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Joel S. Baden. *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. x + 378 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-15263-0.

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A Literary Solution to a Literary Problem?

Joel S. Baden's recent volume, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, may be one of the most lucid, well-written treatments of the Documentary Hypothesis available. Baden takes a "show-and-tell" approach to re-presenting this classic theory of composition history, pairing chapters on each source document with detailed studies of selected texts. The chapters not only introduce readers to the main characteristics and parameters of each source document but also develop the overall themes of his argument for the Hypothesis in an alliterative, easy-to-remember way. Baden argues for the *continuity* of J, as opposed to the discontinuity implicit in supplementary approaches that posit the redaction of small, separate blocks of tradition. In contrast to studies of E that unsuccessfully tried to distinguish it from J on the basis of style, he argues for the *coherence* of E. His chapter on D makes a case for the *complementarity* of law and narrative within a single source document. And he counters the common view that P is a redactional layer by arguing for its *completeness.* The case studies illustrate key points developed in the chapters through study of select pericopes, showing the Documentary Hypothesis at work and providing good models of what efforts to apply it to other texts might look like. Baden's framing of the entire discussion is pedagogically thoughtful and well executed, making this volume highly accessible to beginner and advanced students alike.

Baden agrees with some well-worn critiques of the Documentary Hypothesis–greater concern with historical development of religious ideas than with literary issues, multiplication of posited redactors, overreliance on style and vocabulary–and seeks to present a refined version of it as a corrective. He reminds us that the Documentary Hypothesis is fundamentally an effort to solve a *literary problem*, a concern to explain the literary integrity of the text as well as the incoherence we encounter as we try to read the Pentateuch as a whole. This is hardly a new point.[1] But Baden helpfully brings us back in touch with the fact that classic source criticism was conceived as *Literarkritik* and strives to provide us with a more solid ground for doing this critical work. He emphasizes that theme, style, and vocabulary can be only secondary criteria for identifying compositional layers, because more than one source can deal with a single theme, and all have access to the resources of the Hebrew language. We must focus instead on the "narrative flow" of the text (p. 28) and the consistency of "claims about the way events transpired" (p. 16). Problems with either–such as irreconcilable contradictions, doublets that involve contradiction, and discontinuities (for example, Moses is told to go up the mountain when he is already on it)–should be taken as primary indicators that we are dealing with multiple layers of composition. Baden couples discussion of such problems with discussion of continuity, coherence, and completeness across select texts in an effort to argue that these layers are independent sources rather than redacted fragments.

If one is going to identify the main problem of Pentateuchal criticism as a literary problem, as Baden rightly does, one needs a *literary method* adequate to address it, and here this study is alarmingly weak. Literary criticism has given us a thorough set of precise terms and concepts to aid in analysis, but Baden employs only a limited range. When he speaks of "narrative flow," one assumes he is talking about plot structure and to some extent char-

acterization. What about setting, point of view, genre, rhetorical strategy, and ideology, to name a few? All of these things play a role in the construction of a coherent literary text, yet Baden fails to adequately engage them, and sometimes this results in problematic analysis of text. For example, he argues that the itinerary notices in Exod 12:37 and 13:20 bring the Israelites to the sea in preparation for the sea crossing and that they are simply "retracing their steps" in Exod 14:2 (p. 205). But the places named in Exod 12:37 and 13:20 are nowhere near a sea, and only Exod 14:2 provides a plausible setting for the sea crossing narrative. Baden misses this problem with the setting because he is looking for "narrative flow," broadly speaking, and the concept of setting is not an active tool in his critical toolbox.

Baden is also imprecise in his use of literary terms. For example, some of the "thematic elements" of P he identifies are actually themes, while others are not: cult and priesthood are themes, while "the heavy use of genealogies" (p. 27) is a matter of genre, not theme. Moreover, he is not consistent in his treatment of theme as a criterion for distinguishing source documents that is *secondary* to the criteria of "narrative flow" and consistent historical claims. At one point, he includes theme and style in his definition of "the hallmark of a unified composition" (p. 16), and the themes of meat complaint *versus* leadership are among the primary criteria for separating J and E in his case study on Numbers 11. In fact, while Baden's critique of the use of theme, style, and vocabulary as primary criteria for distinguishing sources in classical iterations of the Documentary Hypothesis is right on target and his treatment of them as secondary criteria understandable, the question of theme is considerably more complex. Plot, characterization, setting, point of view, etc., are employed as they are in a narrative typically in order to develop a particular theme or set of themes, so theme cannot really be separated from consideration of these other elements. Perhaps to discuss what constitutes coherence (or incoherence) in a narrative–to address the literary problem of the Pentateuch–we must carefully discuss how *all of them work together* (or fail to, as the case may be) in any given text.

Baden's treatment of literary criticism in this volume takes the form of a response to the typical formalist and structuralist approaches that became popular in biblical studies in the 1980s, and his critiques of these approaches are excellent ones: They too often "focus on formal structure over the narrative coherence of [a] passage" such that they fail to see textual difficulties (p. 10). Alternatively, they acknowledge textual difficulties but either ignore them as irrelevant to the final form or explain them away, often implausibly, as features of style or rhetoric. Baden is right to bring our attention back to the fact that there are real difficulties with the coherence of Pentateuchal narrative. But formalism and structuralism are only *particular kinds* of literary criticism, yet his critique of them reads like a dismissal of literary criticism *as a whole*. Some literary and linguistic theories are actually quite useful in dealing with the issues we face as we try to solve the literary problem of the Pentateuch, including tools such as New Historicism, reception theory, linguistic pragmatics, and conceptual integration theory.[2] Certainly a variety others might be used as well. It is a pity that Baden did not explore the potential yield of literary critical tools for his task; if he had, he might have avoided the problems identified here and produced a work with a much more solid theoretical and methodological foundation.

Baden's work is not merely a re-presentation of the Documentary Hypothesis but also an ardent defense of it against other current approaches to the composition of the Pentateuch. One wonders if this defensive stance does not keep him from thinking about possible approaches that have not yet been tried. Moreover, at points he loses sight of his claim that the Documentary Hypothesis is a *hypothesis*, or one "proposed solution to the literary problems of the Pentateuch" (p. 32), and begins to depict it as the natural outcome of a careful reading of the text (p. 20), implying that those who do not incline to it simply are not reading closely enough. This rhetorical move has the potential effect of shutting down creative, innovative thinking about potential solutions to these problems not only for Baden himself but also for his readers. Yet it is just such thinking that we are arguably in need of within Pentateuchal studies, whether we want to find a more solid footing for the Documentary Hypothesis or a more plausible alternative to it.

One must weigh these concerns against the elegance and lucidity of Baden's work in deciding how it might be used. It is hard to underestimate the importance of encouraging innovative thinking that has a solid theoretical and methodological foundation, and this volume falls significantly short in these areas. But it is also hard to underestimate the value of models of good scholarly writing that can be emulated, especially for students. This latter feature, coupled with Baden's very helpful treatment of the history of scholarship, makes it a good refresher course on the Documentary Hypothesis and candidate for a course text. One hopes that it might be issued in a more affordable paperback form for that use.

Notes

[1]. For example, John Barton, "Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation: Is There Any Common Ground? ," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder,* ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. E. Orton, Biblical Interpretation Series 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 7.

[2]. For use of these tools, see my *The Wilderness Itineraries: Genre, Geography, and the Growth of Torah,* HACL 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

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