

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY PHILOLOGY

New approaches to King James Bible Studies

Abstract: This paper employs innovative linguistic methods and posits new and invasive ways for probing a text's graphemic and phonemic microstructures

An overview in brief

Where does one begin in explaining his or her fascination with ancient history and, more importantly, the captivation involved with the writings which unveil her past glories? The best place to begin, I believe, is with written texts. Literature provides readers who are separated from the past--geographically, temporally and culturally--with an alternative route to future studies. For whatever commentaries will be compiled tomorrow will derive from present readings of texts from the past. Yes, it is true that we have unearthed many types of old artifacts and these have altered our understanding of very important aspects of antiquity, but, at the same time, these relics have confirmed much too.

Epigraphic labors have justifiably increased our awareness of how the 'ancient working man' used his tongue, still too, the manner in which dialectal language was construed. Taken as a whole, these few words do seem to be far too foreign for any conversation on an edition of scripture; nevertheless, they form an integral part of understanding why the authorized version of the year sixteen hundred and eleven should figure into any discussion on the transmission of scripture. Of the many new editions currently on the market there are a number of advantages proffered for their use, and to a degree, there could be some relative weight to an argument for a text in current idiom.

The problem which one faces when attempting to 'pick a bible' to read is compounded by issues that average laypersons rarely consider. Anyone may, and should, study the vast domains of textual studies available in English, but I would be willing to aver that very few parties are able to read and/or conduct research in original source texts and documents. And this one drawback has limited the way in which modern bible versions have been utilized by the professional scholarly community. Theologians may theologize but 'doing theology' per se is not comparable to the detailed, systematic and rigorous work required to investigate language and its proper settings. A broad view of sociolinguistics is needed for expansive coverage in the area of true New Testament critical studies. This is, from what I read in our scholarly journals, currently an impossible task, since most of our biblical scholars have done little in diachronic language study.

Brief note: A scholar friend and I were once engaged in a discussion on semiotics and translation, and he brought to my attention an experience well worth repeating here. In a class on Medieval Latin he put forth a foil to his students; a Latin text of some 20 or so lines of which the first line reads: *Res sunt numquam ut videntur*—At no time are things as they have seemed, or (paraphrasing) nothing is as it appears to be. Students were then given nearly an hour to outline the poem’s syntactical structures, date and any other relevant data coming to mind from their reading. After the submission of some long detailed papers ascribing the Latin verse to periods ranging anywhere from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the professor informed all that they had summarily failed the exam. He then went on to explain that years prior, his own mentor had constructed this Latin poem in less than 10 minutes flat while seated at an old fashioned typewriter. The point was well received by each student: Fine Latin poetry can be reasonably composed still today and that Alexandrian school analytical methods might provide initial false assumptions which go on to yield faulty conclusions.

To begin with, our understanding of the Renaissance and Elizabethan periods has increased with the work of such men as Anthony Grafton who has stayed close to the ‘Revival of Learning’ period texts and given us opportunities to meet illustrious men through pages of literature long since forgotten. Men who edited old Latin and Greek MSS, then composing their own verse and prose for publication, were at the forefront of critical studies in their day, and rightly so. They lived, breathed, thought and spoke the tongues which we now call dead languages. To my knowledge we have no advanced editor of new bible editions who is publishing works which he or she has composed directly from classical sources—to be sure, Greco-Roman foundations in biblical scholarship are weak today.

It is not that there are not those today within academe who are not continuing the humane traditions of old—writing on ancient Greek comedy in all its phases, studying the inter-textuality of authors, editing for the present generation new editions of Latin authors, inventing their own poetry—it is that these geniuses are not involved nor leading the way in biblical criticism. So what we are left with are persons whose knowledge of Greek is confined to Koine—a knowledge subpar for the technicalities of linguistics—and whose understanding of Hebrew has ventured no further than the Dead Sea Scrolls—what of the troves of literature remains in Syriac, Arabic, Amharic, and Latin inscriptions?

With the publication of the edition commonly called the King James Bible a number of unsurpassed features were fixed in the text. By way of illustration allow me to cite only a few: First of all, the poetry sections of scripture were deftly handled. The poet Rolfe Humphries (1894-1969) who translated Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, was correct in saying that “It is high time for translators to quit trying to inherit the earth by succumbing meekly to that tired old *traduttore-traditore* cliché, or the maybe-malice-mot of Frost’s that Poetry is that which gets lost in translation. How much poetry gets lost in

the King James version of Psalm XXIII or Job 31-34, or the Song of the Songs, which is Solomon's?"¹

Rolfe Humphries assessment is a result of years of close readings of texts. For anyone who has ever touched upon the niceties of poetics, it is clear from poetry's composite structure that any transference of meaning from one tongue to another requires a translator to possess great comparative philological skills. *The right word in English for the right word in Hebrew is necessary for meter and the scansion of lines.* If as a layman or scholar you have misunderstood the above sentence, imagine what difficulties emerge when a translator (or translation team) is unable to compose a proper English sentence on his own and finds himself in need of, God forbid, the assistance of a modern day translation stylist. The editors of the King James Bible did a remarkable job creating what is persistently known, even in academic circles today, as a virtual literary classic; the fluid style of each verse being the result not only of inspiration but of technique.

Old Testament Illustration

Now in a very practical way allow me to demonstrate how a mathematical analysis of a few lines is foundational to a philologist's work method. This will also give adequate representation of the nerve structure of the Hebrew verse overshadowed by English dress. Indeed, it is good at times to lift up the English skirt to take a peek at those bony Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek legs idly standing there. So let us take the bait which Mr. Humphries gives and outline Psalm 23.

Psalm of David the Lord {is} my shepherd I shall not want/he maketh me to
lie down in green pastures he leadeth me beside the still waters/he restoreth my
soul he leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his namesake/yea though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with
me thy rod and thy staff they comfort me/thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of mine enemies thou anointest my head with oil my cup runneth over/
surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in
the house of the Lord forever. {Grand total: 151 syllables}

*The Hebrew text contains thirteen syllables in verse one—eighteen in verse two—eighteen in verse three—thirty-four in verse four—twenty-five in verse five—and twenty-six in verse six. A total of one hundred and thirty-three syllables.

¹ Poets, Poetics and Politics—America's literary community viewed from the letters of Rolfe Humphries, 1910-1969. Edited by Richard Gillman and Michael Paul Novak, published by University of Kansas press 1992. Quote found on page 4 of introduction.

One of the first things to notice is that I have printed a clean text (one without punctuation) reflecting its Hebraic undertones in the Masoretic manuscript. The words all seem to run together, falling on top of the other in sequence. And at the end of each verse I have annotated the number of syllables counted—with the symbol {/} signifying the termination.

Any strict analysis of texts requires studies in form and content. By form I mean not only the aesthetic qualities which take up space and time but also its arrangement in multiple levels of interpretation. If one were given the task of describing the ‘form’ of an old quarter and later writing those descriptions on paper all that would be said would normally relate to its shape—maybe its color—and how it contrasts with other known shapes and sizes. However, real form study from a professional and critical perspective would demand an attention to details often overlooked; remarks on the front face revealing George Washington with the word “Liberty” atop his head, the flowing hair tied at end with roughly hewn facial features, alongside the phrase “in God we trust” and below the neckline the numbers 1996. On the obverse side one finds English words—“United States of America, Latin diction—E Pluribus Unum, and an eagle perched—with tail feathers falling just below its resting place but slightly above the foliage--as representative of a nation.

These points of minutiae are what inform us as to the appearance of a thing but this aspect of criticism is narrow and one sided. When literary form criticism is applied to biblical poetry it does not allow for the metrics or aural beauties linked to poetry. To test this thesis, find someone who can read Psalm 23 as a native would. If you are able to read the whole text yourself with comparative ease this would be fine too. Then listen to the cadence of the text as it is recited. Pay close attention to the long and shorts—accents of stress--of each line. You will immediately hear the rhythmic qualities embedded in each verse. To capture this felicity in another language is difficult. And with one hundred and fifty one English syllabic equivalents to the one hundred and thirty-three Hebrew syllables the translators of the Authorized Version did well in transferring its form and meanings.

The sound correspondents of both English and Hebrew texts are neat. Thus, in the inspiration of scripture, not only should we affirm the preservation of letters, syllables and words, moreover, we must affirm the needed transference of auditory structures. Many recently published English editions of scripture--do well in places—with respect to the transmission of meaning, but less so with regard to spectrums of Hebrew form and sound; items which God also preserved in scripture.

Read the last line of verse six from Psalm 23 in the Authorized Version, then, read the same identical line from the New Revised Standard Version, which reads: “And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”It is the phrase “my whole life long” that destroys the euphony of the Hebraic tones—vashav’ti. B’beit y’hovah l’orekh yamiim. What is constructed in Hebrew through nasal and guttural gist becomes palatal/dental in this newer speech edition of scripture and is quite literally, non sensical. The committee members employed by King James utilized a vast number of monosyllabic sound correlations in the Psalms and as you know, the rest is history. So when editors claim that their versions are written for oral use and congregational readings from the pulpits, how are parishioners able to judge? This is a matter requiring the immediate attention of the best and brightest scholars.

Now I realize there are not throngs of people who are interested in the technical aspects of how to read verse, meters and spondee et cetera. Yet these elements do feature in the multifarious texts of scriptures handed down to us from antiquity. And so, it is with great sadness that I must relate that for the most part, many of our editorial stylists are overlooking true oral formulaic patterns in Hebrew manuscripts and sacrificing euphonic concepts. Strong words, yes, but necessary in times when so few are genuinely engaging in the type of text critical research required for substantive conclusions.²

New Testament Illustration

At this time, let us consider a passage of scripture which is bracketed in all recent editions of scripture. Luke’s discourse records Jesus’ final moments in the Garden of Gethsemane and he does offer more information than presently attributed to him. As an instance of this, we find these words in Luke chapter twenty-two, verses forty-three and forty-four:

“ANDTHEREAPPEAREDANANGELUNTOHIMFROMHEAVENSTR
ENGTHEINGHIMANDBEINGINANAGONYHEPRAYEDMOREEA
RNESTLYANDHISSWEATWASASITWEREGREATDROPSOFBLO
ODFALLINGDOWNTOTHEGROUND”

Once again I have placed a clean text (this time with Uncial English letters) of the King James Version above. Naturally, this configuration accords with the original Greek text written in Uncial script. With respect to this test I have used my *Concordant Greek Text* restored from Uncial

²A more thorough and comprehensive look at the practice of textual criticism may be found in the essay for Housman Society Journal volume thirty-four entitled: “A Rural Pastor’s notes on A.E.H., *The Classicist: A Man of Right and Necessary Sense*”--by Pastor Darrell Sutton.

Manuscripts (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus) and their ancient editors with the variant readings in the superlinear—published by Concordant Publishing Concern, fourth edition 1975. Along with this Greek text, I have used the *Scrivener's Annotated Greek New Testament* of 1908, republished in 1999 by the Dean Burgon Society.

You may note the close reading needed to discern the verses above. To read from a paragraph similar to this in uncial Greek is hard on one's eyes and concentration to say the least. Only by reading a clean text, free of punctuation and divisions, will the peculiarities of prose texts manifest. Our English verses are pretty transparent as it relates to the manner in which the Greek is laid out so the form is no problem at all.

The issue is over its authenticity or spuriousness. The arguments have gone on for some time with the consensus of critical text followers presuming its falseness. C.F. Evans in his commentary on Luke writes of these verses, "On balance the verses should probably be deleted."³ His reasoning is that there are number of unusual locutions not locatable elsewhere in the New Testament. This does appear to be the single most agreed upon fact on the matter—although some may cite its absence from a few ancient texts as further proofs.

As a starter, we should remember that Luke's historical language is far more cosmopolitan than normally acknowledged. His opening words (from the Greek text) in the preamble to Luke's Gospel {1:1-4} show an affinity to the wording used by the historian Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* {book 1:1.} No assertion of inter-textuality is posited on my part, only that his phrasing is demonstrative of a style commonly used by writers of narration, particularly, in Greek authors. If we follow ancient authors in their biographical facts concerning him we may conclude that he was a doctor, of whose training we receive an overview from the books of Hippocrates. Should we choose not to follow the doctoral line of thinking we still possess the manuscript with all the internal evidence necessary to prove Luke's semantic range.

The arguments against these two verses in question revolve around issues of uniqueness. Supposedly, as hapax legomenon--words found once in a text but nowhere else—they are to be questioned as to "why they are there?" Since Gr. *agonia* and/or *thromboi* are not found in other locations in the New Testament critics surmise that they must be interpolations of some kind. In late Roman republic era poetic works Catullus has some of the finest Latin verse to be found and he also has one hundred fifty words that he alone uses. Percentage wise, about seventy percent which are rare

³ New Testament Commentaries, Saint Luke, SCM Press published 1990, quote found on page 813.

in all Latin Literature combined; amazingly, nearly ninety percent of these words have no occurrence whatsoever in Vergil. So are all these locutions to be discarded only because they are not discoverable in any other contemporary authors of Catullus' timeframes? Methods of this type are illogical when applied in a general form.

As for the uniqueness of Lukan forms, *agonia*, though distinct, is still represented in Jude 1:3. A stemmatic root is justifiably the same—whether with prefix, infix, suffix or not—as its varied forms wherever found in literature. However strange a style (of word) to the eye of a reader, biblical criticism is ill qualified to litigate it out of a text when hundreds of witnesses from the early second century to the Renaissance have spoken clearly and with one voice; and if its provenance is bilaterally provable. As long as biblical editors are not required to manage and control sources from multiple parallel genres at one and the same time, the whole business of editorial work will remain questionable.

Diachronic linguistics

Returning to the phenomenon of hapax legomenon, the discussion is really moot because a 'unique word' is a free form which communicates all the information and data of a traditional epigram. Therefore, standing on its own and in its own merit, it never requires reduplication. The fact that it gains an entry into a dictionary is proof against its uniqueness. A dictionary records ranges of meanings historically. A true once-word is relatively impossible to define as there are no compatible meanings with which to compare its structures; if similar lexical moulds are unearthed then, its level of uniqueness slowly or quickly disintegrates.

Using the above thesis as grounds for review, the Greek word *agonia* is found in Herodotus, Xenophon, even Plato. Also, the Greek word *thromboi* is found in Aeschylus and Sophocles. These occurrences are more revealing than not. Luke has judiciously wrested words from an ancient tongue and placed them within the sphere of the holy.

His use of *agonia* has historical connection to war, battle and physical exercises of great nature. His corollary use of *thromboi* is tragedian. For this word was used in its saddest senses as applied to the interpersonal conflicts of man—only in Luke's case Christ was facing the terrible cup! I find it bewildering that in the twenty-first century basic philological theory is being ignored in order to continue to foster an environment for new and supposedly enlightened ideas.

I have already placed the English text of the Luke pericopae above, now I will add a transliterated version of the Greek:

OPHTHEDEAUTOANGELOSAPOURANOUEENISXUONAUTONKAI
GENOMENOSENAGONIAEKTENESTERONPROSEUXETOEGENE
TODEOIDROSAUTOUHOSEITHROMBOIHAIMATOSKATABAINO
NTESEPIITENGEN

By now, philological method may be becoming burdensome to your mental powers and reading skills. On the other hand, if and when a script is laid out in this way it allows readers to dig through a text's strata and maybe, by means of a new side-entrance, invade the world of a text to verify microstructures. To conduct a word-by-word analysis of the Greek text would be tedious and unnecessary for these notes so I will confine myself to statements about certain words and the units of meaning.

The first word "*ophthe*" is aor. pass. ora-o, the pass. w/dative gives the meaning 'appear'. The word "*enisxuon*" is the ptc.-isxuo which gives 'strengthen or fortify'. For *genomenos*—being—we have a verbal/noun like quality. Then, *ektenesteron* is comp. of ektenes (neut.-ektenes, 'strained') adverbial as 'more earnestly'. Next in line is *egeneto*, 'was' and rounding things out there is *katabainontes*, ptc. of baino meaning to 'drop or fall'.

The Greek word *osei* (hosei-with rough breathing) is a nice marker for identifying Luke's hand in this small passage. As a word which defines things relatively it is an important descriptive signpost and as signs tend to do, they keep us on course. Here are a few of the verses where Luke employs '*osei*': 1:56; 2:37; 3:22-23; 9:14 (28); 12:27; 20:31; 22:41 (59); 23:44. The word is most often adverbial and can be found as far back as the period of Epic Greek—Homeric and Hesiodic times. Luke's clausal structures in chapter twenty-two are interweaved throughout and there are no complexities of context.

There are twenty six Greek words—as compared to thirty-six in the KJB text--combined in both verses and each verse's units are easily defined. If we use each 'specific act' as a unit of thought then the reading of the Greek text moves along a bit faster than the English. The acts are as follows: appearing, strengthening, being, praying, falling..Furthermore there are specific verbal pictures such as: angel, heaven, agony, sweat, blood and ground.

The sequences of the wording are consistent with Luke's detailed descriptions of other event situations in his treatise. Taken as a whole, for anyone to conclude that these verses neither fit his hand nor his procedural method, is fallacious and he or she is investigating the text too narrowly and uncritically.

Final Thoughts

It remains to be seen what shape textual studies will finally take in the end. The continual changes in the critical text will ultimately lead logical thinkers backward toward the traditional Hebrew and Greek texts. The constancy among professionals involved in the arena of ‘criticism’ is the dynamic approach taken by our most severe adherents of needed alterations. The process of divining episodes in scripture and determining on the basis of what one believes another to have written is unstable at best. Each succeeding generation returns to scrutinize the former generation’s work and as often is the case finds it wanting.

This purging process is present in all facets of classical studies and has made its way into biblical institutions, only now biblical scholars see little need for solid grounding in classical studies, and so we are adrift, floating about from the arms of one trendy editor into the arms of another. With no safe place in sight in which the anchor of hope may be cast modern versions will remain in a state of flux---with new changes to their Hebrew and Greek texts occasioned by each newly published edition.

In my opinion this is all far too unsettling but the apostle Paul summed it all up when he stated “ For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” {I Cor. 11:19}. Heresy is a word derived from Gr. ‘*aireseis*- aireo, ‘taken through force’—historically linked to the control which a potentate would exercise over a captured or taken city/town. In ancient Greece defeated captives were allowed several choices of subservience. This slightly militates against the popular definition of heresy but it accentuates a core problem in Corinth: having been conquered by another’s thoughts or might they chose to believe wrongly and it gave rise to division.

In conclusion we would only say that more work needs to be done on the Traditional Text. Scholarly analytical work should settle the mind (and the literature to which its attention is given) not destabilize the texts, and many of the places where transpositions, emendations, deletions and other operations have been performed a thorough review should be conducted; not for the purpose of altering the traditional text but for conserving its forms and content which has descended to us in veritable shape.

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