I was first contacted by RBL with a request to review this book on 24 December 2018. Because I had not volunteered to review the book, I found the table of contents on the publisher’s website. The chapter topics looked generally interesting and fell within my range of expertise, but one feature was glaring: every single chapter was written by a cis man of European background or citizenship, over half of whom teach at institutions affiliated with the Southern Baptist tradition (Rooker, Merrill, Thomas, Hearson, Jones, Callaham, McKenzie) or with other theologically conservative institutions (Dempster, Taylor). Despite the fact that many of the contributors are well-respected luminaries in their respective subfields (a few of whom I have met in person and with whom I have shared genuinely pleasant academic discussions), I decided not to spend my time on a review. I viewed a published review as potentially legitimizing the creation of a book ignoring—and thereby undercuts the position of—female academics in the field of biblical studies.¹ I could not imagine writing a review of a book so dominated by men—especially of a specific religious tradition—when I could easily think of four female scholars whose linguistic work would have been appropriate to include in the volume and dozens, if not scores, of women whose

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¹ I am grateful to Prof. Molly Zahn, who kindly read this review and offered critique. She is, however, not to be blamed for any infelicities or deficiencies of thought present here.

1. I would also include trans women and nonbinary academics here, since my own conscious awareness of the predicaments faced by noncis individuals is a much more recent development. To my (admittedly narrow) knowledge, most academics identifying as such are recent entrants into the field, with work appearing as I write.
experiences teaching Biblical Hebrew would have positioned them to reflect on best practices for language pedagogy. When I declined the review offer with a full explanation, I assumed that this response would absolve me of the professional responsibility to make a public statement regarding the volume. I was wrong.

On 24 April 2019, I was once again sent a form invitation to review the book. This time I accepted, resolved to publish both a review of the volume itself and a critical discussion of the sociocultural arena in which such a book could be compiled and green-lighted. I reluctantly agreed to do so, despite my own unease with much of the discourse surrounding representation in the academy, and despite my own professional struggles (and, at times, failures) to arrive at a satisfying answer to the question regarding an adequately representative sampling of diverse voices in joint and compiled academic endeavors. My task, as I understood it, was to write an honest and fair review of the book’s contents while at the same time unflinchingly offering critique of the implied audience of the volume, the context of its compilation, and ways to move forward in the academy such that we achieve a more inclusive, equitable, and representative balance of membership than one that we currently have right now. It is my hope that writing this review aids in developing a membership that we can bestow to later generations of scholars with the assurance that we worked diligently to achieve excellence, not despite being diverse in its methods, concerns, and expressions, but because of that diversity. I pick up on this discussion again below, following an evaluation of the volume’s contents:


Stephen A. Geller, the honoree’s teacher, examines the usage of what he calls the “precative perfect” in the Psalms (3–12). He traces thirty verses in which reading the suffix-form verb(s) as optative is “at least an option” (10) because they satisfy his criterion of collocating with other more clearly optative forms (6). To this count he adds another sixteen possible instances in which suffix-form verbs seem to correspond semantically with optative forms, despite not collocating with any jussives, imperatives, and the like (10–11). I am left doubtful concerning the degree to which this explanation gets at the root causes of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, Geller’s essay was sufficient to leave me curious about whether the “precative perfect” occupies a sufficiently similar functional role to uses of the so-called prophetic perfect to warrant further cross-linguistic consideration of the range of each as a possible manifestation of perfect aspect.

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2. My off-the-cuff listing of four individuals working in detailed, sophisticated linguistic approaches to Hebrew studies should be taken as the tip of the iceberg. If we were to add in women working in Biblical Hebrew poetics—one of the other strongly represented themes of the volume—there would, of course, be an even larger number of women to identify as potential contributors.
Ernst Jenni offers a succinct discussion of the reflexive-passive stems in Biblical Hebrew, focusing most prominently on the niphal and pual stems (13–20). He argues that, whereas the pual is a "pure passive" corresponding to the piel (17), the niphal's relationship to the qal is more complex. The niphal expresses "the state or process that happens on the subject" (16). This picture is somewhat similar to other studies of situation aspect (Aktionsart) in the derived stems, but a more complete working out—preferably, one replete with examples and fuller discussion—would be necessary to situate it within the larger discussion. The present essay is too short to be anything more than a prospectus of future research directions, and I would have appreciated, minimally, a deeper discussion of what the semantic "core" of a verbal form is (e.g., 20). Jenni cites only Hebraists, meaning that a vast body of theoretical literature has gone unaccounted for here.

Holger Gzella examines “untypical wayyiqtol forms” in early Hebrew in light of the linguistic diversity characterizing the early attestations of Hebrew and Aramaic (21–37). Gzella provides a diachronic overview of the wayyiqtol form in Hebrew and a survey of its usage patterns, challenging its origins in Proto-Northwest Semitic. The form seems to mark a specific narrative style in its earliest usages (27), having spread in Hebrew during the ninth century. Gzella’s essay is largely a conventional account of the origin, spread, and function of the wayyiqtol form, yet it is replete with excellent observations (especially concerning the contrast of Hebrew wayyiqtol with the morphological ambiguity of the scattered wyqtl forms of a few Old Aramaic inscriptions, along with the possible dialectical observations that may arise as a result of serious consideration). Of all the essays in this book, this is the one I would most likely include on a syllabus for a graduate course in historical Hebrew grammar.

Mark F. Rooker surveys some recent reactions to the debate concerning linguistic dating of biblical texts (38–52). After a few brief sections introducing the problem, the evidence, and the early history of debate, Rooker provides longer sections discussing Avi Hurvitz’s contributions to the debate and the recent challenges to the paradigm put forth by Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensvärd (whom Rooker dubs “the challengers” [i.e., of Hurvitz’s paradigm]). This much will be familiar to those who have studied the debate, and the more novel contribution of the piece is to be found in Rooker’s summary and evaluation of more recent contributions, including those by Dong-Hyuk Kim and the various contributors to a volume edited by Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit.4 As is to be expected given his own history of research on the subject, Rooker sides with those who challenge the “challengers”—but his balanced review of the arguments is a helpful

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addition to the topic and would make a reasonable introductory reading for upper-level Biblical Hebrew courses where the subject is considered.

Gary R. Williams offers a lengthy consideration of “Hebrew Prosody through the Centuries” (53–84), in which he considers four studies of Biblical Hebrew parallelism and its related literary and semantic phenomena. The four studies were all produced by Geller and three of his students: Williams, J. Worgul, and M. Elliott-Hogg, all three of whom were classmates of the volume’s honoree, George Klein. (In that regard, reading the essay felt slightly awkward, as if watching the volume’s honoree sidelined in a conversation going on among his closest friends.) Williams provides a technical analysis of parallelism, scaffolding an apparent historical development of Classical Hebrew poetic techniques. A longer essay could perhaps have included a more developed discussion of what would count as statistical significance (instead of simply making the various calculations) and might have sought to explain in greater detail the differences in style between Isa 1:1–18 (which seems to pattern slightly more readily with the Hodayot) and Isa 40–45 (which patterns more aptly with the Early Biblical Poetry). If the point of the article was to develop a model of linear diachronic development, the data would seem to undercut that goal, at least without further explanation.

The second section addresses “Syntax and Lexicography.” It comprises the bulk of the book (eight essays) and shades between purely syntactic studies (e.g., Niccacci, Oakes) and more exegetical essays (e.g., Thomas, Hearson). It could likely have been more elegantly organized by breaking these eight essays into two groups, although the genuinely category-bridging essays of a few of the contributors may have challenged that idea.

Alviero Niccacci studies the phenomenon of “two-member syntactic constructions” (87–103), which he defines as beginning with a circumstantial clause (the protasis) and concluding with a main clause (apodosis). The study offers a typology of the various usages of the construction, contrasting it from the common “development of narration and direct speech” (which he finds typified in Gen 1:1–3). In my opinion, the essay does not adequately distinguish the point made by Niccacci in the section on Gen 1:1–3 until later in the essay. This admittedly caused some confusion on my part throughout the essay, but it also left me with the feeling that Niccacci was trying to distinguish too rigidly between syntactic constructions that, by his own admission, can only be identified “on the basis of semantics in the context” (103).

Eugene H. Merrill addresses a few of the “verbal and nominal expressions of walking” (104–17). Although I had hoped for a bit more discussion of the diverse idioms involving “feet” (especially

given my own interest in the semantics of יִתְלַגְּרִת in Hos 11:3), the bulk of the essay is focused on the Hebrew verbal root חָלַל in its various stems (esp. qal and hithpael) and idioms (105–13); a few compelling exegetical comments are found throughout this discussion (especially concerning the satan’s role in Job 1–2), but the second half of the study seems to take a divergent trajectory: Merrill has included a chart with several other roots involving feet (113), but its explicit connection to the present essay is minimal. Instead, the last pages of the essay are dedicated to a discussion of the levirate law (Deut 25:7–10) and the symbolism of the sandal therein. Merrill’s interpretation that “removal of the sandal, then, symbolizes a relinquishment of lordship” (115) strikes me as an overreading of what is patently a public humiliation of the levir who refuses to carry on his deceased brother’s lineage (and who thereby denies his sister-in-law the protection of a marriage, household, and children capable of providing for her needs). While “lordship” might be a distant connotation of the sandal metaphor, the more prominent entailments would, I think, focus on the symbolic aspects of dirt, mourning, and humiliation.

Stephen Dempster examines the uses of תיִרֲחַאְבּ, arguing that the phrase is overwhelmingly used to convey eschatological overtones (118–41). The argument is compelling, insofar as I am willing to accept Dempster’s rough description of this “eschatological freight” as “pointing not to some indefinite future but a future laden with significance for Israel and the world” (138). I am less convinced, however, that scholars from a diverse range of backgrounds will be able to find further common ground with respect to how far in the future that eschatology lay; whether we are not, in fact, witnessing a semantic development in the course of the phrase’s usage; and further clarification of the mode of salvation envisioned by the various biblical authors.

Richard A. Taylor considers the linguistic and text-critical justification for reading the phrase לַﬠ in Dan 2:24 as “entered into” (142–54). Taylor traces the various translational uses of the phrase לַﬠ in Syriac translations in the Peshiṣṭa and both compositional and translational uses of לַﬠ in Biblical Aramaic, Egyptian Aramaic, Qumran Aramaic, and Targumic Aramaic. He finds an overwhelming trend toward the sexual use of the collocation, leading him to conclude (for various other reasons as well) that the phrase in Dan 2:24 has been corrupted. What Taylor has seemingly missed, however, is that the vast majority of usages that he lists are direct, isomorphic translations from the underlying Hebrew אִבָּאִב, regardless of whether it was used with a sexual connotation or not (Gen 6:4; 16:2, 4; 29:23, 30; 30:3, 438:8, 9; 39:14, 17; 2 Sam 3:7; 16:21, 22; Ezek 44:25; Hag 2:16). Of the many Hebrew Bible passages cited, only in Gen 19:31 is אִבָּא rendering Hebrew אָבָא, and Dan 11:10 (אָבָא אָבָא) seems to me to be a corruption of the original אִבָּא (cf. LXX καὶ εἰσελεύσεται κατ᾽ αὐτήν). Despite recognizing that the Greek translations ubiquitously use πρὸς in the parallel passages, Taylor insists on glossing Aramaic/Syriac *ʾal as “onto.” This constitutes a misuse of etic semantic categories and avoids the question of why Hebrew so frequently shows an alternation of לַﬠ for expected לַﬠ (and vice versa). A far more likely solution, in my opinion, is that Aramaic לַﬠ could also denote movement into an area and that Dan 2:24 is textually correct, even if slightly ambiguous when glossed superficially.
Heath A. Thomas offers a syntactic and semantic rereading of Job 42:6 alongside two prominent interpreters of Job: Michael V. Fox and Pieter van der Lugt (155–74). Although the exposition largely comprises a dutiful and by-the-book syntactic and semantic analysis of the verse, Thomas’s conclusion settles on a novel interpretation: he argues that Job is rejecting (ס״אמ) neither the claim of God’s sovereignty nor his own past claims of injustice. Likewise, Thomas rejects the locative nuance of Hebrew לֻּ. Instead, Job is “repenting” or “being comforted” (נָוַל, niphal or piel) “concerning dust and ashes”—the latter nouns serving as a metonym for the act of mourning. In this movement—which Thomas identifies as a “liminal traverse” out of the mourning ritual—Job finally moves to an emotional position of preparedness for life ahead. While defense of the thesis will likely require further working out in light of a fuller reading of the whole book of Job, I found Thomas’s essay compelling, offering creative insights into the character Job’s emotional depth.

Perry J. Oakes presents a discussion of the Hebrew wĕqatal as a “medial” verb (175–202). In using the term medial, Oakes appeals to a typological category of verbal usage in theoretical linguistics. Some “chaining” languages (e.g., Swahili and Mündü, both spoken in Sub-Saharan Africa) utilize a verbal form that has no tense, mood, or aspect of its own; instead, the form continues the tense, mood, or aspect from an initial head verb. (In some cases, when used as a head verb, the medial verb supplies a specific nuance.) Oakes’s clear argument and cogent typological discussion offers a compelling model. Before endorsing the model completely, though, I would want to examine more closely exactly how the use of a medial verb in initial positions in these other chaining languages supplies the meaning—it may be that a diachronic analysis would help to fill out the explanation. Nonetheless, Oakes’s solution has a simple, elegant appeal that could prove to be explanatory with respect to many of the diverse usages of the wĕqatal in Biblical Hebrew.

N. Blake Hearson reassesses the traditional meaning of Deut 6:4–5 (203–16). Because these two verses are central creedal formulations in both Judaism and Christianity (20), such a reexamination is warranted. A succinct discussion of the syntactic ambiguities of verse 4 leads Hearson to the commonsensical position that “[YHWH] is intrinsically one [YHWH]. There is no multiplicity in his nature and no shared identity with another deity” (206; I employ the tetragrammaton here rather than spelling out the full name, which Hearson uses). Hearson then moves to a discussion of what it means to “love” the Lord (informed by Moran’s well-worn political explanation) with all one’s בבל, נפש, ודאמ. While engaging rabbinic interpretations of מזא as “wealth,” Hearson builds an argument that the command should be interpreted as moving from the interior, private being (the בבל, or “mind”) to outward expression (נפש) and, ultimately, one’s whole being (דאמ). Although I am somewhat skeptical regarding the assertion that “the language of the two verses is meant to make the Hebrew audience pause and mentally mull over the implications of terms that can fairly be described as odd” (213), Hearson’s analysis is, like Thomas’s, a creative one that is sure to enhance confessional audiences’ appreciation of the passage.
Ethan C. Jones reexamines the meaning of Hebrew פיֵל in collocations with the niphal of נִפְלֵל (217–32). His cogent discussion demonstrates conclusively, in my opinion, that the collocation פיֵל נִפְלֵל means “defeated by” (i.e., with the object of פיֵל comprising the agent or instrument of defeat) rather than merely indicating a locative proximity “before” whom the defeat was inflicted. This conclusion, however, raises a number of questions for me that are not addressed in this essay; first and foremost is the question of where we might legitimately claim semantics “stops” and pragmatics “begins.” While Jones is clearly correct in his assessment that פיֵל נִפְלֵל means “defeated by,” it is not clear to me that the semantic value of פיֵל is not spatial at its semantic core and only extended in certain pragmatic contexts or collocations. In other words, this is a question of lexicology: How would we most accurately categorize the semantic values of פיֵל in a lexicon? (Not incidentally, the question is related to my objection regarding Taylor’s glossing of Aramaic *ʿal, above).

The final section consists of two chapters dedicated to Biblical Hebrew pedagogy. I treat them in a single paragraph because of their overlapping and complementary foci.

In their respective chapters, Scott N. Callaham (235–58) and Tracy McKenzie (259–71) rethink Biblical Hebrew instruction in light of the many pedagogical models available to pedagogues, the new technological advances enabling various modes of learning, and the social and linguistic constraints confronting students of Biblical Hebrew. After surveying obstacles to student learning (second-language acquisition as a distinct mode of learning, student age, variant learning styles, cognitive demands on mastery of new vocabulary, student motivation, and anxiety), Callaham surveys the various paradigms for language instruction. Although the deductive method (or “grammar-translation model”) remains in disfavor (one might even say “nearly universally reviled”) among SLA specialists, more up-to-date contenders such as the inductive model and the communicative model demonstrate weaknesses of their own. Callaham’s discussion here is fair and commonsensical; I wish that I had had access to a similarly thoughtful article on pedagogy before beginning my own teaching career, in which Biblical Hebrew instruction has featured prominently. Likewise, McKenzie’s article focuses on the complications of teaching Biblical Hebrew to congregational leaders. In present circumstances, even if the aptitude to assimilate a foreign language is present, the challenges that congregational leaders must face are many: these leaders are well beyond the critical period of language acquisition, precluding any pretense of linguistic fluency. They are taking fewer hours of credits in their professional training and devoting more hours to their jobs (both congregational and mundane, not to mention simply commuting). McKenzie makes a strong argument that Biblical Hebrew professors—especially those in confessional institutions training congregational leaders—will have to take into consideration an ever-evolving set of new factors in order to respond to the practical exigencies of modern life. While not explicitly geared toward secular institutions or confessional institutions training graduates for the academy, instructors at those institutions would do well to take McKenzie’s arguments to heart as well.
To return to the larger critique of this volume, it should be clear that I do not consider it a waste of paper. I am not inclined to dismiss the many challenging and exciting arguments therein. Like all compiled volumes—and especially Festschriften—the quality of the essays is somewhat uneven. But I would pose the question in what I hope is a constructive way: What is missing from the volume because of its omission of women and people of color? What deficits does it exhibit that might have been corrected had the editor managed to recruit at least a few women in the guild to contribute their own essays?

The answer is not an easy one to provide. Any of the four well-positioned women I named in my initial response to the editorial board of *RBL* would have written strong, capable essays on grammatical points cohering with the theme of the book. The women I named in my response focus on grammatical issues, ranging from syntax constructions of topicalization and focus to lexical semantics. And several others could have been recruited, I suspect, to contribute thoughtful essays on teaching Biblical Hebrew in various types of confessional or secular institutions. But the same could be said for a number of men whose work was not included. (Presumably, this omission from the book was due to a lack of personal engagement with Klein, the volume’s honoree.) Similarly, it would not be merely enough to say that one or more women should have been included so as to provide “women’s perspectives” on the topics—for example, the challenges encountered by women in pedagogical roles in certain institutions. In both of these critiques, any criticism of the volume on the basis of its omission of women would be merely a prima facie tokenism.

The omission, then, is not necessarily one of thematic omission (although I have no doubt that whole volumes could be dedicated specifically to both cis and trans women’s experiences at the front of language classrooms). Instead, I would frame the omission as bearing on validation: in failing to include a single essay by a cis or trans woman or by a person of color, the book has implied an audience that does not include those constituencies—and, correspondingly, that women and other minoritized groups cannot or should not be interested in the topics handled here. Further, this omission highlights the fact that approximately half of the contributors are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, potentially fueling speculation regarding the various motives for any omissions—regardless of whether they are intentional or not. One could easily (and, likely, facilely) point to the Southern Baptist tradition’s position on women in teaching positions here,

6. I surveyed the extensive faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary while writing this essay, because I worried that I may be overstating the opposition the tradition holds for women in teaching roles. I found six women on faculty there (out of a total of seventy-nine listed administrators and faculty), specializing in subjects such as “Theology in Women’s Studies,” “Women’s Ministries,” “Children’s Ministry,” “Systematic Theology in the Women’s Studies Program,” and English. The situation does not differ much at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where I found three female members of the administration and faculty (out of sixty-five total), specializing in “Ministry to Women,” “Biblical Counseling,” and “English and Linguistics.” Finally, at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, I count three women (out of seventy-six total), specializing in “Biblical Counseling,” “Teacher Education,” and Church Music. The marginalization of female academics predominantly to women’s
cannot help but be dismayed at reports emerging from some of the most prominent affiliated institutions regarding the treatment of women in roles both as students and teachers. That the omission of women from this volume may be due to a more institutionally inscribed exclusion is not for me to determine or arbitrate. But this is an impression that, I suspect, would not be a desirable one for at least most of the contributors. Moreover, were I the honoree, this impression would not gesture at the legacy that I hoped to leave through my teaching and research. Now, I do not intend to lay all blame for the structural imbalances represented in this volume at the feet of the contributors, nor even at the feet of the editor. In fact, it would only be proper to admit that I am not guiltless in the persistence of institutionalized asymmetries. (The inability of individuals to overcome these imbalances is precisely what makes them institutionalized.) Yet as individuals we can begin to reverse the effects of these structural asymmetries, and this requires deliberation and intentionality, from which none of us can or should be absolved.

In the end, the solutions to the myriad structural problems confronting academic study of biblical and “parabiblical” literature are not to be found in a rigidly policed tokenism. Instead, I maintain that the crisis of academic representation is best solved by deliberately and consciously expanding our respective circles of interlocutors. (Here I am picking up on ideas from colleagues and commentators too numerous to count, articulating the same ideas more clearly and more forcefully in various oral and written venues, both in person and in print or online.) This will require developing our respective networks—of colleagues, of mentors, of students—self-consciously, with an eye toward disciplinary breadth. It may be difficult, but doing so will put us in a position to include a younger, more diverse set of scholars in projects adding meaning and value to the field. Part of the challenge must also consist in considering impact when developing projects and discussing publication venues: many younger scholars, women scholars, and scholars of color cannot afford to spend time on publications that will not position them for success. (In this regard, Festschriften should be rethought and reframed so as to carry more heft for contributors; it may be worthwhile to change the mode completely, so as to allow more readily for inclusion of studies

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8. McKenzie, at least, seems sensitive to issues of inclusion: he conspicuously mentions “women and men who have academic interests” (260) alongside using both feminine and masculine pronouns—not to mention singular “their”—when discussing congregational leaders (265–266).

9. I use the term parabiblical here to describe the ample early Jewish, early Christian, and other ancient Near Eastern literature here with full recognition of its biblicocentric outlook. Although I may have chosen another term for use in a different venue, I deemed it appropriately broad for the present venue—the Review of Biblical Literature, itself a publication outlet of the Society of Biblical Literature.
by scholars who were not an immediate part of the honoree’s social circles.) It is well-known that administrative burdens are typically imposed upon women and members of other visible minority groups in greater quantities and with more punitive consequences for lack of acquiescence than upon the white males who make up the numerical majority of the professorate. Naturally, these additional administrative burdens come with more potentially detrimental results for career advancement. Thus, the broadening of social networks is a necessary precursor to a more just and equitable distribution of power.

At the same time, the root justification of a more inclusive representation seems to me to be one not of tokenism, of inclusion for the sake of inclusion. Rather, the justification of inclusive representation, both at the publication level and at the much more foundational level of hiring, is to invite previously ignored or underrepresented individuals to the table in the confidence that they will be conversation partners whose experiences and insights bolster, complement, or even challenge those traditionally maintained within the academy. If our ultimate goal is the quest for discoverable truth, then an intermediate goal along the way must necessarily be to consider and evaluate as many viewpoints of that truth as possible, thereby to refine our own views of it and to correct inherited orthodoxies by purging ourselves of unwarranted assumptions. To allow the field to stagnate because of its entrenched hierarchies and institutionalized prejudices would constitute a squandering of opportunities for sincere, mutually beneficial engagement with others.