Written Transmission in the O.T.: Some Observations', *ST* 3 (1949), pp. 34-59, while displaying the differences between a number of parallel texts, was more interested in identifying which variants were due to oral and which to written transmission. The special study of Georg Schmuttermayr, *Psalm 18 und 2 Samuel 22: Studien zu einem Doppeltext. Probleme der Textkritik und Übersetzung und das Psalterium Pianum* (SANT, 25; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), is focussed on the question of preferable readings, without any consideration of the wider questions raised by the existence of the parallel texts within the Masoretic tradition. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 2001), pp. 12-13, deals with 'differences between inner-Bible; parallel texts'. It is hard to know exactly what he has in mind when he speaks of the parallel text 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 as 'reflect[ing] different formulations of the same psalm' but also allows that '[t]he differences between these parallel texts ... could reflect very ancient differences created in the course of the copying of the biblical text' (p. 12). Since most of the differences are obviously scribal, I can see no reason for doubt that they belong to the phase of transmission rather than of composition of the biblical text.

<p><u>2 Kgs 18.14</u> And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.</p> <p><u>2 Kgs 18.15</u> And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house.</p> <p><u>2 Kgs 18.16</u> At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.</p>	
<p><u>2 Kgs 18.17</u> And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish (a) <u>to King Hezekiah</u>, (b) <u>with a great army</u>, (c) <u>to Jerusalem</u>. <u>And they went up and came to Jerusalem</u>. <u>And they went up and came</u>, and <u>they stood</u> by the conduit of the upper pool, <u>which</u> is on the highway to the Fuller's Field.</p>	<p><u>Is. 36.2</u> And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish (c) <u>to Jerusalem</u>, (a) <u>to King Hezekiah</u>, (b) <u>with a great army</u>. And <u>he stood</u> by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field.</p>

Key to underlining

Single underline = a plus (words in one text and not in the other)

Double underline = a variant (difference in wording)

Bold underline = difference in word order

Wavy underline = repeated words (not in the other text)

In this excerpt, I judge it impossible to determine with any certainty which variants are the result of editorial alteration, and which are due to scribal corruption. The absence of 2 Kgs 18.14-16 from the Isaiah text results almost certainly from an editorial decision; on the other hand, the repetition of 'and they went up and came' in 2 Kgs 18.17 looks like a simple scribal error. Perhaps the awkward position of 'with a great army' in 2 Kgs is purely scribal, but no doubt the omission of 'the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and' in Isaiah is editorial; and who can say whether 'which' (ΓVα) in 2 Kgs 18.17 is scribal or editorial?

So I leave aside parallel texts with evidence of editorial interventions, and concentrate on texts where the variants seem to be wholly or almost wholly due to the usual processes of scribal transmission. Chief among these parallels is 2 Samuel 22 = Psalm 18. in Appendix A I present my analysis of the variants. I leave entirely out of account orthographic and grammatical differences.<sup>5</sup> The figure in the third column indicates the number of words involved in each variant (though most variants concern only one word). I have divided the variants into three categories: (1) pluses (words occurring in one text and not in the other), including cases of the word 'and', (2) difference in word order, and (3) other variants, including cases of synonym substitution.

(1) Here are some examples of significant pluses:

1.

2 Sam	And he said, Yhwh is my rock and my fortress.
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<sup>5</sup> For example, variants between verb forms with and without paragogic *he*.

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22.2	ytdwxmw y[Is hwly rmayw
Psa 18.2-3	And he said, <u>I love you, O Yhwh, my strength.</u> Yhwh is my rock and my fortress ... ytdwxmw y[Is hwly .yqzj hwly °mj ra rmayw

2.

2 Sam 22.3	I take refuge in him, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my height, <u>and my refuge, my saviour; you save me from violence.</u> yn[vt smj m y[vm yswmmw ybgcm y[vy ^rqr yngm wbAhsj a
Psa 18.3	I take refuge in him, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my height. ybgcm y[vy ^rqr yngm wbAhsj a

(2) Here is an example of word order variant:

2 Sam 22.45	<u>Foreigners came cringing to me; as soon as they heard, they obeyed me.</u> yl iW[mVyl^zad[wmø] iyl AWvj ktyl rknEynB]
Ps 18.45	<u>As soon as they heard, they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me.</u> yl AWvj ky"rknEynB]yl iW[mVyl^zad[m'vè

(3) Here are some examples of significant variants:

1.

2 Sam 22.11	... and he <u>was seen</u> on the wings of the wind. j WrAypnKAI ['arVE'
Ps 18.11	... and he <u>flew</u> on the wings of the wind. j WrAypnKAI ['adVE'

2.

2 Sam 22.44	You <u>kept</u> me as head of the nations ... pyWGovarø]ynhEyt'
Ps 18.44	You <u>made</u> me head of the nations ... pyWGovarø]ynhycit]

So far, there is nothing remarkable about the evidence. We can find the same kinds of variants wherever we look at scribally transmitted texts. But what is interesting about this set of data is that it comes from one and the same text, the Masoretic text, the accuracy of whose transmission is legendary. Clearly, the deviations of one text from the other must have occurred in a pre-Masoretic phase of transmission, and the Masoretes, rather than amending or harmonizing on text-critical principles, have kindly preserved for us with extreme care the discrepant texts they inherited.

That may be interesting, but there is something else about the data that must be called astonishing rather than interesting. The surprise comes if we simply list all the

variants in this parallel text and count them up. We will come to a result like this:

Pluses	including 13 cases of the word 'and'	49
Word Order		3
Other Variants	including 9 cases of synonyms	52
<b>Total</b>		<b>104</b>

*Total Number of Variants between 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18*

If that seems a large number of variants, consider the significance of the number when set against the number of words in the text. By my count, there are 382 words in 2 Samuel 22,<sup>6</sup> and 397 words in Psalm 18. If 2 Samuel 22 contains 104 words that are at variance with Psalm 18, then slightly *more than one in four words is a variant* (one in 3.67, to be exact); in each case one text or the other is corrupt. The result is not significantly different if we compare the 104 variant words with the word count of 397 words in Psalm 18 (one in 3.82).

**b. Preliminary Conclusion**

As a preliminary conclusion, I suggest that if the text of 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 is at all typical of the Hebrew Bible, *one word in four may be textually corrupt*. Since we cannot know which word in each set of four words is likely to be the corrupt one, we could find ourselves in a situation of radical doubt about the text of the Hebrew Bible.

Before long, I shall attempt to assess to what extent these parallel passages can be called typical of the Hebrew Bible, and thus whether an extrapolation from them is appropriate; but first I want to add some additional data about the uncertainty of the text they display.

**c. The Versional and Qumran Evidence for 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18**

Since these chapters are obviously an important test case for text criticism of the Hebrew Bible, we must do all we can to establish the degree of textual corruption they witness to. So far, we have looked only at the variants that emerge if we compare the two Masoretic texts with each other. But there is more evidence than that. We also have the ancient versions of these texts, notably the Septuagint<sup>7</sup> and the Syriac version,

<sup>6</sup> I reckon wordcounts thus: I select the passage in the Westminster Hebrew text as it appears in the Accordance program, save it as a text file, and then open it in Word. I remove the maqqeph, replacing them by a space. I then remove the parashot-markers (p and s), which would otherwise count as a word. Next, since this text contains Qere readings in square brackets, and since inseparable prepositions and particles are treated as separate words, I remove all examples of ]] (closing square bracket followed immediately by opening square bracket), thus making into a single word a Qere word that is preceded by an inseparable preposition or particle. I then replace every opening square bracket (which always signifies a Qere) by an arbitrary sign (e.g. \$) and note the number of replacements, which is the number of Qeres. I then ask Word to do a wordcount, and deduct the number of Qeres from the total. The result is the number of words in the text. I should note that the Accordance program offers a wordcount for any selected passage of text, but the figure can be misleading; for it includes all inseparable prepositions and particles (such as the article and the interrogative *he*) and also the Qeres (which are often variant forms of the Kethiv, and not another word to be counted). If one works with the Accordance total, deducting the counts for all the inseparable prepositions and participles and Qeres, care must be taken to ask also for the number of occurrences of *mi from* and to add them back into the count, since Accordance does not distinguish that preposition written fully from its inseparable form *Am*.

<sup>7</sup> In some 9 cases, the LXX reading is common to Septuagint manuscripts, in some 10 cases it is a reading of Vaticanus (LXX<sup>B</sup>), and in some 40 cases a Lucianic reading (LXX<sup>L</sup>), in 1 case the reading of

together with some very fragmentary evidence from Qumran. Their evidence is not always unambiguous, and there are many pitfalls in trying to state their bearing on the textual criticism of the Hebrew text.

The method I have adopted here is to concentrate on the readings of the ancient versions, principally the LXX, that apparently witness to a variant Hebrew Vorlage. I have left aside inner-Greek variants, which is to say, variants in the LXX manuscripts that may be explained by scribal error within the transmission of the Septuagint itself. I have taken as my guide Kyle P. McCarter, who has presented a thorough study of the variants in his Anchor Bible commentary on 2 Samuel.<sup>8</sup> As with the foregoing discussion of the variations between the two forms of the text in the Masoretic text, I am not here concerned with the question of which reading might be preferred in each case. I am only concerned with the question of how many variant readings may exist, and on that basis, how many may be assumed for the text of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.

Following are some examples of variant readings of the Hebrew text that are suggested by the ancient versions (see Appendix B for the complete list). They do not include cases where the versions or the Qumran manuscript support 2 Samuel 22 or Psalm 18 against the other Masoretic text; they are all readings additional to those we find in these two parallel Masoretic passages.

1.

9	MT	... and a fire <u>from his mouth</u> (= וּפִּי) devoured ...
	LXX, Syr	... and a fire <u>from his face</u> (= וּפְנֵי) devoured ...

2.

18	MT	... he delivered me <u>from my enemy of strength</u> (זַלְּ יְבוּיָם) ...
	LXX <sup>L</sup>	... he delivered me <u>from the strength of my enemies</u> (= יְבוּיָא זַלְּ) ...

3.

37	MT	... and <u>my ankles did not falter</u> . (יְלִ סְרֻקֵי וְדַלְּ מֵאֵלַי)
	LXX <sup>L</sup>	... and <u>those who rose against me did not stand</u> (= יְלִ יַמְוִקֵי וְדַמֵּי מֵאֵלַי) και ουκ υπεστησαν με οι υπεναντιοι LXX <sup>L</sup>

4.

48	MT	... <u>who gives</u> (תַּוְּחֵ) ...
	4QSam <sup>a</sup>	... <u>who gave</u> (תַּן [רְצָא]) (cf. ος εδωκεν LXX <sup>L</sup> )

5.

Ps. 18.49	MT	... <u>from my enemies, yes, from my opponents</u> (יַמְוִקֵי אֵי יְבוּיָם) (2 Sam. 22.49) / ... <u>from my enemies and from my opponents</u> (יַמְוִקֵי וְיַמְוִקֵי יְבוּיָם)
	LXX <sup>L</sup>	... <u>from the wrath of my enemies</u> (= יְבוּיָם אֵי)

6.

49	MT	... <u>you delivered me</u> (יַמְלִי יְצִי) ...
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another LXX manuscript. In some 4 cases the reading is found in the Syriac. In 9 cases it is a reading of 4QSam<sup>a</sup>. In a number of cases more there is more than one witness to a given reading, and the figures just given count each reading only once, noting the source according to the following hierarchical ranking: 4QSam<sup>a</sup>, common LXX, LXX<sup>B</sup>, LXX<sup>L</sup>, other LXX reading, Syriac.

<sup>8</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 8; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980).

4QSam	... <u>you protected me</u> (יְמַרְחֵם[ִי]) ... (cf. διετησας LXX <sup>L</sup> )
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Obviously, in the case of the Qumran variants, we have unambiguous evidence of a Hebrew variant to the texts of 2 Samuel and Psalms we have been looking at. In the other cases, I believe, there is *prima facie* evidence of a Hebrew variant in the text used by the Greek translators.<sup>9</sup>

What is especially interesting is not just the existence of such variants but their number. I found in the evidence of Qumran and the Septuagint 73 words variants to our parallel texts of 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18. So I conclude therefore that we know of the existence in pre-Masoretic times of 177 variants within this poem (i.e. the 104 variations between the Masoretic texts of 2 Samuel and Psalm 18 + the 73 variations between the Masoretic text and the Hebrew of Qumran and the Versions).

#### d. Second Preliminary Conclusion

Considering that the poem contains 382 words (or 397 if we count the words of Psalm 18), if 177 words have attested variants, *almost one word in two* (2.16, to be exact) is textually suspect.

The pressing question now is: Is there any reason why should not extrapolate this state of affairs to the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and infer that also for the Hebrew Bible as a whole almost one word in two is textually suspect? Before doing so, we should consider how typical these chapters are of the Hebrew Bible.

#### e. How Typical is 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 of the Hebrew Bible?

I will consider first arguments that would discount to some extent the suggestion that the evidence from these texts should be extrapolated to the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and then some arguments in the opposite direction.

##### a. Discounting Arguments

1. *Poetry and Prose.* It may be argued that 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 is poetry, and since Hebrew poetry is more difficult than prose, it is thus more likely to have become corrupt. The textual state of 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 would then not be typical of the Hebrew Bible.

Suppose this argument to be sound, what allowance should we make for it? Let us reckon that one-third of the Hebrew Bible is poetry. May we also agree that among the chapters of Hebrew poetry, our text should stand at the easier end of the spectrum (would not Job, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Hosea, for example, all be more difficult, and thus more likely to be more corrupt?). In that case, should we perhaps discount our corruption-ratio by 50% or even 100%, from one in two words to one in three or four?

On the other hand, how well founded is the assumption that prose is less likely to be corrupt than poetry? The only way I could think of testing the assumption was to count the number of lines of critical apparatus in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* for a sample of biblical books. Now the critical apparatus contains various types of material, not all of the kinds we have been considering here; but I suggest that it is a fair representation of the relative difficulty, textually speaking, of the different books.<sup>10</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> Of course, we can never finally distinguish between a reading that really existed in a translator's Vorlage and a reading that was never any more than what the translator thought he saw or thought should have been there, as Tov reminds us (Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. ???). But it is hard to see what allowance can be made for the latter possibility.

<sup>10</sup> I deliberately did not include the books of Samuel or Jeremiah in this sample, since their texts display abnormally wide variations between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, which would have skewed the results. I did not merely compare the number of lines of critical apparatus per page, for this reason:

is how the results turned out:

**Prose**

	Words	Lines of critical apparatus	Words per line of apparatus	
Genesis	20627	288	71.62	Eissfeldt
Numbers	16417	417	39.37	Rudolph
Deuteronomy	14300	611	23.40	Hempel
1-2 Kings	25429	748	34.00	Jepsen
Ezekiel	18742	733	25.57	Elliger
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95515</b>	<b>2797</b>	<b>34.15</b>	

**Poetry**

Psalms 1–50	6436	384	16.76	Bardtke
Job	8344	147	56.76	Gerleman
Proverbs	6918	333	20.77	Fichtner
Isaiah	16935	424	39.94	Thomas
Hosea	2382	113	21.08	Elliger
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41015</b>	<b>1401</b>	<b>29.28</b>	

The table is to be read thus: for Genesis, which has 20,627 words, there are 288 lines of textual apparatus.<sup>11</sup> That means that there are 71.62 words in the text for every line of apparatus. In Psalms 1–50, on the other hand, there are 6,436 words, with 384 lines of apparatus, or only 16.76 words for every line of apparatus; here obviously we are dealing with a more difficult text, more suspicious textually, and therefore a more extensive apparatus is called for, about four times the size of that for Genesis.

I have appended to the statistics the names of the editors of each of the books in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, since the personal predilections of each must have influenced to some degree the size of the apparatus they prepared for their assigned book, but I must confess that I see no evident pattern in the outcomes. It was surprising to me that the apparatus to Job was so slight compared to that to Deuteronomy, for example, but it is impossible to determine how far the difference is due to the actual state of the texts and how far to the working principles of the respective editors. It is instructive nonetheless to compare the statistics for the two texts edited by Elliger, who presumably operated with similar standards in editing each of his books. For Ezekiel,

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Genesis has 20,627 words, Isaiah has 16,935; but whereas Genesis occupies 85 pp. of *BHS*, Isaiah occupies 105 pp., because the poetic layout leaves a lot of blank space on the page. If Isaiah were printed as prose, it would be 70 pp. in length. So I compared the lines of apparatus with the number of words in each of the biblical books considered.

<sup>11</sup> The wordcount for the biblical books listed above differs somewhat from that of Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), pp. 23–27. They reckon 20,613 for Genesis, 16,413 for Numbers, 14,294 for Deuteronomy, 25,421 for 1-2 Kings, 18,730 for Ezekiel, 6915 for Proverbs, 16,933 for Isaiah, and 2381 for Hosea. Their figure for Job (8344), however, is the same as mine.

which is overwhelmingly in prose, and not famous for its textual problems, he prepared a line of textual apparatus for every 25.57 words in the text; for Hosea, a poetic book notorious for its textual difficulty, he prepared a line of apparatus for every 21.08 words of the text—not a very different proportion.

Looking at the totals for the biblical books I have examined (which together amount to about half the Hebrew Bible),<sup>12</sup> the prose books show a line of textual apparatus for every 34.15 words on average, while in the poetic books it is one line for every 29.28 words. This is a difference of about 14%, poetic texts by this reckoning being about 14% more textually suspicious than prose books.<sup>13</sup>

The overall conclusion to which one is drawn is that as far as textual difficulty or textual corruption is concerned any difference between prose and poetry in the Hebrew Bible is not large. If any discount at all should be allowed for this factor, 15% would seem to be quite adequate.

2. *The Date of the Text.* It seems a priori likely that the longer a text has been in existence the more opportunity there has been for it to become corrupt.<sup>14</sup> Some would further argue that orally transmitted texts are more likely to have been corrupted than texts transmitted purely textually, but there is no good evidence for such a suggestion, and in any case the evidence for oral transmission of the Hebrew Bible seems to me rather tenuous (I am not speaking of oral composition).<sup>15</sup>

Now many would argue that 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 is a very ancient text. McCarter, for example, claims that although the central section of the poem (vv. 21-25) reflects Deuteronomistic language and cannot therefore be earlier than the seventh century, the two old poems that flank these verses (vv. 2-20, 26-51) do not postdate the ninth century.<sup>16</sup> Should this be true, the poem would be much older than most of the Old Testament, and may well have suffered more in transmission.

Without acceding to such a dating (which would make the poem older than Homer), I would be prepared provisionally to discount its proportion of corruptions by 25% when extrapolating its figure to the rest of the Hebrew Bible. That is to say, I am allowing that our poem may be, on account solely of its relative date, some 25% more textually corrupt than the average chapter of the Hebrew Bible.

3. *Other Parallel Texts.* Obviously we should not base large-scale conclusions on the one set of parallel texts examined so far, 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18. Perhaps this set is untypical of texts in parallel transmission? Here then is the evidence from some other

<sup>12</sup> Together these books total 95515 + 41015 words, i.e. 136,530 words; the total number of words in the MT, by my reckoning, is 300,932, so the table above accounts for 45.4% of the whole of Masoretic text. According to Andersen and Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament*, p. 3, there are 305,500 words.

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps however the figures for Job and Isaiah have skewed this result. They show very much less extensive apparatus than the other poetic books, and may for some reason or another be very untypical. If we were to total the results for the poetic books *excluding* Job and Isaiah the result would be an average for the poetic books of one line of apparatus for 21.08 words—which would make these poetic books some 38% more textually suspicious than the prose books. It is not certain however that we should exclude the figures for Job and Isaiah, even if they do seem somewhat out of line.

<sup>14</sup> A method of testing this point would be to compare the textual state of Qumran manuscripts that were written by the Qumran community (e.g. The Rule of the Community, the Temple Scroll) with that of older, biblical manuscripts. Though I have not been able to carry out such a study, my impression is that the degree of variation among Qumran-authored manuscripts is less than that between Qumran biblical manuscripts and other witnesses to the biblical text.

<sup>15</sup> See however Ringgren, 'Oral and Written Transmission in the O.T.: Some Observations', *ST* 3 (1949), pp. 34-59.

<sup>16</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, pp. 474-75.

parallel texts both prose and poetic:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Parallel</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Variants</b>	<b>1 in ...</b>
Isa. 2.2-4	Mic. 4.1-3	62	14	4.4
Psa. 14.1-7	Psa. 53.2-7	62	30	2.1
Ezr. 2.1-67	Neh. 7.6-68	484	81	6.0
Psa. 40.14-18	Psa. 70.2-6	45	13	3.5
2 Kgs 24.18-25.21, 27-30 <sup>17</sup>	Jer. 52.1-27, 31-34	439	109	4.0
2 Kgs 18.13, 17-20.19	Isa. 36.1-38.8; 39.1-8	1309	199	6.6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2401</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>5.38</b>

The total number of words (2,401) is a count of the words in the texts listed in the first column. The number of variants (446) is the number of words that differ as between the text and its parallel; included are both pluses and minuses in the text mentioned in the first column.

The table shows that, in this quite representative set of parallel biblical texts, on average one word in about five (5.38, to be exact) is a variant, which is to say, a corruption vis-à-vis the parallel text. This figure includes a relatively low number of variants in two lengthy parallel texts, 2 Kgs 18.13, 17-20.19 // Isa. 36.1-38.8; 39.1-8, and Ezra 2 // Nehemiah 7. In the latter case, the number may in part be due to special factors, such as the acknowledged use of a graphical notational system for writing the numerals<sup>18</sup> and the nature of the contents, which is almost entirely proper names and numerals. The ratio of variants per word of text is to be compared with what we have seen earlier for 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18, the figure of one variant to 3.67 words of text. In these further parallels, the ratio varies from one variant in 2.1 words to one variant in 6.6 words.

If we were to add the data for our original set of parallels, 2 Kings 22 // Psalm 18, with 382 words and 104 variants, the total will be 2783 words with 550 variants, an average of one in 5.06 words being a variant. In short, it appears that the state of the text in our original parallel texts, 2 Kings 22 // Psalm 18 (one variant in 3.67 words of text), is entirely comparable with that of other sets of texts in parallel transmission in the Hebrew Bible, and a figure of one variant in four or five words of text can be successfully sustained. These are all cases where we are simply comparing Masoretic text with Masoretic text, without considering the impact of other Hebrew manuscripts such as the Qumran scrolls or the implication of ancient versions such as the Septuagint.

But for the moment, let us hold on to that figure of one word in every 5.38 as the ration of variants in the set of parallel Masoretic passages we have just been looking at. That is more than the one in 3.67 we originally found for 2 Kings 22 // Psalm 18 (58% more, in fact), so let us allow that we should increase our estimate by 58%.

#### b. *Exacerbating Arguments*

Now I will present some arguments that tend in the opposite direction, suggesting that there may be a higher degree of corruption than we have hitherto noted.

<sup>17</sup> I have left out of account 2 Kgs 25.22-26, to which nothing corresponds in Jeremiah 52, and Jer. 52.28-30, to which nothing corresponds in 1 Kgs 25; presumably we are dealing here with editorial changes rather than scribal corruption.

<sup>18</sup> See H.L. Allrik, BASOR 136 (1954), pp. 21-27.

1. *The More Manuscripts, the More Variants*, We saw earlier a text in the Hebrew Bible in parallel transmission (2 Kings 22 // Psalm 18) that displayed a sizeable number of variants (104) when the two forms were compared with one another. When we went on to compare with those Masoretic Hebrew Bible texts the Hebrew text that Septuagint manuscripts witness to in common we found more variants (9). When we considered an individual Septuagint manuscript, Vaticanus, we found more variants still (9). When we examined a group of manuscripts, the Lucianic recension, we found yet more variants (39). When we brought the Syriac into the frame, we discovered again more variants (9). When we looked at the one Qumran fragment of 2 Samuel, we found further variants (9). We can hardly doubt that if the Qumran text of 2 Samuel 22 were entire, or if there were more than one Qumran manuscript containing this chapter, there would be more variants still.

Every time we find a manuscript, we find variants. Let us consider the situation with the text of Isaiah. Our textbooks tell us that 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> has many variants compared with the Masoretic text, but no one tells us how many. In an early article,<sup>19</sup> Millar Burrows listed (by my count) 536 variants, excluding 'a great many other variants',<sup>20</sup> whatever they were, and excluding corrections made to the original manuscript of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> by the original scribe or an early corrector. If that is the correct number of variant, it would mean that in this single manuscript alone, there is a difference from the Masoretic text in at least one out of every 31 words.<sup>21</sup> But that is too small a number; if we look at the variants that Otto Eissfeldt collected for the seventh edition of *Biblia Hebraica* (the 1951 edition of what is usually called the third edition of *Biblia Hebraica*, BH<sup>3</sup>), we find (again by my count) that the figure is more like 1698 variants, i.e. one in every 9.77 words.<sup>22</sup>

It seems highly probable that the more manuscripts we find, the more variants we will identify. Perhaps we will not find any more manuscripts, but we can be certain that many more existed than those we have now. We do not need to have them in order to know that they contained variants. Perhaps the undiscovered manuscripts had fewer variants than the discovered ones; it is not very probable, but let us allow it. For even if

<sup>19</sup> Millar Burrows, 'Variant Readings in the Isaiah Manuscript', *BASOR* 111 (1948), pp. 16-24; 113 (1949), pp. 24-32.

<sup>20</sup> Burrows, 'Variant Readings in the Isaiah Manuscript', *BASOR* 113 (1949), pp. 24-32 (31).

<sup>21</sup> By my count, there are 16,935 words in the Masoretic text of Isaiah (16,933 according to Andersen and Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament*, p. 24).

<sup>22</sup> Rud. Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica: Textum masoreticum curavit P. Kahle; editionem tertiam denuo elaboratam ad finem perduxerunt; editionem septimam auxerunt et emendaverunt A. Alt et O. Eissfeldt; editio decima emendata typis editionis septimae expressa* (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 19??), p. xxxix. Eissfeldt first produced his collection of variants in a separate fascicule of BH<sup>3</sup> in 1951, which were incorporated in later editions of BH<sup>3</sup> itself. For comments on Eissfeldt's collection, see J. Hempel, *ZAW* 64 (1952), pp. 64-65; M.H. Gottstein, 'Bemerkungen zu Eissfeldt's *Variae Lectiones* der Jesaiah-Rolle', *Bib* 34 (1953), pp. 212-221; S. Loewinger, 'New Corrections to the *Variae Lectiones* of O. Eissfeldt', *VT* 4 (1954), pp. 80-87; Joseph Ziegler, 'Die Vorlage des Isaias-Septuagint (LXX) unter die erste Isias-Rolle von Qumran (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>)', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 34-59 (35-36) (repr. in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* [ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975], pp. 90-115 [92-93]). These articles show that Eissfeldt's collection is not absolutely complete.

Eissfeldt undertakes to note all differences between the two consonantal texts (i.e. of the MT and of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) that are not purely orthographic, but he does include a few orthographical differences, such as those in the spelling of the name Isaiah (hy[vy] and why[vy]). I have not included these variations in my count when they were evident spellings of the same name. (I was not so sure that whyqzj and hyqzjy should be regarded as the same name, though they of course refer to the same person, so I have counted them as variants.)

each undiscovered manuscript had fewer than the manuscripts and versions that we have, we can still be sure that they had some, and that therefore we do not possess all the variants there ever existed.

I do not have the chutzpah to suggest how many unknown variants there might be in undiscovered manuscripts, but we can be sure that however many the variants we know of today, there have been in the history of the transmission of the text many more. If we think that the text of the Hebrew Bible is uncertain today, how much more uncertain would it seem if we had not lost the majority of the variants.

## 2. Editorially Variant Texts

This is the moment when another new dimension needs to be introduced into the discussion, that of texts whose variants are due to editorial work rather than to scribal error. My concern in this paper, as I have said before, is not with the question of original or best readings, but simply with the issue of the extent of variation in texts of the Hebrew Bible or Hebrew Bible texts witnessed to by other textual traditions like the Septuagint.

Since our present enquiry is about 'what remains of the Old Testament', we need to be aware of the often large-scale variations wrought about by editorial work. Some of these may well have come into being in the course of composition of the book rather than in the period of its textual transmission, but, regardless of how the variants have occurred, the fact is that we have some strikingly variant texts of some biblical books. A key example is the variance between Jeremiah in the Masoretic text and the shorter and differently sequenced Jeremiah in the Septuagint. Other examples are the two literary strata of Joshua and of Ezekiel, and of the double tradition of Daniel and of Esther with large sections now treated as 'apocryphal'. Other interesting cases are those of the apparently abbreviated or rearranged texts of the Psalms and the Song of Songs in certain Qumran manuscripts.<sup>23</sup>

What is the degree of variance in such cases? The Septuagint Jeremiah is some 15% shorter than the Masoretic text, and locates the oracles against the foreign nations in a quite different place from the Masoretic text. In Joshua and Ezekiel the Septuagint is some 4% or 5% shorter than the Masoretic text.<sup>24</sup> In Esther the Septuagint is about 30% longer than the Masoretic text (though some of its additions were evidently composed in Greek and do not witness to a Hebrew text),<sup>25</sup> in Daniel about 25%. It is impossible to quantify the overall variance under this heading among the various witnesses to the text of the Hebrew Bible. But let us say, simply in order to put some figure upon it, that the Qumran manuscripts and the ancient verss together differ in their contents and sequence to the extent of 10% from the Masoretic text.

## c. Conclusion

Let us put together our numerical results up to this point. I argued (§1.a) that comparing the parallel Masoretic texts of 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18 shows one word in 3.67 is a variant. Factoring in the readings of Qumran and the ancient versions (§1.c) makes that one word in 2.16. Making allowance of 15% for the prose/poetry distinction (§1.e.a.1) would make that one word in 2.48. Making a further compensation (§1.e.a.2) of 25% for the supposed date of the text would make that one word in 3.10. And making yet another allowance of 58% for the average variance in the other Masoretic parallels we examined (§1.e.a.3) would move the figure up to one word in 4.89. Making

<sup>23</sup> For details and further examples, see Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 319-48.

<sup>24</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 333.

<sup>25</sup> See David J.A. Clines, *Ezra. Nehemiah. Esther*.

now an adjustment in the other direction of 10% for editorially variant texts (§1.b.2) would bring that down to one word in 4.4. At that point, we would have to leave out of account the impact of unknown variants in undiscovered manuscripts, which might well have the greatest effect of all the modifying percentages.

I have attempted to put figures on the various qualifying considerations in order to assess their cumulative effect with some degree of care; but of course all the figures are very notional. In the end, the argument of this essay does not turn on the resultant figure; for it is much the same situation whether it is one word in two or one word in five that we can reasonably estimate is a variant in our Hebrew texts. For the overriding consideration is that (except for the cases where variants are still extant) *we do not know which word it is that is the variant*. For most practical purposes, it is as if every single word in the Hebrew Bible was a known variant, and as if we possessed an entirely uncertain text.

The text of the Hebrew Bible is in a state of radical uncertainty. That means that we cannot be sure about any word or phrase in Hebrew Bible texts that we have today that these were the words and phrases of their original author. It is not that the text is sometimes and at some identifiable places corrupt; it is rather that the text should at every point be suspected of being corrupt.

However, this state of radical textual uncertainty does not mean that we no longer have a Hebrew Bible, that we do not know what the contents and the sequence of materials within the biblical books generally were. Viewed from a perspective of distance from text-critical enquiries, the text of the Hebrew Bible is reasonably sound; there are no major lacunae, large-scale disarrangements or wildly variant textual witnesses. For some purposes we can say that what remains of the Old Testament is good or good enough; but if our purpose is to say what the Old Testament contains, word by word and line by line, what remains of the Old Testament is in a sorry state.

#### **f. The Text of the Hebrew Bible in a Postmodern Age**

Text criticism has been a typically, perhaps even quintessentially, modern project. Whether it has had the aim of establishing the one true text, the original text, the best text—which has been its traditional aim—or whether, as more recently, it has aimed rather at analysing the textual variants that exist in order to explain their relationship, it has exemplified the modernist ambitions of a quest for truth and a quest for understanding.

In a postmodern age, projects of the modern age are not dissolved, but their aims and methods and results are opened up to questioning. Data such as those explored above are not rendered invalid, but the possibility is entertained that their significance may be other than what has been thought.<sup>26</sup> That is what the three next points will explore.

##### *a. Deprivileging the Masoretic Text*

My first postmodern move is to suggest that the position the Masoretic text holds should be challenged.

<sup>26</sup> I have previously commented on a postmodern approach to text criticism in 'The Postmodern Adventure in Biblical Studies', in *Interpretation of the Bible. International Symposium on the Interpretation of the Bible on the Occasion of the Publication of the New Slovenian Translation of the Bible* (ed. Jo e Krajevce; Ljubljana: The Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1998; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 1603-18; another version in 'The Pyramid and the Net: The Postmodern Adventure in Biblical Studies', in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998*, vol. 1 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 138-57.

Throughout the modern period the Masoretic text has, on the whole, been conceived as the norm, and all other texts, versional readings and conjectural emendations have been measured by it as a standard. It has been freely acknowledged that it is not indeed a perfect text, but it has been nevertheless the foundational text on which other scholarly practices (commentaries, lexica, grammars) have been built.

The situation we have examined above, however, can no longer be accommodated within that modernist perspective. What is being recognized today is that the text of the Hebrew Bible is hugely pluriform,<sup>27</sup> and even traditional scholars are calling for a 'change of mentality' on the part of text critics.<sup>28</sup> The name for the new mentality, I would suggest, is nothing other than the postmodern, which resists totalizing and the ascription of authority, and gladly recognizes diversity.

In a postmodern age we should speak of the Masoretic text as one text among others, and resist any claims that would effectively equate it with the Hebrew Bible<sup>29</sup> or 'concede its primacy'.<sup>30</sup> We should give up speaking of Qumran readings as 'deviations' from the Masoretic text,<sup>31</sup> still less as ignorant changes of the Masoretic text,<sup>32</sup> of the Masoretic text as the 'received text', of the Septuagint as 'adding' to the Hebrew text, and so on.

There is no reason to imagine that the Masoretic text was determined upon by some kind of text-critical process, and so that it necessarily represents a better text than those of other manuscript traditions that it superseded or supplanted.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it is now being acknowledged that the establishment of the Masoretic text was a socio-political event, in which a particular text or text-type became the authorized text because those who owned it became the source of authority in their community. It became the standard text not because of any intrinsic merits it had, but simply as a consequence of the standing and authority of its owners.<sup>34</sup> It has been an egregious mistake to attribute to it a text-critical significance which is due rather to its status as an authorized text.

#### b. *The Necessity of Emendation*

The next point is that in a postmodern age emendation of the text of the Hebrew Bible becomes more than ever a necessity. In a moment I will discuss whether 'emendation' is

<sup>27</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon even suggests that there may have been a 'calculated preference for verbal multiformity over uniformity' ('Textual Criticism: The Ancient Versions', in *Text and Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. A.D.H. Mayes; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 141-70 [147]).

<sup>28</sup> So Eugene Ulrich at International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Basel, August 2001, though he would not use the language of the postmodern.

<sup>29</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 352.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Psalms II: 51-100* (AB, 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968; 3rd edn, 1979), p. xvii: 'The study of the Psalter within the wider ambience of Northwest Semitic so frequently vindicates the consonantal text against its ancient translators and its medieval reworking by the Masoretes that one must concede its primacy'.

<sup>31</sup> S. Talmon, 'Textual Criticism: The Ancient Versions', pp. 141-70 (143).

<sup>32</sup> Thus Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, p. xxix: 'Generally speaking, 11QPs<sup>a</sup> is distinctly inferior to the Hebrew consonantal text transmitted by MT. Thus at Ps cxlvii 20 the monks of Qumran changed consonantal *yd'm*, "taught them", to *hwdy'm*, with the same meaning, evidently unaware that the *yqtl* verb could all express the past time of the *qtl* form *hwdy'm*'.

<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, the evidence is that at the very time the Masoretic text was first in the making, the Qumran community was content with a highly pluriform text. As Talmon says, 'Nothing in their writings reveals a recognition of the phenomenon of textual variation or an apprehension over the great number of variants in their biblical scrolls. Equally, there is no indication whatsoever that they considered variance in the biblical text an issue which divided their community from contemporary mainstream Judaism ... Critically, the Community never conceived of the very notion of a unified and stabilized text of the biblical books' (p. 153).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ulrich, paper at International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Basel, August 2001.

the best term to use, but for the present it will serve.

If one word in three or four or five is under suspicion, and we do not know which word it is, we need to revise our view of the significance, indeed of the necessity, of emendation. The general consensus is that emendation is a necessary evil, only to be indulged in when it cannot be avoided, a last resort, inevitably subjective in essence,<sup>35</sup> when there is no other way of solving the problems of the text.<sup>36</sup>

I am arguing that this opinion stands in need of revision. In the first place, we need to recognize that whenever a variant exists, any preference for one variant reading over another constitutes an emendation, for if the MT is not the standard text and if all readings are on the same footing, each to be judged on its own merits, acceptance of the MT, just as of any other text, is an emendation of all other readings.<sup>37</sup> In the second place, there is no reason to suppose that, whatever text we have of the Hebrew Bible (i.e. for most practical purposes, the Masoretic text), it is only when we have problems with the text that the text may need emendation. The text may well be corrupt even when it is perfectly intelligible; indeed, there are without doubt many more variant readings (which I am calling corruptions) in the text of the Hebrew Bible than there are perceived problems with it. The process of emendation (defined as it is here<sup>38</sup>) is a daily necessity for the exegete. I will not claim that there is much of a career to be made out of emending texts that do not seem problematic; but neither should we assume that because no one has suggested an emendation the text is sound.

A postmodern perspective also takes note of the fact that attitudes to emendation are part of the scholarly construct of the nature of the text, which is to say that they are subject to scholarly fashion. We all know that emendations were more in vogue a hundred years ago than today; in order to establish, at least by way of illustration, the extent to which that is true, I undertook to analyse the emendations offered by 15 representative scholars for a particular chapter, Job 29. The results (see Appendix C), though not at all surprising, were worth considering, I thought. Of the 67 emendations that were offered by these scholars for the 25 verses of Job 29, older scholars, Budde (1896), Duhm (1897) and Hölscher (1937) accepted 14, 17 and 12 respectively, whereas in the second half of the last century Fohrer (1960), Pope (1973), Gordis (1978), Habel (1985) and Hartley (1988) accepted 5, 5, 3, 1 and 1 emendations respectively.<sup>39</sup> The contrast between the third edition of *Biblia Hebraica* (1937, Beer), with 11 emendations, and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967, Gerleman), with none, was especially striking.

It is a mistake to imagine that our disinclination today for emendation is the result of new and better knowledge than older scholars had; actually, as I have arguing,

<sup>35</sup> Cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, 'The Hebrew Bible', in *The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions* (ed. H. Wheeler Robinson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), pp. 1-38 (36): 'Conjectural emendation on the scale practised by some modern commentators has little more value than as a academic exercise. In recent years there has been a growing reaction against such subjectivity. Even when, as must often be the case, the Masoretic text does not satisfy us, it is there to be explained in the best way possible as the only accepted text we have, or are ever likely to have.'

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 356. Tov, however, is by no means opposed to conjectural emendation; as he says: 'The discovery of previously unknown readings in newly discovered texts which are identical to formerly proposed emendations thus vindicates the procedure of correcting the text by way of conjecture' (*Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 353).

<sup>37</sup> See Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 352-53: 'The process of emending the text thus pertains to the biblical text as a whole, and not solely to ~, that is, one emends all the existing witnesses, and not merely ~'. Tov is working with a narrower definition of 'emendation' as what is usually called 'conjectural emendation', since he uses the term 'preferred reading' for variants that are actually attested. I would rather call both preferred readings and conjectural emendations 'emendations', but in substance I am in agreement with his position.

<sup>38</sup> That is, for example, as including preferring one reading above others.

<sup>39</sup> De Wilde (1981), with 11 emendations, was an exception that proved the rule.

one might have thought that the new knowledge of textual variants available to us today would have encouraged rather than discouraged the acceptance of emendations (indeed, without it having been so realized, every time a Qumran variant reading has been published, the mere maintenance of the Masoretic text in the face of the variant has constituted an emendation). It seems rather than the disinclination for emendation is mostly a scholarly fashion or trend: the reason why we do not emend so much today is, largely, that we do not emend so much today.

One practical consequence of a postmodern approach to emendation may be seen in the work of commentating on the biblical text. One thinks of the inordinate expense of effort commentators across the globe are laying out to explain texts that are in all probability corrupt. No doubt we should do all within our power to explain the texts we have (in practice most commentators restrict themselves to explaining the Masoretic text, privileging it over all the other textual witnesses, as usual), but it is a moot point to what lengths we should go when an alternative text is available by way of emendation.<sup>40</sup>

*c. Deconstructing the Opposition 'Attested Reading' vs. 'Conjectural Emendation'*

My third point that develops from a postmodern perspective is that the fundamental distinction between 'attested readings' and 'conjectural emendations' needs to be re-examined. I will conclude that both should be known as 'variant readings'.

Of course some readings are attested in ancient manuscripts—such as readings in parallel Masoretic texts or readings in Qumran scrolls—and others are 'conjectured' by modern scholars, as their reconstruction of what the original (or, an earlier) text is likely to have read. We have all (I suppose) been trained to privilege readings attested in ancient manuscripts, and taught that we should be extremely 'cautious' about accepting emendations of modern scholars, in which there is bound to be a high degree of the 'subjective'. If we are going to 'emend the Masoretic text' (as we have been in the habit of calling it), we always feel on safer ground if we have support from an ancient manuscript than if all we have to depend on is the judgment or imagination of a Bernhard Duhm; to make a 'conjecture' is by definition a highly risky act.<sup>41</sup> The distinction between anciently attested and modernly conjectured is a classic oppositional pair.

Now, in a postmodern mode, we are bound to ask whether this distinction between 'attested' and 'conjectural' emendations, a typical binary opposition in which one of the elements is privileged over the other, does not lay itself open to deconstruction. That is, we should consider whether the distinction really works, or whether (1) the distinction is other than what it is usually represented to be, or whether (2) to some degree each element may actually be included in, rather than exclude, the other.

(1) Although the opposition is characterized as one between ancient readings and

<sup>40</sup> I mention only one example, from my own forthcoming commentary on Job 21–42, a case (29.7) where I laboured over the words  $\text{trq} \text{Ayl} [ \text{r} [\text{v} \text{y} \text{taxb}$ , lit. 'when I went out the gate upon the town', examining no fewer than nine proposed solutions before I allowed myself to suggest that all that was needed was a small emendation of the word order, to  $\text{trq} \text{r} [\text{v} \text{Ayl} [ \text{y} \text{taxb}$ , 'when I went to the gate of the town'.

<sup>41</sup> If it should happen that the Hebrew text we would prefer (I mean, for good scholarly, exegetical reasons) is neither the reading of an ancient manuscript nor the emendation of a modern scholar, but is only implied by a retroversion of the Septuagint into Hebrew, we have a bad conscience about adopting it, and feel obliged to utter an incantation against the doubtful propriety of such an undertaking. Nevertheless, if we can convince ourselves that the retroversion is assured, we will align it with readings of Hebrew manuscripts, not with conjectural emendations, even though we do not have a Hebrew manuscript in which it stands written.

modern readings, it is not in fact text-critical practice to evaluate readings primarily on the basis of the antiquity of their attestation. In the activity of text criticism, what we are interested in is preferable readings, and there is no a priori reason why the readings of an ancient manuscript should be better than other readings. Ancient manuscripts indeed often contain mistakes, and their antiquity does nothing to compensate for them. Modern conjectural proposals differ in their value also, but it is rare that one can call a conjectural emendation a 'mistake'. Within the realm of ancient manuscripts, we do not evaluate readings primarily on the basis of their antiquity, and it is misleading to suggest, as the oppositional pair does, that age of attestation is a determining criterion.

(2) There is the interesting case of a number of conjectural emendations that subsequently became attested in ancient manuscripts (with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls). Tov mentions three such examples, in which scholarly emendations of Isaiah were later discovered to be attested by 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. Tov attempts to argue that the status of these emendations changed when 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> was found. If the Qumran scrolls had not been discovered, he says, these emendations would have remained 'mere conjectures'; but the discovery of the Qumran scroll 'confers on them the status of variant readings similar to that of all other readings'.<sup>42</sup> Since nothing really happened to the readings in 1947—1QIsa<sup>a</sup> did not begin attesting those readings at that moment, but had been doing so through all the centuries even when no one was reading the scroll—the distinction between attested and conjectural readings breaks down at this point. All that really matters about a reading or an emendation (whatever we call it) is whether it is good, or better, than some other reading.

Now a postmodern perspective does not deny any distinction between ancient and modern, between attested readings and proposed readings, or suggest for a moment that some readings are not attested in ancient manuscripts and that others did not originate as modern scholarly proposals. It merely questions the value of maintaining the distinction as a primary distinction between textual readings. I would make the radical proposal here that, while not closing our eyes to the facts about the ancient or modern provenance of a reading, we should change the valuation we give to the traditional division of the data into attested readings and conjectural emendations. More important than the ancient/modern or attested/conjectural distinction should be what all the readings have in common: the fact that they are variant readings of the Hebrew Bible. I would suggest, in other words, that we regard all variants, whether contained in ancient Hebrew manuscripts, or the result of retroversion from the Septuagint, or the proposal of a modern scholar, as of fundamentally the same kind. Some will be better than others (postmodernism never suggests that judgments should not be made, that preferences should not be adopted), some groups of variant readings will have special characteristics, some groups may have a better track record than others of gaining acceptance, and so on. But the important thing about a variant reading is not its origin but its credibility, its appropriateness, its acceptability. The terms 'conjectural emendation' and 'emendation' should be abandoned, and we should speak only of 'variant readings'. Note too that by definition there can never be a single 'variant reading' of a word or text; every variant reading implies at least one other, and every variant to the Masoretic text, for example, makes of the Masoretic text a variant.

<sup>42</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 353-54.

## B. The Language of the Hebrew Bible

If the *text* of the Hebrew Bible exhibits a high degree of uncertainty, the same must also be said of the *language* of the Bible. To put the matter into perspective, I will first show that the outcome of philological research in the twentieth century has been to increase the Hebrew vocabulary by 50%; in other words, for every two words in one of our standard lexica, such as Brown–Driver–Briggs, Gesenius–Buhl or Koehler–Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, there is now another new word, or proposal for a new word. These new words are unknown to most biblical scholars, but their existence further unsettles the state of biblical studies, and makes us wonder again what exactly it is that remains of the Old Testament.

Secondly, I will show how the quest for ‘new words’, what D. Winton Thomas famously called ‘the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language’,<sup>43</sup> was motivated by an aversion to textual emendation and a reverence for the Masoretic text.

Thirdly, in a more postmodern mode, I will argue that uncovering the interests behind this movement in Hebrew philology does not exhaust its significance and certainly does not negate its impact, which I estimate to be far other than what its proponents intended.

### a. *The Evidence of New Words*

My detailed knowledge of ‘new words’ results from researches in the philological literature of the twentieth century for Volume 5 of the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Mem to Nun.<sup>44</sup> I collected all the proposals I could find for ‘new’ words, which I defined as words that did not appear in Brown–Driver–Briggs; they are now included in the *Dictionary*.<sup>45</sup> These are words that are alleged to have existed in the vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew but had subsequently been forgotten. In many cases (about two-thirds), they are homonyms of words already recognized as Biblical Hebrew words, and that may in part be the reason why they were forgotten. For example, if there really was a noun רח: II meaning ‘oil’, and occurring only once in the Hebrew Bible, it is not surprising that the memory of it did not survive beside the much better attested רח: I meaning ‘river’ (119 occurrences). In many cases, the proposed new word is a cognate of a similar word in another Semitic language, though in 40% of the cases the new word has been inferred on the basis of the Hebrew language itself.

Now there were in the Brown–Driver–Briggs lexicon some 1469 words beginning with Mem or Nun; my researches identified 725 ‘new words’,<sup>46</sup> and more extensive acquaintance with the scholarly literature of the past century would no doubt yield still others. I have no reason to doubt that similar results would be reached if the words beginning with other letters of the Hebrew alphabet were researched in the same way.

Here is a small selection of some interesting ‘new words’ (in the last column, I give first a traditional translation, marked with ❖, of a biblical phrase in which the word occurs, and then a translation, marked with ●, displaying the sense if the

<sup>43</sup> David Winton Thomas, *The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

<sup>44</sup> David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. V. Mem–Nun* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> See further my paper ‘725 New Words Beginning with Mem or Nun’, presented to the congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Basel, August 2001, and published at [www.shf.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurren/725NewWords.pdf](http://www.shf.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurren/725NewWords.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Some 56 of them had appeared in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967–95), 5 vols. (translated as *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [trans. M.E.J. Richardson; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–], 5 vols.

proposal for a new word is accepted):

Word	Meaning	Cognate(s)	Hebrew text and translations
hm/qm]	opposition, adversaries <sup>47</sup>	Arab. maqāmat resistance	Na 1.8 עֲוֹיָאֵי דַרְיָאֵי וְיַבְיָאֵי חִמָּה־קִמָּה־לְיַחֲלִי־קָ; ❖ And with a sweeping flood He makes an end of <b>her place</b> , And chases His enemies into darkness (JPS). ● ... he will make a full end of his <b>adversaries</b> ... (RSV).
rhq: II	oil <sup>48</sup>	Heb. rhn shine, Arab. tanwîr lighting, oil	Is 20.17 חָמַיִם וְנַחֲלֵי־בַשֶּׂמֶשׁ וְנַחֲלֵי־חֶמֶר וְנַחֲלֵי־חֵלֶב וְנַחֲלֵי־חֵלֶב ❖ He shall not see the rivers, <b>the floods</b> , the brooks of honey and butter (KJV). ● He shall see no streams of <b>oil</b> , no torrents of honey or milk (NAB).
מִלְכָּה II	bribe <sup>49</sup>	Heb. מִלְכָּה conceal	Am 2.6 מִלְכָּה יִמְכְּרוּ־רִישׁוֹן וְיִמְכְּרוּ־רִישׁוֹן וְיִמְכְּרוּ־רִישׁוֹן ❖ ... because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes (RSV). ● ... and the needy for a <b>bribe</b> .
rynl V	dominion <sup>50</sup>	Aram. rynl yoke, Akk. n•rum yoke, Arab. nr yoke	1 Kgs 15.4 מִלְכָּה־בִּי־רַיְנִלְוִי וְיַהֲלֹךְ־הוּא־הַלֹּהִים־בְּיַד־מִלְכָּה־בִּי־רַיְנִלְוִי ❖ ... for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a <b>lamp</b> in Jerusalem (RSV). ● ... gave him <b>dominion</b> in Jerusalem.

Not all the proposals, even those I have selected above, are self-evidently superior to traditional meanings, but most of them are interesting and challenging. To an overwhelming extent, new proposals have been made in response to perceived difficulties in the Hebrew text. Contrary to some accounts that are given of the practice of comparative Semitic philology, it has by no means been a matter of trawling through the Arabic dictionary and others to see how many alternative renderings one can come up with for the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the new philologists have typically fastened on some oddity or problem in the Hebrew text, and have gone looking for a solution in the

<sup>47</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament. VIII', *JTS* 36 (1935), pp. 293-301 (300-301); Driver, 'Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. II', *JTS* 39 (1938), pp. 260-73 (269).

<sup>48</sup> H.P. Chajes, 'Note lessicali a proposito della nuova edizione del Gesenius-Buhl', *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana* 19 (1906), pp. 175-86 (181-82); N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, revised edn, 1967), p. 314; M. Dahood, 'Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography V', *Bib* 48 (1967), pp. 421-38 (437).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Gordis, "'Na'alam" and Other Observations on the Ain Feshka Scrolls', *JNES* 9 (1950), pp. 44-47 (44-46); N.H. Tur-Sinai, *arqm lç wfiçp* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1967), III/2, pp. 454-55; Gordis, 'Studies in the Book of Amos', in *American Academy for Jewish Research Jubilee Volume 1928-29/1978-79* (ed. S.A. Baron and J.L. Barzilay; PAAJR 46-47; New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1980), pp. 201-64 (213-15); S.M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 78-79.

<sup>50</sup> Paul D. Hanson, 'The Song of Heshbon and David's NÎR', *HTR* 61 (1968), pp. 297-320 (310-13); Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 95; D. Kellermann, 'רַיְנִלְוִי rynl nîr', *TDOT*, X (1999; orig. 1986), pp. 14-24 (18).

range of Semitic languages (including Hebrew itself). We may differ over whether the difficulty perceived is a real difficulty or not (whatever 'real' might mean), or whether there may be other or better ways of dealing with it, but there is no doubt in my mind that the procedure adopted by the great majority of those who have proposed new words has been a responsible one.

b. *Philology and Text Criticism*

The proposal of new words has had a symbiotic relationship with the practice of textual emendation. As Eissfeldt put it classically:

It repeatedly happens that the adducing of new words from the other Semitic languages or from new archaeological discoveries brings it about that a word which was hitherto regarded as corrupt and unintelligible now appears to be completely meaningful and so the conjectures suggested for it are seen to be superfluous and false.<sup>51</sup>

That is to say, emendations of the Hebrew text may be minimized by postulating 'new words'. It has indeed often been noted by the proposers of 'new words' how their suggestion obviates the need for emendation, usually with the implication that emendation is a bad thing,<sup>52</sup> and that 'respect for the MT' or 'textual fidelity'<sup>53</sup> is a virtue.<sup>54</sup> Tampering with the Masoretic text has more than a hint of sexual impropriety about it, 'tak[ing] unwarranted liberties with the sacred text'.<sup>55</sup>

Dahood, for example, opines that 'The MT is remarkably sound; the unintelligible readings which it presents are only apparently so'.<sup>56</sup> 'Many a biblical text which has been considered corrupt is now proven [on the basis of 'new words' cognate with Ugaritic] to be sound.'<sup>57</sup> 'It is closed season forever to those who would emend the consonantal text whenever it did not conform to their preconceived notions of Hebrew grammar and lexicography.'<sup>58</sup> Eitan likewise had argued that 'quite often not corruptions and discrepancies in the masoretic [sic] text are responsible for our ignorance and misunderstanding of the Scriptures, but rather our insufficient knowledge of the treasures of our ancient language ... [W]hen we face a difficult word or expression in the Scriptures, let us not be in haste to correct or emend the text; it is much better that we consult the Semitic languages.'<sup>59</sup>

The rhetoric is pervasive. The Masoretic text is sound, it deserves respect, and to maintain or defend it is responsible behaviour. Emendation is an indulgence, a showcase for the commentator's ingenuity, 'apt to become a *reductio ad absurdum* in the

<sup>51</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 721.

<sup>52</sup> The phrase 'obviate the need for emendation' is one of Mitchell Dahood's ('Enclitic Mem and Emphatic Lamedh in Psalm 85', *Bib* 37 (1956), pp. 338-40 [339]). G.R. Driver uses the same language ('Problems in Aramaic and Hebrew Texts', in *Miscellanea orientalia dedicata Antonio Deimel annos 70 complenti* [Analecta orientalia, 12; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1935], pp. 46-70 [70]).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. M. Dahood, 'Is Eben Yīṣrā' Ša Divine Title?', *Bib* 40 (1959), pp. 1002-1007 (1007).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. M. Dahood, 'Qoheleth and Recent Discoveries', *Bib* 39 (1958), pp. 302-18 (304).

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell Dahood, 'Ugaritic Studies and the Bible', *Greg* 43 (1962), pp. 55-79 (61).

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell Dahood, 'The Root bz[ in Job', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 303-309 (308-309). Cf. G.R. Driver, 'Problems in the Hebrew Text of Proverbs', *Bib* 32 (1951), pp. 173-97 (197): 'Continued study of the Hebrew text has only served to convince me of the substantial correctness of the Massoretic text, however much it may err in points of detail'.

<sup>57</sup> Dahood, 'Ugaritic Studies and the Bible', *Greg* 43 (1962), pp. 55-79 (61).

<sup>58</sup> Dahood, 'Ugaritic Studies and the Bible', *Greg* 43 (1962), pp. 55-79 (74-75).

<sup>59</sup> Israel Eitan, 'Studies in Hebrew Roots', *JQR* 14 (1923-24), pp. 31-52 (52).

hands of over-ingenious scholars',<sup>60</sup> it is reckless, unnecessary,<sup>61</sup> hasty,<sup>62</sup> it represents an attempt to 'emend [problems] out of existence',<sup>63</sup> it is 'drastic re-writing',<sup>64</sup> 'drastic surgery';<sup>65</sup> 'only too often [it] is nothing but a confession of ignorance'.<sup>66</sup> Emendation of the Hebrew consonantal text becomes 'more precarious every day'.<sup>67</sup> Emendation, indeed, 'rests largely on a fallacy, viz. that what has survived of an ancient language is the whole of it and therefore necessarily sufficient basis for the restoration of a corrupt passage'.<sup>68</sup> It is a matter of pride if one can write a long article on Hebrew philology with 'not a single change of the consonantal text',<sup>69</sup> if one can 'recover' the sense 'without touching the text',<sup>70</sup> 'healing the text ... with the least possible alteration of the M.T.'<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, the most prolific of proposers of 'new words' in Biblical Hebrew, G.R. Driver, wrote, early on in his career:

<sup>60</sup> G.R. Driver, 'I. Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament', *JTS* 31 (1929-30), pp. 275-84 (275).

<sup>61</sup> All these terms can be found on one page of Dahood's article, 'Ugaritic Studies and the Bible', *Greg* 43 (1962), pp. 55-79 (75). He quotes H.H. Rowley's characterization of the era of emendation in 'the early decades' of the twentieth century: 'Commentators vied with one another in the ingenuity with which [the MT] was emended. Where any version could be invoked in favour of a change, its support was welcomed, but where no version could be laid under contribution it mattered little' (in *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, p. xv). Other generalizations by Dahood on Hebrew Bible text criticism may be found in his 'Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography II', *Bib* 45 (1964), pp. 393-412 (395); Mitchell Dahood, 'Hebrew Lexicography: A Review of W. Baumgartner's *Lexikon*, Volume II', *Or* 45 (1976), pp. 327-65 (327: 'the needless emendations of the consonantal Hebrew text recommended in numerous entries. [328] ... more consistent and diligent attention to the Ras Shamra tablets would have obviated many of the emendations detracting from an otherwise excellent lexicon'; Mitchell Dahood, 'Ugaritic *mjr*, "song", in *Psalms 28,7 and 137,3*', *Bib* 58 (1977), pp. 216-17 (217 n. 6): '[T]he solution of textual problems in Biblical Hebrew [should] be sought more in Northwest Semitic texts than in the testimony of the Versions'.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. G.R. Driver, 'The Modern Study of the Hebrew Language', in *The People and the Book* (ed. A.S. Peake, 1925), pp. 73-120 (91): '[T]he study of Assyrian has confirmed the Massoretic text against too ready emendation'.

<sup>63</sup> This is the language of G.R. Driver, for example in his 'Hebrew Notes on the "Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach"', *JBL* 53 (1934), pp. 273-90 (289); 'Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament. VIII', *JTS* 36 (1935), pp. 293-301 (293).

<sup>64</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Linguistic and Textual Problems: Isaiah i-xxxix', *JTS* 38 (1937), pp. 36-50 (50).

<sup>65</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Problems in Job', *AJSL* 52 (1936), pp. 160-70 (169).

<sup>66</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Old Problems Re-examined', *ZAW* 80 (1968), pp. 174-83 (183).

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell Dahood, 'Comparative Philology Yesterday and Today' (review of James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (1968), *Bib* 50 (1969), pp. 70-79 (73).

<sup>68</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Problems in "Proverbs"', *ZAW* 50 (1932), pp. 141-48 (148).

<sup>69</sup> Mitchell Dahood, 'New Readings in Lamentations', *Bib* 59 (1978), pp. 174-97 (197); cf. Dahood, 'The Root *bz* in Job', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 303-309 (309): '[T]he writer has not resorted to a single emendation of the text'. Cf. G.R. Driver, 'Linguistic and Textual Problems: Jeremiah', *JQR* 28 (1937-38), pp. 97-129 (129).

<sup>70</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Ezekiel ii 6: "Sitting upon scorpions"', *JTS* 35 (1934), pp. 54-55 (55).

<sup>71</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Linguistic and Textual Problems: Ezekiel', *Bib* 19 (1938), pp. 60-69 (60). It should be noted that what is meant by the Masoretic text for many such philologists is the consonantal text. Driver's formulation was as follows: 'The solutions of difficult words and phrases here put forward are based on the assumption that alteration of the consonantal text must wherever possible be avoided but that the vowel-points are only of secondary importance and may be emended with considerable freedom' ('Hebrew Notes', *VT* 1 [1951], pp. 241-50 [50]. Dahood's principle was this: 'where the Masoretic punctuation cannot be coaxed into yielding sense, the textual critic should cut free and chart a course on the linguistic map of Northwest Semitic' (*Psalms II: 51-100* [AB, 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968; 3rd edn, 1979], p. xvii. James Barr questions, with a certain irony, 'whether it is ultimately consistent to look with such deep veneration on the Jewish transmission of the consonants of the Bible while holding such deep scepticism towards the Jewish transmission of the vowels' (*Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 35); but this seems to me no better than a debating point, since *ex hypothesi* the date of the consonantal text and its vocalization are far removed from one another.

[T]he fact that with the increase in our knowledge of the related [cognate] vocabularies an increasing number of these rare words is being interpreted should put a stop to hasty 'emendation'; in fact, the time has come to lay down the rule that NO WORD, AND ESPECIALLY NO VERB, IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, IF ONLY IT PRESENTS A TRULY SEMITIC FORM, MAY BE EMENDED. Many, if not most, such words will find an explanation some day in the cognate languages, while there will generally be no reason to suppose that those that cannot be so explained have been incorrectly handed down, although their meaning remains hidden to us.<sup>72</sup>

A later formulation was less one-sided and more nuanced, it must be admitted:

Emendation can only get rid of difficulties by the known, and therefore serves at best to preserve, at worst to impoverish, the language; comparative philology, reaching out into the unknown, aims at and often succeeds in enriching it by the recovery of lost and the discovery of new treasures.<sup>73</sup>

All the same, looking back at the history of text criticism from the vantage point of his Presidential Address to the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in 1956, this is how Driver viewed it:

The wealth of new knowledge [of the previous three decades especially], indeed, went to some scholars' heads like wine and tempted them into rewriting the Old Testament in the interests of some pet theory, it might be pan-Babylonian astrology or a pseudo-Ugaritic proto-Hebrew dialect; these were harmless whims. The most disastrous result was the idea that, while cuneiform tablets provided texts which might in many cases be autographs or at any rate copies not far removed from autographs, that of the Hebrew Old Testament, being far remote from any archetype, must be desperately corrupt and called for extensive rewriting. A flood of emendations

<sup>72</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Two Forgotten Words in the Hebrew Language', *JTS* 28 (1927), pp. 285-87 [287]. The capital letters, and the talk of laying down rules, as well as the enclosing of 'emendation' in quotation marks (as if the very term were illicit), are very suggestive. He was still speaking of 'so-called "emendation"' thirty years later (G.R. Driver, 'A Lost Colloquialism in the Old Testament [1 Samuel xxv. 6]', *JTS* ns 8 [1957], pp. 271-73 [272]). Driver himself, nevertheless, was in practice by no means averse to emendations; cf. for example his 'Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament. VII', *JTS* 35 (1934), pp. 380-93 (390-93); G.R. Driver, 'Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament', *JTS* ns 4 (1953), pp. 208-12 (209); and his paper 'Glosses in the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament', in *L'Ancien Testament et l'Orient. Etudes présentées aux VIes Journées Bibliques de Louvain (11-13 septembre 1954)* (*Orientalia et biblica Lovaniensia*, 1; Louvain-Leuven: Publications Universitaires / Instituut voor Orientalisme, 1957), pp. 123-61.

<sup>73</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Supposed Arabisms in the Old Testament', *JBL* 55 (1936), pp. 101-20 (120). The same language was used by Driver's pupil, D. Winton Thomas in his chapter in *Record and Revelation* (ed. H.W. Robinson (Oxford, 1938), p. 401: 'Emendation is based upon the false assumption that all that can be known of Hebrew is known—it perpetuates the known as the norm by which language is gauged. Comparative philology, however, ventures into the unknown, and discovers new criteria by which language be adjudged possible or impossible.'

It is interesting, incidentally, to note that however misguided emendation may be in principle, Driver obviously wanted to attribute to it some positive value when in 1943 he announced that despite the usual ascription of emendations to German scholars of the nineteenth century, many of the emendations offered for the Psalms (356 of them) were in fact the proposals of French and English scholars ('Notes on the Psalms. II. 73-150', *JTS* 44 [1943], pp. 12-23 [23]). The emendations may have been wrong, but at least they were ours.

descended on the unhappy pages of the Old Testament. Since the second world war the pendulum has swung the other way and the substantial accuracy of the text is now a commonplace of scholarship ... [S]tudy of it in the light of increasing knowledge of the cognate languages has shown that many words and phrases once thought incredible have in fact been correctly transmitted.<sup>74</sup>

It does not need to be further argued that comparative Semitic philology was understood by its practitioners as a riposte to the practice of textual emendation. And there can be no doubt that as the century wore on, emendation became less and less fashionable. I rather doubt, however, that the new philology was the direct cause of the waning of enthusiasm for textual emendation. There were probably several causes. One will have been a growing distaste for 'the proud ich lese and the dogmatic legendum [that] seemed to [Nyberg] to be not a demonstration, but a denial, of good scholarship'.<sup>75</sup>

c. *The Language of the Hebrew Bible in a Postmodern Age*

A typically postmodern question is to ask, In whose interest is a given ideology or practice? We are all interested parties, our behaviour is always explicable to some extent in terms of what is to our advantage.<sup>76</sup> What have been the 'interests' of the schools of 'new philologists' who have proposed the multitudinous new words we are considering here? They were very plainly concerned to defend the Masoretic text, yet it is hard to know quite why they were so committed. They were not apparently motivated by biblical fundamentalism. One could hardly regard a person as religiously motivated who would begin an article:

The interpretation of the Old Testament has for countless generations been in the hands mainly of rabbis and clergy, both equally indifferent to natural sense and advancing knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

So Driver. Dahood was, so far as I know, a devout Roman Catholic, who usually referred to the Hebrew Bible as 'the sacred text' and 'the Scriptures', but equally he was no fundamentalist.

I would prefer to account for the enthusiasm for the 'recovery of the ancient Hebrew language' along another line. It is in terms of the sociology of knowledge, specifically of the processes of group formation and of loyalty within groups that

<sup>74</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Presidential Address', in *Volume du Congrès, Strasbourg 1956* (VTSup, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1957), pp. 1-7 (4-5). It is hard to say whether the following general statement is or is not fully in harmony with others of his: '[T]he massoretic text is as often right as it is wrong; and, if it is interpreted in the light of Hebrew and indeed general Semitic usage, a vast number of its difficulties will disappear, *spurious versenkt*, and the need for emendation will disappear with them, even though resort to it may still be unavoidable; then it must be as slight as possible, supported if possible by the evidence of the ancient versions' (G.R. Driver, 'Forgotten Hebrew Idioms', *ZAW* 78 (1966), pp. 1-7 [7]).

<sup>75</sup> Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, p. 72, reporting on the views of H.S. Nyberg, 'Das textkritische Problem des Alten Testaments am Hoseabuche demonstriert', *ZAW* 52 (1934), pp. 241-54; *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (Uppsala, 1935).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. David J.A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 205; Gender, Culture, Theory, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>77</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Ancient Lore and Modern Knowledge', in *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 277-86 (277).

perceive themselves as marginal.<sup>78</sup> It is clear that both Driver and Dahood, at least, saw themselves as innovators who were in opposition to the prevailing scholarly consensus, especially as represented by German biblical scholarship. In short, comparative Semitic philology in the twentieth century became something of a cause, a war being waged by champions against the Goliath of the hegemonic *Bibelwissenschaft*.

It would be a slur upon postmodernism, however, as well as unduly reductionist, to suppose that identifying motivations and interests can offer a complete account of the project we are reviewing. I would want to suggest that, no matter the motivations and interests of the philologists, the extension of the Hebrew vocabulary through the 'new words' they have proposed is an inescapable reality that affects all Hebrew Bible scholars and exegetes.

The primary effect of this reality is instability in our knowledge of the Hebrew language, just as we observed above for the text of the Hebrew Bible. It is an effect far from the intentions of the new philologists, who thought they were embarked on a stabilizing project, restoring faith in the Masoretic text after the depredations of the emenders, and altogether 'moving in the direction of a more conservative frame of mind'.<sup>79</sup> They did not realize that what the resources of comparative Semitic philology would provide was not transparent solutions for one textual problem after another, but a superfluity of proposals that would prove as unsettling as the proliferation of conjectural emendations in previous decades.

Let us remind ourselves of the measure of this instability. Since we are in an early phase of processing the proposals the last century has put forward, there being so far very few critiques of them in existence, we are in a position of quite serious indeterminacy. We are closer than we have been in centuries to the situation of a language that is just being deciphered for the first time, with the meaning of one out of three words being in doubt. What can we say with any certainty remains of the Old Testament when we know the meaning of only 65% of its vocabulary?

Now perhaps I should not put it as strongly as that. The new words that have been proposed are, for the most part, relatively rare words. For the letters Mem and Nun, the new words proposed are identified in only 2300 occurrences, whereas the old words occur some 50,000 times. If we extrapolate the number of new words and their occurrences across the whole Classical Hebrew vocabulary, new words might be alleged to occur some 15,000 times in the Hebrew Bible. Compare that with the word count for the Hebrew Bible of some 300,000 words, and it would appear that we would encounter a 'new word' only once every 20 words of the Hebrew text.

Is that, however, a comforting statistic? Is once in 20 words a lot or a little? Would meeting with two 'new words' in every three verses count as a lot? I would think so myself, though others might disagree.<sup>80</sup> Yet the situation is less comforting than that. For how do you know when you have encountered a 'new word'? They are not marked in the text. You have to worry whenever you meet with a rare word (and how do you know it is a rare word when you are reading the text?) whether this is one of

<sup>78</sup> See also my paper, 'Philology and Power', in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998*, vol. 2 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 613-30.

<sup>79</sup> '[W]hat effect ... is the recovery of Hebrew having upon our attitude towards the value of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament? Its effect is very clear. We are moving in the direction of a more conservative frame of mind' (D. Winton Thomas, *The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language*, p. 35).

<sup>80</sup> The statistics are these: there are 22,945 verses in the Hebrew parts of the Hebrew Bible; if we divide the 300,932 words in the Hebrew parts of the Hebrew Bible by 22,945, we get an average of 13.16 words per verse. If there is one new word every 20 words, there are two new words every 40 words, i.e. every three verses.

those words that has been explained differently by philological scholars of the last century, whose proposals did not find their way into one of the standard lexica you are inevitably using. It is an even worse situation than that, though, because not all proposals of new words concern only rare words; sometimes it is a quite 'normal' word that we need to check out, like  $\Gamma\eta\aleph$  (is it *river* or *oil*?) or  $\Gamma\aleph'$  (is it *bitter* or *strong*?). Nor is it only a matter of one new word in contention with an old word. There may be many alternative new proposals for a single word. When we meet with the verb  $SS\aleph$ , is it the  $SS\aleph$  I *be sick* that we know from our standard lexica, or is it  $SS\aleph$  II *sparkle* or  $SS\aleph$  III *sway* or  $SS\aleph$  IV *suffer convulsions* or  $SS\aleph$  V *rally to the banner* or  $SS\aleph$  VI *dry up*?<sup>81</sup> Or is the verb  $\aleph\aleph$  before us the  $\aleph\aleph$  wave we already know, or is it  $\aleph\aleph$  II *sprinkle* or  $\aleph\aleph$  III *bow down* or  $\aleph\aleph$  IV *declare superfluous* or  $\aleph\aleph$  V *raise* or  $\aleph\aleph$  VI *deliver in large measure*?<sup>82</sup> Even seasoned scholars can no longer rely on their accumulated knowledge of the Hebrew language, but must again become tyros, looking up even common words in case they are missing something.

I am far from arguing that because a proposal for a new word has been made, it must be right. Indeed, it is self-evident that the proposals cannot all be right, for quite a few of them are mutually exclusive. For example, when Issachar is called a strong ass crouching between the  $\mu\aleph\aleph\aleph\aleph\aleph$  (Gen. 49.14), is he between the *fire-places*, the *saddle-bags*, the *divided sheepfolds*, the *double wall*, or the *grazing places*—or perhaps something else altogether different?<sup>83</sup> Perhaps, now that it is easy to see all the suggestions together in one place, in the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (but very probably there are other suggestions I have not yet come across), we will be able to settle ultimately on one preferred meaning and reject the other four. Or perhaps not; perhaps we shall never know which is the best meaning, and we may have to live with five or even more possibilities. It is a situation typical of a postmodern age.

It was so different in the modern period. Then it seemed that advances in knowledge would always lead us closer and closer to the truth. G.R. Driver, for example, was always conceiving his task as a philologist to be the solution of problems or riddles; he could even title an article simply 'Problems and Solutions'.<sup>84</sup> Even if his proposed solution did not find acceptance, perhaps it would point the way to the correct solution: 'I can only hope that even where I have not been successful in solving the problem before me I may have succeeded in throwing such light on it that another coming after me may be able to reach a final solution'.<sup>85</sup> Final solutions are no longer on offer; although there are no doubt better and worse proposals for the text of the Hebrew Bible or the meaning of its words, the last century has taken us further away from final solutions universally agreed towards an ever growing number of competing claims. The world of Hebrew Bible studies has changed dramatically and irreversibly from a day when it could be urged that 'every effort must be made to establish beyond doubt the precise sense of every word in the Bible'.<sup>86</sup> It is a relief, in a way, to know that we do not need to try to attain such an idealistic goal; but it does not make our task as philologists and exegetes any easier to know that we are not ascending some upward

<sup>81</sup> See *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, V, p. 701.

<sup>82</sup> See *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, V, pp. 645a-647b.

<sup>83</sup> See *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, V, pp. 564b-565c.

<sup>84</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Problems and Solutions', *VT* 4 (1954), pp. 225-45.

<sup>85</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Textual and Linguistic Problems of the Book of Psalms', *HTR* 29 (1936), pp. 171-95 (195); the last words of the quotation seem curiously insensitive, given their date!

<sup>86</sup> G.R. Driver, 'Hebrew Notes on "Song of Songs" and "Lamentations"', in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80. Geburtstag gewidmet von Kollegen und Freunden* (ed. Walter Baumgartner [et al.]; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1950), pp. 134-46 (146).

slope from ignorance to enlightenment, but that the task can never be completed, that the globalization of the Hebrew Bible industry will for the foreseeable future be bringing us fresh perspectives we will have difficulty in adapting to, that the alternative to a heartening evolutionary progression in knowledge is a sense of chaos and confusion, and a fear that we are destined to remain in a state of uncertainty for a long time yet, perhaps for ever. For some this is an anxiety-provoking situation, and we must be prepared for some strong language as the significance of the situation sinks in.<sup>87</sup>

Let me stress that in this lecture I have speaking of the *text* and the *language* of the Hebrew Bible, not in broad terms of its contents, its ideas, its narratives, its poetry, its imagination. They too are open for reassessment in ways we never dreamed of even a couple of decades ago. But they are not my topic here. What I have to suggest today is that, so far as concerns the text and language of the Hebrew Bible we are in a situation of radical uncertainty.

What then remains of the Old Testament?

<sup>87</sup> Barr even argues that calling into question the Masoretic vocalization 'logically deprives us of a great deal of existing knowledge of Hebrew ... May not the philological treatment, starting out by claiming to extend our limited knowledge of the vocabulary and usage of Hebrew, logically end up by placing us in a through scepticism of even such knowledge as we have?' (*Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, p. 36). On the contrary, if it is possible to be sceptical about something, we can hardly call it knowledge. But Barr need not worry, since the Masoretic text is and always will remain evidence for a certain phase of the Hebrew language, and no one is calling for scepticism about Masoretic Hebrew, only for scepticism about how well it represents Classical Hebrew. Barr must hate the situation of textual and linguistic instability that I am outlining here, since he is such a foe of postmodernism. '[T]o me', he says, 'to utter the word "postmodern" is equivalent to saying "I am now going to start talking nonsense"' (*History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of the Millennium* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 30).