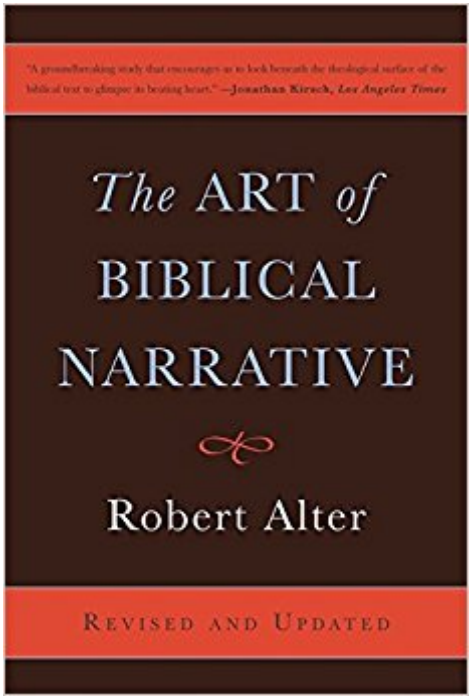
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# The Art Of Biblical Narrative




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## Synopsis

Since it was first published nearly three decades ago, The Art of Biblical Narrative has radically expanded the horizons of biblical scholarship by recasting the Bible as a work of literary art deserving studied criticism. Renowned critic and translator Robert Alter presents the Hebrew Bible as a cohesive literary work, one whose many authors used innovative devices such as parallelism, contrastive dialogue, and narrative tempo to tell one of the most revolutionary stories of human history: the revelation of a single god.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Robert Alter is a Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a recipient of the Robert Kirsch Award for lifetime contributions to American letters, he lives in Berkeley, California.

This is an absolutely necessary read for anyone who is interested in better understanding the OT, either at a layman’s level or for someone who is interested in serious scholarship of the OT. I highly recommend it for anyone who is simply interested in better understanding the OT but does not have an extensive background in either biblical scholarship or literary criticism. For those who are interested in biblical scholarship this book provides an excellent starting point for understanding the dynamics of literary criticism as applied to the Bible.A rough familiarity with the biblical stories is

necessary, though he typically provides his own translation of those sections that he will look at in detail. A basic familiarity with the various approaches in biblical criticism would be extremely helpful for better understanding his goal in writing. A knowledge of Hebrew is not necessary as he always explains significant nuances of the language either in his translations or commentary (though it would, of course, be immensely helpful!).The book is both a defense and demonstration of a literary approach to OT narrative. He provides a brief overview of the history of literary approaches to the Bible, showing how past interpreters of the OT (including sections in the Midrash) have on occasion made observations that approach literary criticism, but that a well-developed system of literary analysis has for the most part been lacking in most OT scholarship. He also theorizes about the reasons why the Hebrew authors should have utilized narrative (as opposed to, for instance, myth) in their theological writings.Most of the book is composed of chapters that expound different techniques used by the biblical authors. After an explanation of the technique, he typically gives examples demonstrating how an understanding of the technique can aid in the interpretation of the text. What I found to be the most interesting parts of the book were his chapter conclusions, where he makes a few observations about the interplay between the theology of the authors and the reasons why they utilized that particular technique.The reader need not agree with either his interpretations nor his assumptions about the origin of the text. In the final chapter he notes that a person can disagree with interpretations, and that his goal was not necessarily a full-fledged commentary on his sections, but merely a demonstration of a particular technique. As for his assumptions of the origin of the text, he makes no claim to his own religious devotion or beliefs. He assumes, for example multiple authors behind the Pentateuch (as most biblical scholars do). Even for a person who is committed to Mosaic authorship, this should not be reason to dismiss his observations about the literary quality of the text, as his primary concern in this book is always the final form of the text.The only minor thing that I can think that MIGHT have made this book better is divisions within the chapter to help the reader better understand when he is transitioning.In sum, this should introduces the student of the Bible to the various techniques used by the authors of the biblical narratives, and trains him/her to ask the right questions about the text when they arise.

It is always a delight to read books about the Sacred Scriptures written by those who ’are at home’ with the Hebrew Language. Robert Alter is one of those -he reads Hebrew as I read English. More than that, he has a ’feeling’ and a ’taste’ for the Language. He understands the structure and the ’in-built’ nature of the Language which enables him to see things that others do not. Reading a Text for such people is more than reading- it penetrates into the heart of the words and his whole mind

and heart automatically re-act to what is read. This is shown very clearly as the Author takes the Reader through the saga of stories about David and Jacob. I found them wonderful. Read the book- it will teach you how to approach and read the Sacred Scripture with a Biblical mind. If you do not read Hebrew, the next best thing is to read those who do and learn what the Hebrew Text actually says. It is all very exciting. Happy reading!! Ignotus.

So wonderful I ordered another copy of Alters book on the Psalms. He makes the scriptures come alive and shows us all the literary devices used.some are obvious and others more subtle. I recommend for anyone wanting to study the word of God more closely. Hebrew, Gentile, Christian, Atheist, anyone. God bless.

Robert Alter’s translations are wonderful. I only have two of his many volumes, but The Psalms are great language. I read one Psalm aloud at a funeral and the words flowed easily and the mourners had no trouble comprehending the sense and poetry I was reading. His scholarship is monumental. I stand in awe of his work, so any slight criticism I have to make of this book makes me feel like a little boy throwing stones at a mountain, a midget in the presence of a giant.The tendency of scholars to create things out of their agreement with one another, what I call naive ontology, is a general failing. I assume Alter has to work with what he’s got on the shelf, the works that make up his field and the comments of others. I have learned greatly from this work and will probably re-read it. I do not care for the Bible particularly and the over-estimation of the work bothers me. It’s part of out culture to overestimate the Bible. Those who praise the King James Version, for instance, generally don’t read it. They praise the language and rely on their memory of the language. Alter perpetuates this mythology and finds something special about the literary conventions used in it.He calls the betrothal stories of the patriarchs a "type". I wonder whether it might not be more like a record of the terms of a contract, guaranteeing that the proper forms were observed. Was the bride from outside the tribe? Was she properly obtained and not a battle trophy? etc. But there is the scholarly category of the type and Alter gives evidence of it. Maybe it’s just a 20th century scholarly quirk and has no extra cranial existence.I have writerly qualms about the assignment of meaning to word choice. Repetition is a device one may use and vary at will. Speculation about an un-verifiable oral tradition or the unattested literary precedents of Bible writers is vain. It does not support Alter’s position.These are my quarrels with a monument. With all these cavils, I still ordered his companion volumeÃ  Â The World of Biblical Literature. And I wish I had time to read his whole corpus.

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