The book under review represents a careful synchronic reading of Isaiah. Although Ferry does not dismiss diachronic approaches, she is interested in moving beyond them to show that a synchronic reading affects the book of Isaiah in two interrelated ways. First, in terms of literary structure, Ferry argues that the traditional division of the book into three main parts (1–39; 40–55; 56–66) has to be abandoned in favor of a bipartite structure composed of Isa 1–33; 34–66 (217). Second, a synchronic reading of the book uncovers themes that cut across it. These themes offer the reader the main literary and theological routes through which the book as a whole is to be read (217). Following a brief introduction (7–9), there is a discussion of current research on Isaiah (ch. 1), before the book is neatly divided into two main parts. The first discusses Isaiah’s literary structure (chs. 2–4) and the second the book’s main themes (chs. 5–8). A hermeneutical discussion of how to read Isaiah concludes the work (237–44). A list of abbreviations, bibliography, author and biblical indexes, and a table of contents conclude the book (245–81).

Chapter 1, “Histoire de l’exégèse du livre d’Isaïe” (11–36), reviews the history of Isaianic exegesis. Ferry demonstrates that Isaianic research has moved from an emphasis on the book as a unity (premodern approach), to the book as a fragmented literary composition
(since B. Duhm’s 1892 commentary on Isaiah) (12), back to taking it as a unity again (since J. Vermeylen’s 1978 monograph on Isaiah). Ferry situates her own work among those that seek to read Isaiah as a unity. She bases her approach, however, on clues in the book itself that seem to point to a nonfragmentary reading. Even though one finds titles in Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1, they are lacking in 40:1; 56:1. She interprets this absence as an indication that Isa 40–55; 56–66 should be read together with Isa 1–39. Furthermore, Ferry rejects attempts to see Isa 40 as the call of Deutero-Isaiah as unconvincing. Besides, Ferry does not consider the traditional division of the book in Isa 40 to be coherent: even though there is a recognizable change between Isa 39 and 40, the rupture between Isa 12 and 13 is certainly bigger than the one between Isa 55 and 56 (27). Ferry seeks, therefore, to read the book as a whole. She finds support for her view in Isa 8:16; 29:11–12; 30:8, texts that refer to the act of writing within the book itself. For her, the most well-suited exegetical tool for reading a book as a whole is a canonical approach. This approach functions as an invitation to read and research Isaiah’s structuring elements as well as its main themes (30, 36).

Chapter 2, “L’encadrement du livre: Isaie 1 et 65–66” (39–65), discusses the literary function of Isa 1 and 65–66 in the book as a whole. Ferry takes Isa 1 as the prologue or a summary to the whole book. As a prologue, 1:1–2:4 introduces major “intra-Isaianic” themes such as the importance of observing justice and righteousness (48, 49), cultic polemics (48), the remnant (47), peace for Zion and the nations (50), and Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel (51). As a conclusion, Isa 65–66 shares several lexical and thematic connections with 1:1–2:4 (56). Thematically, Ferry identifies the following shared motifs: cultic abuse (1:11, 13b–15; 66:3), the mention of sacred gardens (1:29–31; 66:17), call to repentance (1:21–26, 27–28; 65:11–15), and the image of fire to speak of judgment against the wicked (1:21, 28, 31; 66:24). However, in Ferry’s opinion, Isa 65–66 is not a simple repetition of themes found in chapter 1. Rather, it develops new themes such as the symbolism of childbirth and eschatological motifs such as the holy mountain as a kingdom of nonviolence (65:25; but see here 2:1–4; 11:1–9), Zion’s incredible fertility (66:7–13), and the revelation of God’s glory and face (66:18, 23). Isaiah 65–66’s new contribution to 1:1–2:4 suggests that the book is a journey, not a mere repetition of the beginning, leading one to look at an open future (61).


the actions described in both sections take place on the same place: “at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field” (7:3; 36:2). Third, while the use of a sign is similar in both sections, they are used to contrast the kings: Ahaz rejects the sign, but Hezekiah accepts it. Fourth, the climax of both sections closes with similar phraseology: “the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this” (cf. 9:6; 37:32) (88–89). This comparison between Ahaz and Hezekiah shows that, while Ahaz’s behavior leads to judgment, Hezekiah’s attitude opens the door for the restoration announced in Isa 40. Besides, Hezekiah’s conduct offers a model of faith, contrary to Ahaz’s unbelief (89). In sum, Isa 36–39 has both a literary and a theological function. Literarily, Isa 39 offers a transition from the Assyrian to the Babylonian period (89–90). Theologically, the events of 701 and 587 are related in the sense that Jerusalem’s rescue in 701 functions as a source of hope for the exiles in 587, who saw the destruction of the city. For Ferry, the function of Isa 36–39 is to confirm Isaiah’s oracles against Assyria, thus pointing to God’s good intentions toward Zion (90).

Chapter 4, “Architecture d’Isaïe 1–12 et fonction d’Isaïe 6” (93–118), draws attention to the literary function of Isa 6 in the book as a whole (93–94). As for Isa 6’s immediate context, Ferry sees a connection with Isa 5 in terms of vocabulary, especially the repetition of the expression “the Holy One of Israel,” which touches on the holiness-of-Yahweh theme found also in Isa 6. She also sees a link between the singer of the vineyard’s song (5:1) with the prophet who proclaims Yahweh’s message (6:9–10) (110). In its broader context, Ferry argues that Isa 1–5 functions as the background information that justifies the hardening of the people in 6:9–10 (128, 133). She also uncovers connections between Isa 6; 40 in their use of הָיוִם (112). Her conclusion is that, while an announcement of judgment finds its climax in Isa 6, Isa 40 starts with a proclamation of salvation (112).

Chapter 5, “Entre endurcissement et foi” (121–54), is the first chapter in the second part of Ferry’s book, which focuses on important themes that appear throughout Isaiah (119). Chapter 5 addresses the function of the hardening motif in the book as a whole. Ferry interprets the theological development of this theme as follows. The hardening motif appears together with Uzziah’s death notice and the assumed ascension of a new king to the throne (cf. 6:1, 9–10). The coming of the new king proves to be insufficient to reverse the situation of hardening, as Ahaz fails to listen to Isaiah’s call to faith (cf. Isa 7). The hardening motif is taken up in 29:9–10 in the midst of a series of “woe” oracles (cf. Isa 28–31; 33). Isaiah 32 interrupts this series to announce the coming of a new king who will put an end to the condition of “hardening” (cf. 32:3–4). Similarly, 42:6–7 charges the “servant” with the task to “open eyes that are blind,” in stark contrast to the prophet’s mission as depicted in 6:9–10. Contrary to 32:3–4 and 42:6–7, 44:18 portrays idol makers as “blind.” For Ferry, 44:18 suggests that its redactors viewed the task of Isa 42’s servant as
limited. The more so since 63:17, echoing 6:9–10, in Ferry’s view, shows that part of the postexilic community remained hardened. Thus, later redactors of Isaiah took 6:9–10 as an ever-relevant message to their present situation (151).

Chapter 6, “Justice et salut: Lecture d’Isaïe 56” (155–80), discusses the meaning of צדק in the book of Isaiah. Whereas in Isa 1–33(39) צדק is often paired with משפט, in Isa 34(40)–66 the same term is paired with ישע. Ferry correctly takes צדק/משפט as a hendiadys that is used to indicate the practice of “social justice” that leads to a harmonious living between the different parts of society and between individuals (171). Contrarily, צדק in Isa 34(40)–66 is not related to “social justice” but to God’s “salvation” because there the term becomes a synonym with ישע (173). However, Ferry does not see Isa 34(40)–66 as correcting Isa 1–33(39)’s view on צדק. Rather, a study of Isa 56:1–59:21 allows her to see an intrinsic theological relationship between צדק as “social justice” and צדק as “divine salvation.” In its use of צדק, the book calls its postexilic community to testify to Yahweh’s “salvation” in their favor by adopting his salvation as a model to be followed in their communal relationship. In Ferry’s view, Yahweh’s redeeming צדק toward his people becomes the basis for the people’s practice of צדק in society (cf. 61:10; 62:2; 64:4). From a synchronic perspective, the reader of the book is invited to incessantly make the transition from a moral justice to justice as salvation and to maintain the relationship between the two in a way that is in keeping with those who are said to receive the Spirit and the words of Yahweh (cf. 59:21) (180).

Chapter 7, “Le(s) serviteur(s) dans le livre d’Isaïe” (181–214), addresses the identity of the servant(s) figure in the book of Isaiah. Ferry notes that it is difficult to identify the “servant(s)” in Isaiah because of its multifaceted use. She notes that the “servants” are named in Isa 1–39 (e.g., Isaiah, Eliakim, and David in 20:3; 22:20; 37:35), are named and unnamed in Isa 40–55, and are unnamed in Isa 56–66 (190). Who are the servants, then? Ferry advances the proposal that the book of Isaiah allows for an identification of the servant(s) with the group known as “us” that appears throughout the book (210). She takes this group as the “implied reader” of the book. After discussing a few key passages where the “us” group is either present or implied (see 9:5; 12:4–5; 24–27; 33:22; 53:1–6), Ferry finds the basis for her position in 63:17, where the “us” group is explicitly identified with the “servants” (213). In the evolving use of the termעבד in Isaiah, Ferry argues that the “us” group, the implied reader of the book, becomes the “servants” introduced in 52:13 (214).

Chapter 8, “La figure de Sion” (215–35), discusses the role of Zion in the book of Isaiah. Following in the footsteps of U. Berges’s work, Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt (Fribourg: Herder, 1998), Ferry sees a movement from attacking Zion to
pilgrimage to Zion (218). More specifically, Ferry argues that Zion is depicted as a city in Isa 1–39, as a mother in Isa 40–55, and as a light to the nations in Isa 56–66 (219–27). The core of her argument consists in demonstrating that the characteristics of the servant and Zion mix in Isa 49–55. This blending can be seen in the parallel use of feminine and masculine forms in texts such as 51:12; 55:5 (226). More important, this chapter demonstrates that the Zion motif attests to Yahweh’s dramatic relationship with Zion in the sense that Zion will no longer be a prostitute (see 1:21–23) but that it will be renewed for the sake of the world’s nations (2:1–5) (234).

Ferry’s work represents a remarkable synchronic reading of Isaiah. It shows how key sections such as Isa 1; 6; 36–39; 65–66 fit in their present literary context. Her work also tracks key motifs that run through the book as a whole. As a way to foster further reflection on her discussion, I would like to make here both general and specific critical comments on some of her proposals. In general terms, one misses a discussion of the literary function of Isa 24–27 in relation to the rest of the book. Because critical scholarship has treated these chapters as an independent section, a discussion of their literary function vis-à-vis the whole book would be welcome. Also, Ferry’s proposal to see the book as composed of a bipartite structure (Isa 1–33; 34–66) seems at times to become a problem for some of her thematic discussions. For instance, Ferry’s claim that there is a development in the servant motif throughout the book of Isaiah is based on her observation of the fact that the “servants” are named in Isa 1–39, are named and unnamed in Isa 40–55, and are unnamed in Isa 56–66 (190). Here one can observe her dependence on the traditional division of the book into three main sections. The same is true for Ferry’s discussion of the Zion motif. She tracks the development of Zion from “impious city” to “holy mountain” in Isa 1–39 (219), of Zion as a mother in Isa 40–55 (224), and of Zion as a light to the nations in Isa 56–66 (226). This tracking of the Zion motif in the book’s traditional three parts contrasts with her statement on the same subject, where she says that “le lecteur sera alors conduit à faire un parcours qui le conduit à percevoir Sion comme cité (Is 1–33), puis à la regarder comme un mère (Is 34–55) avant qu’il ne se laisse illuminer par sa lumière” (218). These examples show that a tripartite, not a bipartite, division of the book can be more suitable for a synchronic reading of specific themes in Isaiah.

Further, I offer comments to Ferry’s interpretation of particular passages. The first ponders on Ferry’s handling of the “hardening” theme and more precisely with her reading of the subject of the singular verb מַטְח to be besmeared” in Isa 44:18. Ferry takes Yahweh as the subject of this verb so as to translate Isa:18 as “he has covered their eyes” (148). However, Yahweh is not found in the immediate context. It is better to take the dual “eyes” as the subject of the verb and translate it as “their eyes are besmeared” (see GKC §145o). If this is correct, Ferry’s claim that the redactors of 44:18 considered the
servant’s task as limited is weakened. This leads to my second point, which is 63:17. As Ferry recognizes, the verb used in 63:17 (קשׁח) differs from the one in 6:9–10 (שׁמן). This difference may suggest that 63:17 is not a text that belongs to the “hardening” motif introduced in 6:9–10. It seems to function as a lament against Yahweh that blames him for the people’s faults. If this is so, a synchronic reading of the hardening theme in Isaiah would point to the servant’s task in 42:6–7 as the climatic counterpoint to 6:9–10: whereas the prophet is commissioned with the task to “shut the people’s eyes,” now that Yahweh’s anger has passed, the mission of “opening eyes that are blind” is assigned to the servant. Third, Ferry claims that in Isa 49–55 the characteristics of the “servant” and Zion mix. This mingling of traits can be seen in the exchange between grammatically masculine and feminine forms such as in 51:12; 55:5. The latter verse is the focus of my discussion here. Ferry interprets the pronominal suffix in לָאֵר as feminine. The problem here is that, in pausal form, the pronominal suffix should be taken as masculine (see GKC §58g; Joüon-Muraoka, §61i). As such, 55:5 should not be read as one of the texts where the traits of the “servant” and “Zion” mix, because all the forms in that verse are to be taken as masculine.

Despite the minor criticisms above, Ferry’s work should be viewed as an important contribution to Isaianic studies, and her work is a must read for those interested in a synchronic reading of the book of Isaiah.