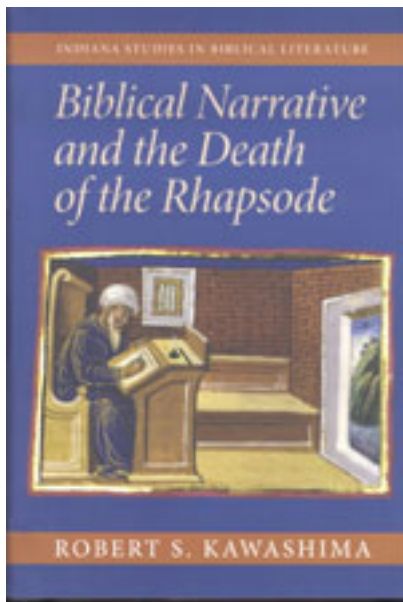


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Kawashima, Robert S.

Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode

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No manuscript is written in a vacuum but rather in conjunction with encounters that occur over an extended period of time. One is told that this volume was written after the author had encountered Banfield's work *Unspeakable Sentences* in which she outlines the characteristics (*passé simple* and *style indirect libre*) of the novel. Kawashima also notes other influences such as Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and *The Art of Biblical Poetry*.

The first chapter, "Introduction: The Novelty of Biblical Narrative," lays the framework for the rest of the book. Fundamental to Kawashima's thesis is the distinction between the formal Greek and Hebrew understanding of narrative. Thus he argues that for Socrates the performers of theater do so not by *technē* but by *theia ... dynamis* or by *entheous*. In contrast, Hebrew narrative is postulated as something "decisively new and unprecedented in ancient literature" (4). Kawashima understands, with Alter, Hebrew narrative to be much like modern prose fiction, often marked precisely by its use of the third person. Israel, according to the author, had major "technical" influences during the development of the narrative story. Following Cassuto, he argues for a direct influence on Hebrew narrative via the Ugaritic materials.

One of Kawashima's main theses is that the medium of writing is treated as "a type of technological development, a new verbal medium possessing ... its own distinctive though not necessarily superior set of inherent possibilities" (10). Modern linguistic influences such as Benveniste, Hamburger, and Banfield are noted in the first chapter. Yet at the heart of this work lies the intention to treat biblical narrative as a novelty. What the author contends is that the "Bible's novelty results from a shift from the medium of the spoken to the written word" (10).

In the second chapter, "From Song to Story: The Genesis of Narrative in Judges 4 and 5," the author utilizes Judg 4–5 as a test case for his theory of narrative. The author deftly surveys the "origins" of biblical narrative. Specifically, he argues that at the heart of Hebrew narrative is the idea of "epic." Contra Talmon, Kawashima agrees with Cross that the earliest Hebrew compositions exhibit signs of an oral-formulaic composition. Thus it is the author's contention that Hebrew "epic" grew out of the earliest biblical poems. It is this theory that motivates Kawashima to examine the pericopes of Judg 4–5. He notes that "the prose story in Judges 4 and its 'synoptic parallel' in Judges 5 provide an interesting case" (18). At the heart of Kawashima's methodology are the narrative theories of Aristotle, Henry James, Kermode, and the Russian formalist Valdimir Propp. The tension between all three narratologists is evidenced in the author's writing. He, much like Kermode, notes that characters or actants can be created from agents who served the plot of prebiblical tradition. Consequently, the author embraces not the Aristotelian notion that plot dictates narrative but rather the character as the one who shapes the nature of the plot. He notes, "For it is the written story, loosed from the fetters of tradition, which allows for the transformation of agent into character" (34).

The third and fourth chapters are the heart of Kawashima's discussion of narrative. In the third chapter, "Narration and Discourse: The Linguistic Dualism of Biblical Narrative and Its Literary Consequences," the author quickly reveals his literary dependence upon both Benveniste and Banfield. A terse introduction into narrative theory is given, with the impetus revolving ultimately around Banfield. For Kawashima, within biblical Hebrew the sentence containing the narrative preterite and the consecutive constitutes the first of Banfield's "unspeakable sentences" (75). The notion that "unspeakable sentences" give way to pure narration is not without its detractors. However, the author makes a strong case that this type of narration allowed the biblical writers to fashion a new "impersonal style" that was a necessity for writing history. The author is aware that this newer impersonal style is required for recounting an objective sequence of events and thus actually to write history. Likewise, he notes that this type of language in essence became a marked type of discourse. He notes, "Discourse—no longer coterminous with language itself but restricted to the speech of characters—would enable these writers to explore

and develop the interiority of these characters to a degree unthinkable for the epic singer” (75).

It is through “represented consciousness” in the biblical narrative that the biblical writers effectively and convincingly represented “perception of its characters.” Kawashima astutely identifies the particle הנה, which appears both in discourse and narration as an effective marker. It is this context, the construction beginning with הנה, that the author (following Banfield) identifies as “represented consciousness,” also known as *style indirect libre* and *erlebte Rede* (78). At issue in this fourth chapter is perception of consciousness and the contextual clues that narratologists have sought from the text. The author argues, contra Berlin, Miller, and Andersen, that while context is not irrelevant, it does not and cannot supply the reader with “features of consciousness” embodied in the more advance syntactic structures. He supports his theory by adducing represented speech and thought(s) “on the basis of their inherent syntactic features: various deictic and expressive constructions that were centered on a third-person ‘self’ ” (123). Kawashima, following Joyce, argues that represented consciousness has nothing to do with redundant information. Likewise, he takes issue with Andersen’s “inter-clause constructions” as an effective identifying marker.

The fifth chapter effectively draws a marked contrast between biblical and epic considerations of time. When the epic singer relied on oral recitation, he performed under the temporal constraints of improvisation and thus worked at the level of the phrase. In contrast, the writer must not only “find his *mots justes* but string these together into an order ‘in every way appropriate’ ” (159). Kawashima argues, with Shlovsky, that the biblical writers engaged in a process known as “defamiliarization.” This process was used by the writer to make objects of perception strange and unfamiliar. It is contended that the biblical narrative “violates, makes strange, the temporal form inherited from the traditions of the ancient Near East” (160). Kawashima also makes a leap to span the chasm between the biblical narrative and the modern novel. He forcefully argues that the process of defamiliarization utilized by the biblical writers anticipates the modern novel. While such a contention is forcefully argued, it is not convincingly argued.

In order further to argue his point of “defamiliarization,” Kawashima examines type scenes in both biblical and Ugaritic literature. Specifically, he argues that the biblical writers engage in “substitution,” “parenthesis,” “movement,” and “deletion” to defamiliarize the narrative convention. The genius of Kawashima is in his comparison of the above type scenes with traditional Greek Homeric literature. He argues that, whereas the Homeric literature is rigid and unbending in type scenes, the biblical narrative “performs secondary operations, or ‘transformations,’ upon the convention’s underlying syntax or ‘deep structure’ ” (186). In this fashion the biblical writers were free to

displace, distort, or even delete the type scene's expected constituents. The impetus for this radical understanding of biblical narratology was so that its readers would perceive literary forms anew.

The last chapter is aptly entitled "Toward an Archaeology of Ancient Israelite Knowledge." In this chapter Kawashima, following Foucault, argues for a nontraditional understanding of the word "archaeology." He notes, "by opposing his 'archaeology' to 'history, in the traditional meaning of that word,' Foucault indicates that he will dig beneath those surface phenomena treated in traditional intellectual history ('ideas,' 'science') in order to bring to light the 'space' and 'configurations'—in a word, the epistemes—that constitute the ground, the 'historical *a priori*,' of knowledge itself" (194). This unconventional understanding of archaeology takes as its object the history of knowledge per se.

Kawashima does not seek to recount the history of monotheism in either Israel or the ancient Near East. Instead, he seeks to utilize his methodology to ascertain the epistemic break "within the space of knowledge" that made it possible for monotheism to be thought at all (197). A quick comparison is made between monotheism and dualism. In this discussion Kawashima betrays his dependence upon both Kaufman and Halpern for direction. For him, the concept of monotheism is very similar to Frankfort's idea of the divine outside of mythopoeic thought. Monotheistic mythology, according to Kawashima, is the epistemic revolution leading to a sudden and profound shift in the very concept of God. At issue concerning monotheistic mythology is the thought that Israelite thought embraced either consciously or unconsciously a type of epistemic dualism. The author argues forcefully that such a philosophical construct existed in Israel. Kawashima ends his work with a discourse on *écriture biblique*, where he concludes that "like the writing of the novel, *écriture biblique* is impersonal, alienated from the speaking subject, signifying the death of the rhapsode" (213).

Scholars have argued for quite some time for a crossover between biblical studies and discourse theory. This work, while not quite achieving a needed balance, does open one's eyes to the possibility of what can be done with both the biblical text and literary/discourse theory. Kawashima's theory, while not completely new, does open new vistas for the erudite scholar who is not hesitant to use newer critical theories. It is a very well researched book (fifteen-page bibliography) but written at an upper-graduate level. I would not hesitate to require it for a graduate seminar in reading strategies. The end user of this book would need to be grounded in both literary theory and the Hebrew Bible.