INTRODUCTION

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

THROUGH the ages, Psalms has been the most urgently, personally present of all the books of the Bible in the lives of many readers. Both Jewish and Christian tradition made it part of the daily and weekly liturgy. Untold numbers have repeatedly turned to Psalms for encouragement and comfort in moments of crisis or despair. The inner world of major Western writers from Augustine, Judah Halevi, and George Herbert to Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan was inflected by the reading of Psalms. But for all the power of these Hebrew poems to speak with great immediacy in many tongues to readers of different eras, they are in their origins intricately rooted in an ancient Near Eastern world that goes back to the late Bronze Age (1600–1200 BCE) and that in certain respects is quite alien to modern people.

The prose narratives of the Hebrew Bible, despite the sundry links with the surrounding literatures that scholarship has identified, are formally innovative in striking ways. Indeed, it is arguable that at least as a set of techniques and conventions, they constitute the most original literary creation of the biblical writers. Psalms, on the other hand, or psalm-like cultic hymns and celebrations of the gods, were common in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and in Syro-Canaanite literature. We know this literature chiefly through the trove of texts found at the site of Ugarit, on the Mediterranean coast of present-day Syria, dating roughly from 1400 to 1200 BCE—several centuries earlier than the main body of biblical writings. As previously unknown texts in the various ancient Near Eastern languages have been unearthed and deciphered over the past century, it has become clear that the psalmists not only adopted the formal system of poetry (about which more is said later) from the antecedent literature

of the region but also tapped their predecessors for verbal formulas, imagery, elements of mythology, and even entire sequences of lines of poetry. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that a few psalms are essentially Hebrew translations of pagan poems, though a comparison with the proposed originals suggests rather that what the psalmists did was to adapt, briefly cite, or even polemically transform the polytheistic poems, which is, after all, what poets everywhere do with their predecessors—both building on them and emphatically making something new out of them.

In any case, the imaginative and verbal affiliation of many of the psalms with the pagan literary tradition—particularly the Canaanite tradition—that came before them is quite strong, and surely would have surprised pious readers of the canonical book over the centuries. Although God is often entreated in Psalms as a compassionate God, healer of broken hearts, and sustainer of the lowly, a good many of these poems represent the deity as a warrior god on the model of the Canaanite Baal riding through the skies with clouds as his chariot, brandishing lightning bolts as his weapons. Famously, a triadic line in one of the Ugaritic texts is virtually replicated in Psalm 92:10, with little more than the name of the god changed: "Look, your enemies, O Baal, / look, your enemies you will smash, / look, you will destroy your foes."

The council of the gods, a regular feature of Canaanite mythology, makes an appearance in a number of psalms and with it the notion of either lesser gods over whom YHWH the God of Israel presides, or of a celestial entourage ("the sons of God") that serves Him. At the great temporal remove from which we read these texts, it is hard to know to what extent such residues of polytheism were literally embraced as items of belief or were simply used as vivid poetic resources. Some of the psalms seem to reflect an ambiguous oscillation between those two possibilities. Another theme drawn from Canaanite mythology that recurs frequently in Psalms, the cosmogonic conquest of a monstrous sea god—intimating chaos—by a warrior god—associated with order—is on the whole more firmly assimilated into a monotheistic outlook. Although the various names of the primordial sea monster—Leviathan, Rahab, Yamm, Tanin—conquered by God do appear here, the originally mythological conflict is characteristically figured in more naturalistic terms as God's subduing the breakers of the sea. In Psalm 104 the fearsome Leviathan is actually reduced to an aquatic pet with whom YHWH can play.

Many of the psalms, then, derive some of their poetic force from the literary antecedents on which they draw. But the Hebrew poems were manifestly framed for Israelite purposes that were in many regards distinctive and at best no more than loosely parallel to the polytheistic texts that served as poetic precedents.

When were the various psalms composed and to what ends? The dating of individual psalms has long been a region of treacherous scholarly quicksand. The one safe conclusion is that the writing of psalms was a persistent activity over many centuries. The Davidic authorship enshrined in Jewish and Christian tradition has no credible historical grounding. It was a regular practice in the later biblical period to ascribe new texts to famous figures of the past. Although many psalms include the name David in the superscription supplied by the editors, the meaning of the Hebrew particle *l*^{e} that usually prefixes the name is ambiguous. It is conventionally translated as "of," and in ancient seals and other objects that have been discovered, it does serve as a possessive. But *l*^{e} also can mean "for," "in the manner of," "suitable to," and so forth. The present translation seeks to preserve this ambiguity by translating *mizmor l*^{e}*dawid* as "a David psalm." David was no doubt identified by the editors of the collection as the exemplary psalmist because in his story, as told in 1 and 2 Samuel, he appears as a poet and the player of a stringed instrument, and at the end of the narrative is given the epithet "the sweet singer of Israel." But the editors themselves ascribed psalms to different poets—Asaph, Ethan the Ezrahite, Heyman the Ezrahite, the Korahites, and others. One cannot categorically exclude the possibility that a couple of these psalms were actually written by David, though it is difficult to gauge the likelihood (and some scholars altogether doubt David's historicity).

In any case, a few of the psalms might be as early as the Solomonic court, or even the pre-monarchic period. Many of these poems appear to have been written at some indeterminate point during the four centuries of the First Commonwealth (approximately 996 to 586 BCE). Many others offer evidence in their themes and language of composition in the period of the Return to Zion (that is, after 457 BCE). One famous instance, Psalm 137, which begins with the words "By Babylon's

streams," was clearly written when the pain of exile was fresh, not long after the national trauma of 586 BCE. There is no way to date what may be the latest psalms, and the texts found at Qumran indicate that some sort of psalm writing was still a literary activity in the last two centuries before the Christian era. But the extravagant scholarly hypothesis that many of the psalms were composed in the Hasmonean period in the second century BCE is now generally rejected—among other reasons because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible completed during the third century BCE, already has virtually the same contents (with the exception of one additional psalm) as the canonical Hebrew collection passed down to us. These poems, then, were produced by many different poets over more than half a millennium, probably beginning during or even before the tenth century BCE, though the precise dating of most individual psalms remains elusive. It seems unlikely that any of the psalms is later than the fifth or fourth century BCE. By the late first century CE, the Book of Psalms was considered such a cornerstone of the scriptural canon that in Luke 24:44 it is mentioned together with the Torah and the Prophets as one of the three primary categories of the sacred writings.

Many but by no means all the psalms were composed for use in the temple cult, though it is worth noting that the elaborate instructions for the conduct of the cult in Leviticus and elsewhere include all sorts of regulations for the preparation and offering of sacrifices but no mandate for songs or liturgical texts. (The post-exilic Chronicles does represent David appointing Levitical singers.) Such songs, however, were part of the rituals celebrated throughout the region, and their attractiveness as an enhancement to the cult, with the words performed by singers to orchestral accompaniment (as many of the palms indicate) was irresistible. What should be resisted is the inclination of many scholars, beginning in the early twentieth century, to turn as many psalms as possible into the liturgy of conjectured temple rites—to recover what in biblical studies is called the "life-setting" of the psalms. Perhaps the chief offender among these conjectures is a purported enthronement rite, marking an annual festival in which God was crowned as king. Although Mesopotamian analogies have been cited as evidence, there is simply no indication in the biblical corpus or in the archaeological record that such a ritual existed in ancient Israel, and surely the

Israelites were not such literalists as to be incapable of acclaiming God's kingship without a cultic ceremony of enthronement.

Some psalms nevertheless offer strong evidence of their use as liturgical texts. Several psalms, for example Psalm 118, bear indications that three distinct groups of participants in the temple service—"Israel," "the house of Aaron," and "those who fear the LORD"—were called on to chant the refrain "forever is His kindness." Several other psalms follow the progress of pilgrims climbing Mount Zion, then entering the gates of the sacred precincts. Some psalms celebrate a national victory or pray for God's intercession in a time of national danger. Many of the psalms, however, have an individual rather than a collective focus—prayers of thanksgiving after a person has escaped a deadly illness or some other danger, and supplications imploring God to intervene on behalf of someone threatened by enemies or ailments. At least the thanksgiving psalms would probably have accompanied a cultic act, the offering of a thanksgiving sacrifice. It is conceivable, though not entirely demonstrable, that there were professional psalm poets in the vicinity of the temple from whom a worshipper coming to Jerusalem could have purchased a psalm that he would recite to express his own particular need. Such compositions might have provided a nucleus for the different collections of psalms that were put together in the canonical anthology. There are, however, other psalms that show no evident connection with any temple ritual. The most clear-cut instances of this category are the psalms that are general reflections on the nature of human existence or on the role of morality in human affairs (most of these would also probably not have been performed to musical accompaniment). Still other psalms have a political or public subject that has no obvious link with worship, such as the royal psalms (including one composed to celebrate a king's wedding) and the psalms in praise of Zion.

From all this, one may reasonably infer that the psalm was conceived in the ancient period as a fairly flexible poetic form. Sung and played in the temple service, it could be a liturgical text in the strict sense. It could also accompany individual ritual acts of thanksgiving, confession, and supplication, or perhaps express these various themes outside a ritual context. (Jonah in Jonah 2 and Hannah in 1 Samuel 2 are assigned psalms by the redactor to recite at critical moments in their life stories that have no connection with a cult.) The psalm could serve as a poetic

vehicle for philosophic reflection or didactic instruction or the commemoration of national history or for the celebration of the monarch and the seat of the monarchy. Psalm 137, announcing its own composition in Babylonian exile, is an instructive instance of how far the literary concept of psalm could be pushed. It amounts to an anti-psalm, declaring from the beginning that it is impossible to sing Zion's songs "on foreign soil." Yet the editors thought it appropriate for inclusion in the Book of Psalms, alongside poems that were explicitly framed for use in the temple ritual. The case of this poem should alert us to the limits of one of the most common scholarly modes of analysis of Psalms, the form-criticism that identifies distinct genres of psalms (supplication, thanksgiving, Wisdom psalm, royal psalm, historical psalm, Zion psalm, psalm of praise). Though these generic categories are sometimes useful for understanding the thrust of a particular text, there is more fluidity of genre than they allow, with many psalms being hybrids or switching genre in mid-course and at least a few psalms, such as Psalm 137, standing outside the system of genre. What can be concluded from all this variegated evidence is that the psalm was a multifaceted poetic form serving many different purposes, some cultic and others not, and that it played a vital role in the life of the Israelite community and of individuals within that community throughout the biblical period.

II. ASSEMBLING THE BOOK

THE anthology that became the Book of Psalms was put together in the Second Temple period, perhaps in the fifth century BCE but probably no later than the fourth century BCE. The decision to assemble the disparate psalms in a book may have been motivated by the redaction of the Torah in the fifth century BCE as a canonical book intended for public reading. We have no precise knowledge about the identity of the editors, though the usual suspects—priestly circles in Jerusalem—seem plausible candidates, because they would have had a particular interest in making the psalms authoritatively available for use in worship.

The canonical collection is divided into five books, 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150. The end of each book is marked by a brief prose doxology praising God that is not part of the psalm after which it

is inserted. The fifth book lacks this doxological coda, perhaps because Psalm 150 as a whole, a string of exhortations to praise God in song, was thought to serve that purpose. The first three books seem to have originally been independent collections of psalms, and in all likelihood what is now the fourth and fifth books was at first a single additional book. Psalms 1 and 2 are usually considered to be a prologue to the Book of Psalms as a whole and not part of the collection that constitutes the first book of Psalms. Two duplications of psalms (Psalms 14 and 53, Psalm 40:14–18 and Psalm 70) in different books of the collection offer evidence that these were originally separate anthologies that evolved independently. Further evidence for the independence of the pre-canonical collections is the conclusion of the second book with the words, "the prayers of David son of Jesse are ended," a formula that is then contradicted by psalms in the next three books, many of which are in fact ascribed to David. The division into five books was clearly in emulation of the Five Books of Moses. Perhaps this division was merely a formal device to help confer canonical status on Psalms, following the precedent of the recently canonized Torah. Some scholars have inferred that it was motivated by a practical need to facilitate the public reading of Psalms in coordination with the public reading of the Torah according to a triennial cycle, although the crucial consideration for such reading would be not the number of books (three would have worked better than five) but the number of psalms, 150, allowing for approximately a psalm each week over the three-year cycle. (The number was not absolutely fixed at 150 but rather hovered somewhere around 150 because a few of the psalms that are now separate units may be the result of the joining together of two psalms, and Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single psalm.)

There are also a few smaller groupings of psalms, such as the psalms attributed to Asaph, the "songs of ascents" (the meaning of that term is in dispute), and the hallelujah psalms at the end of the collection (the term *hallelujah*, "praise God," appears only in the fourth and fifth books and is a sign that they once were a single collection distinct from the other three books). It is possible that these shorter sequences of psalms were once small separate scrolls that were incorporated into the books where they now appear, which in turn were put together to make the five-part Book of Psalms.

The title given to this book by Hebrew tradition reflects a particular view of what was its essential subject. The Hebrew term for "psalm" is *mizmor*, which means "something sung," cognate with the verb *zamer*, "to sing" or "to hymn." It is possible but by no means certain that this verb designates singing accompanied by a musical instrument. It is definitely singing associated with praise or jubilation; one would never use it for the chanting of a dirge. The noun *mizmor*, whether or not attached to the name David, appears in the heading of a large number of the psalms. And yet the book as a whole has never been called *Mizmorim*, "Psalms," but *Tehilim*, "Praises" (a rabbinic plural of the noun *tehilah* that appears in the collection with some frequency in the singular). Now, the two preponderant genres in the book are psalms of thanksgiving, which overlap significantly with psalms of praise, and supplications, but there are more supplications than psalms of thanksgiving or praise. Nevertheless, the idea of calling the book *Tehilim*, "Praises," reflects an insight into what is going on in most though not all of the poems. Again and again, the psalmists tell us that man's ultimate calling is to use the resources of human language to celebrate God's greatness and to express gratitude for His beneficent acts. This theme is sometimes given special urgency by being joined with an emphasis on the ephemerality of human life: Only the living can praise God. There are moments of such praise, or at least expressions of readiness to turn to praise, even in many of the psalms of supplication. The editorial decision to conclude the book with six psalms of praise, each of the last five beginning with "hallelujah" (two words in the Hebrew—an imperative verb "praise" and its object Yah, "God"), all coming to a grand orchestral climax in the last psalm, is surely an effort to define the whole collection as a gathering of songs of praise. Despite the variegated character of the sundry psalms, it is a definition to a large extent justified by the poems themselves.

III. THE POETRY OF *PSALMS*

IT HAS BEEN generally understood since the eighteenth century, and among some Jewish scholars still earlier, that biblical poetry is based on a parallelism of meaning between the two halves of the line (or, in the minority of lines that are triadic, among the three parts of the line). There is no requirement of rhyme (very occasionally one encounters an ad hoc rhyme) and no regular meter of the kind manifested in Greek and Latin poetry, though some Bible scholars in recent decades have made misguided attempts to impose such a meter by counting syllables or other proposed phonetic units. The best account of the formal system of biblical poetry is the concise article by Benjamin Hrushovski (now Harshav) under the rubric "Prosody, Hebrew," in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Hrushovski calls the system "semantic-syntactic-accentual parallelism." That is to say, between the two halves of the line there may be some equivalence of meaning ("semantic"), an equivalent number of stressed syllables ("accentual"), and a parallelism of syntax. Some lines may manifest a neat parallelism in all three categories, but that is not obligatory. As to the parallelism of meaning that has chiefly absorbed the attention of scholars since the idea was first expounded by the Anglican bishop Robert Lowth in the eighteenth century, such parallelism is prevalent, but many divergences are allowed, in the same way, for example, that Shakespeare often permits himself to modify or swerve from strict iambic pentameter in his deployment of blank verse. Finally, much of the force of ancient Hebrew poetry derives from its rhythmic compactness, something one could scarcely guess from the existing English versions. A typical line of biblical poetry has three beats in each verset (I borrow this term for the half lines from Hrushovski, who uses it instead of "hemistich" or "colon" to avoid confusion with other systems of prosody). Some lines exhibit a three-beat four-beat pattern; sometimes a verset may have only two beats. Typically, given the compact structure of biblical words, there are usually only one or two unaccented syllables between the accented ones. In the next section, I will consider the implications of this prosodic system for translating the Hebrew poems.

Although, as systems of prosody go, biblical poetics remains relatively conservative with the passage of time, it is worth noting that over the six centuries or more during which the canonical psalms were composed, some evolution in the system is observable. The oldest stratum of biblical poetry, as evidenced in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), shows a fondness for patterns of incremental repetition. These occur in Psalms as well, whether because the poem is old or because the poet

has chosen to use an archaizing device. Here is
mental repetition in a verse I alluded to earlier v
look, Your enemies, O LORD, / for, look, Your enem
The increment in the repetition is italicized. The
here can be attributed to the adoption by the psalm
line from an old Canaanite poem. At the other
spectrum, in the Second Temple period semantic
what weakened. Many lines show no parallelism
versets; in numerous instances, this lack is co
semantic parallelism between two whole lines in s
is not invariably the case. One observes, for exan
parallelism in Psalm 27:3:

Though a camp is marshaled against
my heart shall not fear.
Though battle is roused against me,
nonetheless do I trust.

Since the pioneering work of Bishop Lowth
inclined to imagine semantic parallelism as a dep
between the two versets. Sometimes this is actu
Psalm 6:2 reads, "LORD, do not chastise me in You
ish me in Your fury." The two versets are neatly par
for term, and the syntax is parallel as well (in t
comes at the end of each clause). The only diverge
metry between the two clauses is that the first v
vocative "LORD." The immediately following verse
other hand, exhibits a far more prevalent use of
"Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am wretched. / H
are stricken." This is synonymity with a differenc
with a development. The general plea "Have me
becomes the physically concrete "Heal me" (*refa*
condition of misery ("for I am wretched") is transl
cally specific "for my limbs are stricken." This is ho
usually works in the Bible. Poets in any language ar
ply to repeat the same thing in different words. If t
general term for a concept appears in the first ver

ce of increoting: "For, . ." (92:10). poetic style noted, of a e historical m is someg between d for by a though this interlinear

have been f synonyms case. Thus, do not punaning, term w the verb strict symns with the alm, on the parallelism: or my limbs should say," (*honeini*) d a general the somatiparallelism ntent simommon or usually the

case, the "synonym" in the second verset is often a more unusual term, a stronger word, some sort of specification of the first term, or a metaphorical substitution for it that carries with it the vividness or heightening involved in figurative language. Thus, from the first verset to the second, there is typically an intensification or concretization (as in the line just quoted from Psalm 6), a focusing of the initial idea, and sometimes a narrative development of it.

This building of semantic momentum from verset to verset is one of the sources of the distinctive power of biblical poetry. Here is a simple and graphically clear instance of narrative progression between versets: "Who shall go up on the mount of the LORD, / and who shall stand up in His holy place?" (24:3). The units of syntax and meaning are neatly parallel, but a process is going forward in time. In the first verset, the pilgrim is imagined making his way up the slope of Mount Zion; in the second verset, he has arrived within the sacred precincts of the temple and no longer "goes up" but "stands" (literally "rises" or "stands up"). In the following line of poetry, an intensification is effected in the second verset through the addition of figurative language: "Shuddering seized them there, / pangs *like a woman in labor*" (48:7). (The meaning of this line, part of a celebration of a victory at sea, is amplified by its allusion to the Song of the Sea, Exodus 15:14.) The tendency to focus meaning in the second verset, often accompanied by some narrative development from the first verset to the second, manifests itself again and again in these poems, as it does elsewhere in biblical poetry. Here is a sequence of three such lines that can stand for many others.

I have sunk in the slime of the deep,
and there is no place to stand.
I have entered the watery depths,
and the current has swept me away.
I am exhausted from my calling out.
My throat is hoarse. (69:3–4A)

The speaker, vividly evoking the experience of near death through the imagery of drowning regularly associated with death in Psalms, first reports sinking into the muddy deep, then the panicky sensation that his feet find nothing firm on which to stand. In the next line, first he

enters the watery depths; then, in the second verset, he discovers that the current (perhaps in this instance an undertow) is sweeping him away. In the third line, first he cries for help to the point of exhaustion; then, in the second verset, he notes the concrete physical consequence of all this desperate shouting—a hoarse throat. Although some psalms are laden with stereotypical language in which both the parallelism within the line and the poem as a whole are relatively static, the strong forward thrust in many of these lines of poetry as well as from line to line means that this is by and large a highly dynamic poetic system in which ideas and images are progressively pushed to extremes and themes brought to a crisis and a turning point. It is a formal aspect of the poetry of Psalms that helps make it an abiding resource for readers, whether they are in the grip of stark despair or on the crest of elation.

For all these features of the poetry of Psalms that are common to the general system of poetics in the Bible, there are also ways in which the kind of poetry deployed here is distinct from what we see in other poetic texts of the Bible. As poetry often framed for use in worship, it flaunts its own traditionalism. It rarely seeks startling effects, and again and again it deliberately draws on a body of familiar images. In Job, one encounters an astonishing inventiveness in the use of figurative language; that is often true in the Prophets as well. In Proverbs, didactic points are frequently made through sharp thrusts of wit in the metaphors. But the psalmists, to a large extent composers of liturgical and devotional texts, have no desire to surprise or disorient the pilgrims and supplicants and celebrants for whose use the texts are intended. If a person is threatened with death, the danger is represented, as we have seen, by the depths of the sea, swirling waves, waters that come up to the neck, and the "originality" of the poem inheres in the imaginativeness and freshness with which the poet reworks familiar images, as is strongly evident in Psalm 69, from which I have quoted. This notion of putting a fresh spin on stock images is common in other bodies of poetry: One might recall, for example, the Renaissance tradition of love sonnets from Petrarch to Spencer, in which the fair beloved is both fire and ice, her hair pure gold, her lips coral, and so forth. In similar fashion, God in the psalms of thanksgiving is a rock and a fortress, a shield and a buckler, a sheltering wing and a hiding place on an evil day. (Psalm 91 strikingly illustrates how great poetry can be created out

of such stock images.) Each genre of psalms draws on its own reservoir of conventional images. In the many supplications that are also complaints, the speaker's enemies, even if their enmity is in the civic realm, lay snares and dig pits for the speaker's feet, speak words like piercing arrows with a tongue that is a sharpened sword and drips poison like serpents. In the psalms of praise, because the subject is God, figurative language is often less central, but God is represented in stereotypical phrases performing the same acts—keeping truth forever, making heaven and earth, rendering justice to the oppressed, giving bread to the hungry, and, in a mythological register, riding on the clouds, crushing Leviathan, subduing the waves of the sea.

The reliance of these poems, however, on a repertoire of traditional images and stereotypical phrases does not preclude the creation of fresh and moving poetry. Granted, there are poems in the collection that are largely a stringing together of psalmodic clichés. What is remarkable is the poetic beauty and eloquence of many of the psalms, qualities that have made this book one of the primary models for lyric poetry in the Western tradition, leading many English Renaissance poets to use the verse rendering of Psalms as a basic exercise for the composition of poetry. Some of the poetic power of the psalms derives from their strategically effective use of fairly simple archetypal imagery. Thus, the first psalm sets up a strong antithesis between the just man, likened to a fruit-bearing tree deeply rooted alongside streams of water, and the wicked, who are like chaff driven by the wind. The similes are grounded in a familiar agricultural world in which the difference between what is rooted and perennially productive and what is a mere waste product that is blown away would be clear to everyone, but these images still speak to us. In many of the psalms, the simple directness of statement in the use of traditional figurative language becomes affectingly eloquent, as readers through the ages have attested. Here, for example, is the initial verse of Psalm 27 (two lines of poetry exhibiting a compact three-beat two-beat rhythm in the Hebrew):

The LORD is my light and my rescue.
Whom should I fear?
The LORD is my life's stronghold.
Of whom should I be afraid?

God as light for someone plunged in darkness and God as a fortress for someone under assault are recurrent metaphors in Psalms. But the succinctness with which these familiar terms are set here opposite the speaker's declaration that he has nothing to fear, coupled with the reinforcing effect of the interlinear parallelism, gives these lines striking expressive power. One sees why such psalms have meant so much to countless people in their own hour of uncertainty and dread.

Often, the sequencing of observation and poetic statement produces the most moving effects. Memorably, the speaker in Psalm 8 looks up at the night sky and reflects:

> When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
> the moon and the stars You fixed firm,
> "What is man that You should note him,
> and the human creature, that You pay him heed,
> and You make him little less than the gods,
> with glory and grandeur You crown him?" (verses 4–6)

The first line here incorporates a reminiscence of the creation of the celestial bodies in Genesis 1 with an elegantly apt variation on a biblical idiom. Instead of "the work of Your hands," we have "the work of Your fingers," in keeping with the delicate tracery of the stars. In the next two lines, the speaker's exclamation of astonishment hurtles downward in the cosmic hierarchy from the heavens above, where the celestial beings (perhaps *'elohim* here is an ellipsis for "sons of God") would dwell, to man down below. The synonymous parallelism of the middle line ("What is man . . .") is counterpointed by the focusing parallelism of the line that follows ("You make him little less . . . , / with glory and grandeur You crown him.") The idea that humankind is to have dominion over the created world is prominent in the first creation story, but in the last line of this sequence, it is poetically realized in a little fanfare of royal imagery.

Poetically effective sequencing may be combined with the semantic dynamics to which lines of parallelistic verse lend themselves. Psalm 90:4 offers a remarkable expression of the overwhelming disparity between the divine perspective of eternity and the fleeting temporal experience of ephemeral man: "For a thousand years in Your eyes / are like yesterday gone, / like a watch in the night." This triadic line offers

us a vision of time from God's end of the telescope. In a pattern of diminution, it takes us from a thousand years to a yesterday that has already vanished to a single watch in the night, barely four hours. And Psalm 90 as a whole uses a poetic strategy frequently observable in these poems by repeating key words with a thematic point. In this meditation on temporality, the psalmist rings the changes on "years" and "days," "morning" and "evening," all the way to the plea just before the end, "Give us joy as the days You afflicted us, / the years we saw evil" (90:15).

Finally, though much of the figurative language is manifestly taken from a traditional repertoire, there are moments of striking metaphoric inventiveness. Water, as we saw in the case of the first psalm, is a potent metaphor in this culture existing often precariously in a semi-arid climate. It is understandable that Jeremiah should represent God as the source of living waters. What the poet in Psalm 42:2–3 does with this traditional background is nevertheless utterly arresting:

> As a deer yearns for streams of water,
> so I yearn for You, O God.
> My whole being thirsts for God,
> for the living God.

The thirsting reflects a distinctive aspect of Psalms. These poems, even if many of them were written to be used in the temple cult, exhibit an intensely spiritual inwardness. Yet that inwardness is characteristically expressed in the most concretely somatic terms. Here is another example of the psalmist's longing for God articulated as thirst:

> God, my God, for You I search.
> My throat thirsts for You,
> my flesh yearns for You
> in a land waste and parched, with no water. (63:2)

The King James Version, and most modern translations in its footsteps, has the "soul" thirsting for God, but this is almost certainly a mistake. The Hebrew *nefesh* means "life breath" and, by extension, "life" or "essential being." But by metonymy, it is also a term for the throat (the

passage through which the breath travels) or, sometimes, for the neck. As the subject of the verb "thirst" and with the interlinear parallelism with "flesh," *nefesh* here surely has its physical meaning of "throat." The very physicality, of course, makes the metaphor of thirsting all the more powerful.

Let me offer one last example of the force of figurative language in Psalms within a framework of traditional language. God, as we noted in a verse quoted from Psalm 27, is associated with light—in that instance, because light, archetypically, means safety and rescue to those plunged in fearful darkness, but also because radiance is a mythological property of deities and monarchs. Psalm 104 is a magnificent celebration of God as king of the vast panorama of creation. It begins by imagining God in the act of putting on royal raiment: "Grandeur and glory You don" (*hod wehadar lavashta*). The psalmist then goes on: "Wrapped in light like a cloak, / stretching out the heavens like a tent-cloth" (verse 2). What makes the familiar figure of light for the divinity so effective is its fusion with the metaphor of clothing. The poet, having represented God donning regalia, envisages Him wrapping Himself in a garment of pure light (the Hebrew verb used here is actually in the active mode, "wrapping"). Then, associatively continuing the metaphor of fabrics, he has God "stretching out the heavens like a tent-cloth," the bright sky above becoming an extension of the radiance that envelopes God. This is a small but vivid instance of the imaginative energy that produces poetry of the highest order in Psalms. The figurative invention is not meant to startle or disorient the reader, who is invited to participate in the mood of exaltation of the psalmist, but it is fresh enough, and tightly enough woven into a texture of related images, that it serves to convey a strong vision of God as king of creation and of the luminous enchantment of the created world. These poems retain their eloquence and liveliness after two and a half millennia or more, for believers and simply for people who love poetry.

IV. THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING *PSALMS*

It is a constant challenge to turn ancient Hebrew poetry into English verse that is reasonably faithful to the original and yet readable as poetry.

Perhaps the most pervasive problem is the intrinsic structural compactness of biblical Hebrew, a feature that the poets constantly exploit musically and otherwise. Biblical Hebrew is what linguists call a synthetic language, as opposed to analytic languages such as English. Pronominal objects of verbs are usually indicated by an accusative suffix attached to the verb. The pronominal subject of verbs is usually indicated by the way the verb is conjugated, without need to introduce the pronoun, unless it is added for emphasis. Thus, "He will guard you" is a single word, *yishmorkha*. Instead of using possessive pronouns, nouns are declined with possessive suffixes. And the verb "to be" has no present tense, instead being merely implied by the juxtaposition of a subject noun and a predicate noun (hence the King James Version constantly italicizes *is* because there is no literal equivalent in the Hebrew text). Thus, "The Lord is my shepherd" is only two words, four syllables, in the Hebrew: YHWH *ro'i*.

There is no way of consistently getting this terrific rhythmic compactness into English, but I am convinced that a more strenuous effort to approximate it is called for than the existing translations have made. The King James Version is often (though not invariably) eloquent, but it ignores the rhythms of the Hebrew almost entirely. The various modern English versions are only occasionally eloquent and sometimes altogether flat-footed and, more often than not, arythmic. Thus, the concluding verset of Psalm 104:1, quoted with a transliteration of the Hebrew in the last paragraph of the preceding section, reads in the King James Version as follows: "thou art clothed with honour and majesty." This is dignified, though "honour" for *hod* is wrong. What is notable is that the 1611 version has seven words for the three in the Hebrew, and no equivalent for the strong alliterative effect of the Hebrew. The New Jewish Publication Society translation, "You are clothed in glory and majesty," is simply a modernization of the King James Version. The Revised English Bible has "clothed in majesty and splendour," which does eliminate two words, "You are," but at the cost of diminishing the active sense of God's putting on the royal raiment. In my translation I render the verb as "You don," the monosyllable allowing a phrase of just two syllables that brings the whole verset close to the Hebrew rhythm: "Grandeur and glory You don."

The question of syntax here and throughout these poems also

deserves a comment. Biblical syntax is more flexible than English syntax, often adjusting the order of terms for emphasis or for other expressive purposes. The object of the verb can precede it, as it does in the verset we are considering, or follow it, as it does repeatedly in the next several lines of Psalm 104. The syntactic fronting of *hod wehadar*, "grandeur and glory," is a way of highlighting these accoutrements of majesty that the God of creation dons. The reversal of normal English word order is, it seems to me, idiomatically viable because traditional English poetry makes abundant use of syntactic inversions; and, given that all biblical poetry incorporates a more archaic stratum of the ancient language than one encounters in the prose, the appropriate English style and diction for representing it should have a slightly antique coloration.

Let me offer as a test case for the issue of rhythm a single line that, in the King James Version, has probably become the most famous set of words from the whole Book of Psalms. The initial line—there are two in the verse—of Psalm 23:4 grandly reads in the 1611 translation: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." This beautiful line has understandably moved readers for four centuries, but it is the stately beauty of a leisurely prose amble, not of a line of poetry (or, if one prefers, the beauty of a proto-Whitmanesque line of poetry rather than of biblical poetry). The Hebrew sounds like this: *gam ki-'elekh begey' tsalmawet / lo'-'iyra' ra'*. If we ignore the Masoretic hyphenation, the Hebrew comes to eight words, eleven syllables. The King James Version weighs in with seventeen words, twenty syllables. My version reads, "Though I walk in the vale of death's shadow, / I fear no harm." When I showed the line in draft to a discriminating friend, he objected that I had flagrantly done it this way simply to be different from the King James Version. I had to explain, and add the explanation to my notes, that I was impelled by the desire to get a better approximation of the Hebrew rhythm—more concise, with the intimation of dachtylic cadence in the first verset, and actually matching the cinched effect of the Hebrew's four stark syllables in the second verset.

This preoccupation with rhythm, which will be self-evidently justified to any serious reader of poetry and probably seem odd to anyone else, is inseparable from the underlying aspiration of this translation. I do not want to make the poetry of Psalms sound like Shakespeare or

Keats or Whitman or Yeats. Milton, one of the great virtuosos of English poetry (and one of the very few who actually read biblical Hebrew), translated a small selection of psalms into rhyming couplets, abab rhymes, *terza rima*, and other intricate patterns. It is an astonishing performance, and less far removed from the literal sense of the Hebrew than one might imagine. But it is nothing like biblical poetry. What I have aimed at in this translation—inevitably, with imperfect success—is to represent Psalms in a kind of English verse that is readable as poetry yet sounds something like the Hebrew—emulating its rhythms wherever feasible, reproducing many of the effects of its expressive poetic syntax, seeking equivalents for the combination of homespun directness and archaizing in the original, hewing to the lexical concreteness of the Hebrew, and making more palpable the force of parallelism that is at the heart of biblical poetry. The translation is also on the whole quite literal—something that the King James Version has probably conditioned English readers to expect—in the conviction that the literal sense has a distinctive poetic force and that it is often possible to preserve it in workable literary English. Where English usage has compelled me to depart from a literal rendering, I have noted the divergence in my commentary.

An observation about the concreteness of language is in order here. Biblical Hebrew uses few abstractions. In most instances a term anchored in physical existence, some metonymy or synecdoche, serves in place of an abstraction. There is no real biblical word for "progeny" or "posterity"; poets and prose writers as well prefer to say "seed," which also means "semen" and, by metonymy, the product of semen. It should also be observed that the Hebrew word for "seed" is two syllables, as against the two polysyllabic Greco-Latinate equivalents just cited. Wherever possible, the translation resists substituting an abstraction for the concrete term in the Hebrew. I have tried to avoid ponderous Latinate terms such as "iniquity" and "transgression," which misrepresent the tone and sound of the Hebrew equivalents if not their denotations; I have preferred instead more everyday terms such as "wrongdoing" and "crime." What is at stake in this preference is not just a matter of phonetics or aesthetics but a world view that informs these poems. We are all accustomed to think of Psalms, justifiably, as a religious book, but its religious character is not the same as that of the Christian and Jewish

traditions that variously evolved over the centuries after the Bible. The psalmists are constantly concerned with the relationship between man and God, or Israel and God, which is more than sufficient to qualify their poetry as religious. But this relationship is often imagined in social, political, and even physical terms rather than in the framework of what Protestant theology calls "salvation history." "Crime" is frequently a more apt English equivalent for the Hebrew *'awen* than "iniquity" because what triggers the indignation of the supplicant is the bribing of judges, defamation, theft, conspiracy to murder, and other violations of the law. Another Hebrew term, *ḥet'*, which repeatedly figures in both older and modern English versions as "sin," is translated here as "offense." I do not mean to say that there is no notion of sin in Psalms, but the fraught theological connotations of the English term are not quite right. Etymologically, *ḥet'* comes from a verb that means "to miss the mark." In the prose narratives, it is the word used in political contexts for the rebellion of a vassal people against its overlord and, in court settings, for when a subject person causes displeasure to his superior. Giving offense to God as king is connotatively different from sinning, with the associations of that English term with spiritual degradation leading to contrition, self-flagellation, and penance.

The two most notable instances of resistance to inappropriately theological language in this translation are the pointed absence in it of "soul" and "salvation." The avoidance of these terms, which many English readers may automatically associate with Psalms, is not the result of contrariness on my part but reflects a commitment to philological fidelity and to the notions of reality manifested in the Hebrew words. *Nefesh*, as I observed above, has a core meaning of "life breath," but the Vulgate generally rendered it as *anima*, and that in turn predisposed the King James translators to represent it as "soul." It covers so many different meanings that it is impossible to translate in all contexts with the same English equivalent, something I attempt to do with all the Hebrew terms that will allow it. The possessive "my *nefesh*" is often chiefly an intensive form of the first-person-singular pronoun and, given the lack of any analogous term in English, is usually rendered here simply as "I." When *nefesh* is the object of a verb such as "to save," the reasonable English translation is "life." Because it is the very breath that quickens a person with life, it sometimes carries the sense of "essential being," and in these

cases it is usually rendered here as "being." I am aware that "my being" is more awkward than "my soul," but "soul" strongly suggests a body-soul split—with implications of an afterlife—that is alien to the Hebrew Bible and to Psalms in particular. (There are indications of a Hades-like underworld, Sheol, a shadowy realm of nonbeing into which the dead descend, but this remains far from the distinct afterworld of later Judaism and Christianity.) As such, "soul" is a word that has to be avoided if we are not to get a misleading idea of what the psalmists are saying.

As previously noted, *nefesh* often occurs in Psalms as an anatomical term for the part of the body between the head and the shoulders. This usage is widely recognized by modern scholars, though in my view it is more frequently applied in Psalms than is generally allowed. Here is an instance where there is scant disagreement: Psalm 69 begins with these words in the King James Version: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul." This image of internal seepage is picturesque if mystifying, but what the Hebrew really says, in a vivid depiction of threatened drowning, is "for the waters have come up to my neck." Most modern versions have seen this, but in Psalm 44:26, where the King James Version has "For our soul [*nafsheinu*] is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth," modern translators opt for a simple "we" instead of "soul," missing the strong physical parallelism with "belly" (a word that in the New Jewish Publication Society translation vanishes into the prim generality of "body"). The present translation renders this line as "For our neck is bowed to the dust, / our belly clings to the ground," in fidelity to the poet's strong concrete image of a person thrust into a prostrate position on the ground from neck to belly.

"Salvation" is the term that the translators in 1611 chose to represent the Hebrew *yeshu'ah*, and it has shown more than a little persistence in the various modern versions. "Salvation" is a heavily fraught theological term, pulling in its tow all sorts of associations of eschatological redemption or radical spiritual transformation and sublime elevation of the individual sinner. In Christianity, it also strongly implies a particular Savior (whose name is derived from this verbal stem); in post-biblical Judaism as well, the Hebrew word *yeshu'ah* comes to designate a global process of messianic redemption. But in Psalms this noun and its cognate verb *hoshi'a* are strictly directed to the here and now. *Hoshi'a* means to get somebody out of a tight fix, to rescue him. When the tight fix involves

the threat of enemies on the battlefield, *yeshu'ah* can mean "victory," and *hoshi'a* "to make victorious"; more commonly, both the noun and the verb indicate "rescue." It will no doubt take getting used to for some readers to feel comfortable with "the God of my rescue" instead of "the God of my salvation," but that is precisely the sort of readjustment of mind-set that this translation aims to effect. The relationship between man and God is as urgent as readers of Psalms in English have always imagined, but it is not enacted in the kind of theological theater that has conventionally been assumed. The psalms of supplication, where rescue is the central issue, are poems emerging from the most pressing sense of personal or collective crisis. The speakers in these poems, however, do not seek some transport to a different spiritual realm, some radical transformation of their inward self. Instead, they implore God to extricate them from terrible straits, confound their enemies, restore them to wholeness and safety. Notions of the heavens opening and flights of angels in glorious raiment bearing redeemed souls on high have their own excitements, but they are not within the purview of these Hebrew poets. This translation is an effort to reground Psalms in the order of reality in which it was conceived, where the spiritual was realized through the physical, and divine purposes were implemented in social, political, and even military realms.

One special issue of translation deserves comment: how to render in English the various Hebrew names of the deity. The proper name for the God of Israel is indicated by the four consonants YHWH, which almost all modern scholars think was pronounced "Yahweh." I have decided not to use "Yahweh" for several reasons. Though this may well have been the original pronunciation, there remains, at least in my stubborn view, a margin of uncertainty about it. Some Jewish readers would be uncomfortable with it because all communities of practicing Jews still observe the prohibition on pronouncing the tetragrammaton. In the late-biblical period, only the High Priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement was allowed to utter the ineffable name. When several centuries later the Hebrew text of the Bible was assigned vowel markings, YHWH was vocalized as though it were *'adonai*, "Master" or "LORD," and was pronounced as *'adonai*. The King James Version in most instances honored this precedent by translating the name as "the LORD," using smaller upper-case font for the last three letters to indicate that there was something anomalous about the word. I have adopted the convention of the King James Version, as I did in my previous Bible translations. English readers of the Bible have been sufficiently conditioned over the past four centuries that "the LORD" is fluent and natural as an element of the poetry, whereas "Yahweh" might run the risk of sounding as though it belonged in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, not in a poem.

The other two most common designations for the deity in Psalms are *'elohim* and *'el*. Both mean "God," and I saw no effective way of distinguishing them in English. In Psalms 42 through 83, where the ancient editors usually substitute—out of motives of piety—*'elohim* for YHWH, I have not tried to restore the text as it was before they edited it, even when the editing produced such anomalies as "God my God." *'Adonai* also appears with some frequency, sometimes perhaps as a pious substitute for YHWH. I translate it as "Master," not wanting to confuse it with "the LORD." God is called "Yah" in quite a few of the psalms. "Yah" is probably a shortened form of Yahweh, as most scholars think, though it might conceivably be an originally independent name assimilated to Yahweh, perhaps through folk etymology. It is the last syllable of the familiar "hallelujah," "praise God." Partly in consideration of that familiarity, I have simply reproduced the name in English. Finally, God in Psalms is occasionally called "Elyon," "the Most High," a name borrowed from the Canaanite pantheon. I have sometimes translated it as "the Most High," and sometimes, defying the hobgoblin of consistency, I have transcribed it as "Elyon," in places where I thought the archaic resonance of the name was important.

There is no perfect solution to the problem of how to refer to the God of ancient Israel in a modern English text. Ultimately, as with other decisions about the translation, I have been guided by what seemed to me to work best in the sound and connotations of the poetry.

V. THE TEXT OF *PSALMS*

WITH all the intrinsic challenges of conveying the poetry of Psalms in English, it would be reassuring if we knew that the Hebrew words passed down to us were dependably what the ancient Hebrew poets wrote. Alas, that is often not the case. It is a nettlesome truth about

scribal transmission that any text copied by scribes from century to century accumulates errors over time. A copyist's eye can easily skip over a letter, a word, even a whole phrase. He may inadvertently duplicate a letter occurring at the end of one word at the beginning of the next word in the text (what is called "dittography"), or, alternately, he may mistakenly drop a letter that actually belongs because he has just copied the same letter in a preceding word (what is called "haplography"). Consonants can get reversed, or even words or phrases. The standard Hebrew text of the Bible, the Masoretic text (from *masoret* or *mesorah*, meaning "tradition") was fixed by a school of Jewish grammarians and editors in Tiberias between the sixth and ninth centuries CE. They also added vowel points and cantillation marks (the latter serving to parse the syntax) to the ancient unpunctuated consonantal text. The evidence suggests that they were scrupulous in the work they did, but a millennium or more had passed since the original composition of most of the texts, and in that period a host of errors had crept in, and they themselves were hardly immune to error in their editorial decisions. The biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as the versions that appear to have been used by the ancient translators of the Bible into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin all show local divergences from the Masoretic text, though it is often not easy to determine which is more authoritative than the others, and any translator, as I can attest from experience, might be tempted to "improve" the text when it is difficult.

Textual errors cluster far more heavily in biblical poetry than in the prose. A straightforward explanation for this difference offers itself. Biblical poetry uses a specialized poetic vocabulary incorporating many words that never occur in prose and in some instances are rare or archaic. When a copyist is confronted with an unfamiliar word or idiom, he runs the risk of scrambling it or substituting a more familiar term. Let us imagine for a moment that the poetry of T. S. Eliot was composed before the invention of the printing press and so was exposed to the vagaries of scribal transmission. What would a poor scribe do when he encountered in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" the following line: "Swelling to maculate giraffe"? Many speakers of English, apart from zoologists and perhaps other scientists, have never seen or heard the word "maculate." Our hypothetical scribe would be doing a perfectly natural thing if he replaced this puzzler, either unconsciously or because

he thought he was correcting an error, with the familiar "immaculate," though by so doing he would have his version say the opposite of what the poet wrote and would entirely lose the image of the giraffe's spots. Moving on to "Gerontion," he would be perplexed by "Spawned in some estimanet of Antwerp" because "estimanet" is a French word (a shabby tavern), and he might be tempted to make sense of it by substituting "estimate," thus reducing the whole line to gibberish. A similar borrowing from French a few lines down in the same poem, "Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds" (the last word from *merde*, here plural without the *e*, used to mean "turds") would produce further incomprehension, and the scribe, a sensible man, might therefore replace it with the blander, if context-appropriate, "mud."

There is abundant evidence that slips or blunders of this sort occurred again and again in the copying of the psalms, rendering some phrases or whole lines or even sequences of lines almost unintelligible. I don't mean to exaggerate. Many psalms, including some of the most famous, such as the first, the twenty-third, and the last psalm in the collection, are beautifully transparent in the original from beginning to end, inspiring considerable confidence that there was no slip between the pen of the poet and the pens of the long line of scribes. But there are also many instances in which the meaning of the text as it stands is quite opaque, with no easy path of reconstruction back to what the poet might have originally written.

Psalms 9 and 10 are a striking illustration of these textual problems. In the Septuagint, these appear as a single psalm. Internal evidence for their unity is the fact that together they form an alphabetic acrostic. Psalm 9 begins with the initial letters of the alphabet in proper order, though it lacks a line beginning with *dalet*, the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The acrostic vanishes in the last two verses of Psalm 9, reappears at the beginning of Psalm 10, only to vanish again, then resurfaces toward the end of the psalm, which has lines beginning respectively with the last four letters of the Hebrew alphabet (verses 12–17), though interspersed with lines that are not part of the acrostic pattern. This scrambling of the acrostic is accompanied by a slide into incoherence in 9:21 and 10:3–6. It is reasonable to infer that something happened here to the text more extensive than a scribal inadvertence. Perhaps a purportedly authoritative manuscript used by the line of

scribes that led to the Masoretic text was damaged—by moisture, fire, or otherwise. With bits missing and the continuity of the acrostic no longer in clear sight, some later editor may not have realized that these two segments of the text were the halves of a single psalm. Moreover, at least in the four verses I have just cited, there may have been missing or illegible elements in the text, and a desperate scribe might have copied the incoherent fragments or, in an effort to make sense of them, created nonsense on the order of "spawned in an estimate of Antwerp."

What is a translator to do with these many places where the text has been corrupted? The standard scholarly resource is to emend the text in an effort to restore it as it originally read. Some scholars have not hesitated to reconstruct clauses or whole lines and sequences of lines, but such extensive emendation usually looks more like an exercise in ingenuity than a reliable means of recovering the original text. This translation is relatively conservative in adopting emendations, and some biblical scholars may look askance at this cautiousness. Small-scale emendations seemed the safest: reversals of consonants, single-letter changes as in evident dittography or haplography or in the confusion of *dalet* and *resh*—letters that look similar in Hebrew script. I was especially encouraged to follow such divergences from the Masoretic text when they were confirmed by one or more of the ancient translations, or by the Qumran texts, or by variant Hebrew manuscripts. Where no plausible modest emendation of an unintelligible word or phrase suggested itself, I have done what most previous translators of the Bible have done, which is to try to make some sense out of the Hebrew words as they stand by an interpretive stretch. Occasionally, when the stretch seemed too extravagant and no viable emendation was available, I have actually reproduced the incoherence of the Hebrew in my translation, duly explaining the difficulties in my commentary. These moments will be a perhaps disconcerting novelty for English readers of Psalms, but they are intended to remind the audience of this translation that there are spots and patches where unfortunately we do not have the text that the poets originally wrote. We must nevertheless be grateful that such problems, though persistent, are not pervasive, and that a large part of these remarkable poems remains eminently readable despite all the textual vicissitudes of many centuries.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

GIVEN the phonetic differences between Hebrew and English, any effort to convey the sound of the Hebrew in the Latin alphabet is bound to be an approximate and rather awkward procedure. The accepted scholarly system of transliteration works well enough for those who actually know the Hebrew letters and are familiar with their equivalences in the system, but its profusion of diacritical marks is likely to be forbidding to general readers, and the system is not an easy guide to pronunciation unless one knows both languages. I have limited myself to three diacritical marks: ' for *aleph*, which was probably a lightly aspirated sound in the biblical period but has become a "silent" letter; ‘ for *ayin*, a consonant pronounced as a strong glottal stop in the biblical period but also no longer articulated by modern speakers; and a dot under an *ḥ* to indicate *ḥet*, a light fricative, something like the *j* in Spanish words. (*Kh* is used for *khaf*, which is a stronger fricative, something like the German *ch* in words such as *noch*.) I do not double the English consonant to reflect a *dagesh* in a Hebrew consonant—for example, *diber* for the word that means "spoke," and not *dibber*—because the so-called doubled Hebrew consonant is basically a grammatical concept and is not audible in anyone's pronunciation today. I use a *v* for the letter *bet* when it lacks the *dagesh*, which is how everyone now pronounces it. To avoid confusion with the *v*, I represent the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet as a *w*. In the biblical period, it would in fact have been pronounced as a *w*, though in modern Hebrew it has become a *v*. The vowel *a* in the transliteration is pronounced *ah*, as the letter *a* would be pronounced in most French words (for example, *pas*). The vowel *i* in the transliteration is a shorter version of the *ee* in "beet," as *i* would be pronounced in most French words (for example, *tique*). I did not want to confuse matters further by introducing indications of accent, but the