Cynthia Long Westfall’s notable study represents the fifth book-length structural analysis of the book of Hebrews. The others are Albert Vanhoye (2nd ed., 1976); Louis Dussaut (1981); Linda Lloyd Neeley (1987); and George H. Guthrie (1994), of which the last two, like Westfall’s, apply discourse analysis.1 Hence, her question “Do we really need another analysis?” (21) might not be intended as merely rhetorical.

Nonetheless, or perhaps therefore, Westfall sets out by presupposing a scholarly lack of agreement on the major and minor divisions of the book and its argumentational development. She argues that the methodology best suited to uncovering the organization and structure of a text produced and read in an ancient culture must be textually based. Hence, she draws upon the insights of linguistic studies, in particular upon that stream of discourse analysis based on a form of systemic functional linguistics developed for Hellenistic Greek that investigates the function and use of language (pragmatics) above the sentence level.

Apart from a general introduction (xi–xii), chapter 1 offers a survey of the literature that is either influential or representative of approaches to the structure of Hebrews (1–21). Chapter 2 introduces the terminology and definitions of discourse analysis, which underpins Westfall’s methodology and procedure for analyzing the text (22–87). Chapter 3 analyzes the first section of Heb 1:1–4:16 (88–139), while chapters 4 and 5 examine the

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1. Dussaut and Neeley wrote wide-ranging articles.
second section of Heb 4:11–10:25 (in two portions, 4:11–7:28 and 8:1–10:25), which overlaps with the first in Heb 4:11–16 and with the third in 10:19–25 (140–87, 188–241). Chapter 6 explores the third section, Heb 10:19–13:25, which contains the book’s discursive climax or peak (242–96). Finally, chapter 7 concludes the study with a description of the discourse and mental representation of the text and with the general design of its tripartite outline (297–301). Besides the bibliography, Westfall provides searchable indices, including authors, subjects, and references (302–39).

In chapter 1, Westfall provides an account of the research history on the structure of Hebrews by grouping—although not consistently—past proposals according to the methodology applied and by considering their strengths and weaknesses. Under “content analysis” she lists thematic approaches as well as—albeit mistakenly—formal bipartite structures that segment Hebrews based on genre analysis and according to the indicative-imperative scheme of the Pauline Epistles; notably, this scheme has recourse to the disproved assumption that Paul is the author of Hebrews. The subsequent categories are “rhetorical criticism,” followed by “literary analysis”—with its protagonist Albert Vanhoye—“triptapite structure,” “agnostic approach,” and, finally, “discourse analysis.” Westfall’s account leads her to conclude that neither the message nor the structure have been completely understood and that her study will challenge much of Vanhoye’s proposal, in particular his notion of concentric symmetry.

With regard to methodology (ch. 2), ignoring discourse analysis in other fields, such as philosophy, the social sciences, or history, Westfall is concerned with that particular synthetic model in the early stages of linguistics to which the potential to unite semantics, syntax, and pragmatics into a coherent framework above sentence level is ascribed. From the four major linguistic schools in New Testament studies identified by Stanley E. Porter—the Continental European, the South African, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and systemic-functional linguistics—Westfall’s approach is informed by the last one, also known as the “Birmingham school of linguistics” and introduced into the field by Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed.

Westfall subsequently offers a very helpful introduction to linguistic concepts and terminologies, in general as well as specifically with regard to the model of systemic-functional discourse analysis. Based on this theory she introduces her own analytical procedure, composed of a four-step approach: The first step includes “mode and the analysis of textual and componential cohesion”; “mode” here refers to the part that language plays in the cultural and situational context, and “textual cohesion” involves formal and logico-semantic ties, while “componential cohesion” involves ties between linguistic items. The second step includes “field and the ideational analysis of topic”; “field” here refers to what occurs in the text and is realized in its “ideational meaning.”
that is, what people usually have in mind when discussing word or sentence meaning, while “topic” points to what a unit is about. The third step includes “tenor and the interpersonal analysis of prominence”; “tenor” here refers to the participants, their relationship, and their social functions in the discourse, while “interpersonal meaning” is a form of action in that the speaker does something to the audience, and “prominence” refers to the use of devices to highlight material and highlight some part of the text. The final and forth step examines the “relationship to the co-text.”

With regard to structure (chs. 3–7), since Westfall’s methodology investigates the function and use of language, it is important to note that her formally based arrangement is organized around choices from the structures of mood and voice; accordingly, the message is carried by the discourse themes, as expressed by performatives, namely, hortatory subjunctives. It thus comes as no surprise that Wolfgang Nauck’s article (“Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefs,” 1960) is central to Westfall’s structure, as it was to Guthrie’s. Although Nauck did not publish on Hebrews beyond this article, he aimed—as befitting a scholar of the “German school” of his time—at demonstrating that Hebrews as a tripartite paraenetic sermon is based on the one and central paraenetic inclusion of Heb 4:14–16 and 10:19–23. Although Westfall does not name it “inclusion,” these two parallel units of three hortatory subjunctives in Heb 4:11–16 and 10:19–25 also segment her discourse on the macro structure. Correspondingly, her structure—a comprehensive discussion lies beyond the scope of this review—reflects the importance of hortatory subjunctives and carries themes relevant to recipients either under pressure or facing a crisis:

I. 1:1–4:16: Consider Jesus as the apostle of our confession
   1:1–3:1: Let’s hold on to the message that our apostle gave us
   3:1–4:13: Let’s respond to Jesus’ voice today and enter the rest
   4:11–16: Thematic peak

II. 4:11–10:25: Consider Jesus as the high priest of our confession
    4:11–6:3: Let’s press on to maturity with new teaching about Jesus’ priesthood
    6:1–7:3: The new teaching results in access to God
    7:4–10:25: Let’s draw near to God
    10:19–25: Thematic peak

III. 10:19–13:16: We are partners in Jesus’ heavenly calling
     10:19–12:2: Let’s run the race
     12:1–29: Let’s serve God as priests in heavenly Jerusalem
     12:28–13:16: Let’s go to Jesus and offer sacrifices of love, good works, and sharing
     13:17–25: Draw strength from relationships with your leaders and community
An evaluation of Westfall’s study first and foremost needs to take into account that her discourse-analytical approach pertains to a linguistic current whose focus regarding language is **pragmatics** (function and use) as opposed to **structure**. Westfall’s demonstration of a model of discourse analysis and methodology that accounts for all of the text is not only exemplary but also carried out with care.² Both the introduction of linguistic concepts and the offering of definitions of linguistic terminology are helpful. Her tripartite structure is nearly identical with Neeley’s macro structure; although plausible, the discursive climax in Heb 12:18–29 coincides with Neeley’s and Guthrie’s discourse analysis. Moreover, the tripartite model (mostly segmented after Heb 4:13) is the most frequently proposed in Hebrews scholarship.

From a pragmatic point of view, Westfall’s critique of Vanhoye’s symmetric proposal as incorrect or “ahistorical” is astonishing and not necessary, simply because pragmatic approaches have a different focus of interest than structuralistic ones. That symmetries are not of interest to Westfall is somewhat comprehensible, yet to make them disappear behind “repetition” shows a lack of differentiation. Symmetries have not only been recognized in Hebrews (on the macro as well as on the micro level), but its use seems omnipresent and has been observed extensively in ancient biblical and nonbiblical texts. In symmetric terms, then, the sister paragraph of Heb 10:19–23 is not 4:11–16 but 6:13–20; these reveal not only semantic overlappings—of which “veil” is the most prominent—but contextually speaking, 6:13–20 is preceded by two themes that immediately follow 10:19–23 in inverse order: 6:9–12 as well as 10:24–25 contain the “works of love,” and 6:4–8 as well as 10:26–31 contain the stern message that for those once enlightened and sinning again neither repentance nor sacrifice is left.

In Westfall’s study, the term “discourse” obviously does not denote “genre,” and what discourse in antiquity could mean is not considered nor related to the “letter” in the title of her book. Yet in view of pragmatics, a consideration not only of genre, but also of production aesthetics, of the author, of the **Sitz im Leben**, and, most of all, of the sociocultural and intertextual context would have helped. Even though discourses do in actual fact limit the possible meanings of signifiers along the lines of Michel Foucault’s epistemic model, Westfall’s all-too-hasty and text-inherent interpretation of significant lexemes will leave readers uneasy at times. Two examples must suffice here. “Rest” without any semantic or intertextual investigation is defined as “a metaphor for reaching the final goal of spiritual completion” (132), whereas a look into the LXX would have shown that it can operate as a synonym for “land.” Or, the addressees—their gender remains unreflected—are referred to as “priests” (**passim**) who “can approach God to meet with him face to face” (296). In early Judaism, to which Westfall assigns the addressees, to

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² Errors are rare, occurring occasionally in title numbering (especially in ch. 4.3, pp. 152–69).
see God face to face is an unthinkable concept; moreover, priests along with priestesses—what Westfall seems to imply—who sacrifice in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem are simply unheard of.

“Do we really need another analysis?”—Westfall’s own reply to this question is obviously positive; her monograph will be welcomed—and rightly so—as the most comprehensive discourse analysis to date in Hebrews scholarship. Yet her narrowly focused linguistic study is not entirely convincing, especially—and in Foucault's power discursive terms—in view of its sociocultural context and intertext.