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Smith's "Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World" (Book Review)

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How (Not) to Be Secular also employs a variety of structural devices to keep the reader's attention and to aid comprehension. The book is divided into chapters that more or less parallel the much longer sections of *A Secular Age*. It includes a helpful glossary of key terms, which appear in the text in bold typeface. Another of these devices is, in my view, less helpful and even risks thwarting Smith's stated goal of reaching "a wide array of 'practitioners'—by which I mean, simply, those of us living in this cultural moment" (x). I am referring to the asides in which, several times per chapter, Smith seems to appeal directly to a specific set of Protestant readers. One example of such an aside, in a chapter called "The Religious Path to Exclusive Humanism," reads, in part, as follows: "Taylor's earlier criticism of Protestant 'disenchantment' finds a corollary in . . . the loss of the Eucharist as central to the practice of Christian worship. Could we imagine a Protestantism that has room for both Word *and* Table—for that 'faith that comes by hearing' *and* communion with the triune God?" (59). I am not sure whether these interjections have been recommended by the publisher or whether they are the author's own idea. But it sometimes feels like a study guide with a very specific "spin" was dispersed throughout the book by mistake. I should say, though, that there are also places in the main text where one gets the impression that this spin is not a mistake at all. The first sentence of Smith's preface reads, "You're a pastor or a church planter who has moved to Brooklyn or Berkeley or Boulder" (vii). For a book that is ostensibly about "reading Charles Taylor," this is far from an obvious opening line, and it seems to me that some will find the tone of quasi-pastoral guidance off-putting.

That being said, it is understandable that Smith would have this particular audience in mind for the book. The people who are most polemically invested in the subject of secularity today are largely evangelical Protestants, whose cultural history gives them sympathy for critiques of what Taylor calls "exclusive humanism" but who may not know what to do with the fact that, in *A Secular Age*, the Protestant intellectual heritage is connected in multifaceted but clear ways with the rise of the very exclusive humanism they combat. Thus it makes sense that Smith would address this particular audience directly from time to time. Indeed, it seems likely that most of Smith's readers will find these inclusions felicitous rather than jarring, and for that reason one might call them astute. It is fortunate that such comments are mostly separated from the main text, which leaves readers with the option to enjoy or ignore them, as they see fit. However Smith's readers respond in that respect, I think they will agree in the end that *How (Not) to Be Secular* is a valuable contribution to the study of modern secularity and a highly effective illumination of Charles Taylor's innovative genealogical method.

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SMITH, MARK S. *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. xxiv+636 pp. \$55.00 (paper).

Mark Smith's *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* is a tour de force of philological commentary, comparative religion, and historical reconstruction that ultimately focuses its attention on the way warriors and their concerns appear in the Hebrew Bible. After an introduction posing the question of warrior poetry's broad cultural appeal (1–12), Smith devotes part I to "the literary commemoration of warriors and warrior culture" (15–47), in which he lays out a glossary of heroic terminology and literary practice in the Hebrew Bible, highlighting the problem of finding cultural reality within literary rep-

resentations. Part 2 (51–67) explores “three warrior pairs in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Israel” (i.e., Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroklos, and David and Jonathan) and then “gender inversion in the poetry of heroic pairs” (68–95). Part 3 undertakes a detailed study of “human and divine warriors in the Ugaritic texts” (99–208), focusing on the Aqhat and Baal epics as well as the Rephaim texts, and part 4 arrives at “Israelite warrior poetry in the early Iron Age” (211–332), where the focus is on Judges 5 and 2 Sam. 1:19–27. The book is replete with maximal citation to the secondary literature, featuring nearly 250 pages of endnotes (333–576) as well as a detailed set of indexes.

So many of the book’s intriguing features deserve engagement, but space permits only a brief foray into a few topics. There is always at least an implicit question of what one is trying to accomplish in a search for origins or an earliest period, and certainly the attempt to excavate back into the heroic poetry of Israel’s premonarchic era is one such project. Granted, Smith does not use the loaded language of “origins” as such, but the stretch back into the “early biblical world” clearly invokes the idea of Israel’s origins from a history-of-religions perspective as well as the hotly debated linguistic problems of dating biblical Hebrew. Smith correctly points to the following dilemma with regard to any dating schemes for the corpus of the supposed early poetry, and indeed for the dating of any part of the Hebrew Bible, on the basis of language: “all arguments in any direction turn on arguments from silence. This very fact indicates that claims either way are inherently suspect and possible at the same time.” Because of this fact, Smith argues, “the approach taken by either side [in the linguistic dating debate over biblical Hebrew] in their broad outlines is not acceptable” (218). His solution is to interrogate the evidence on the basis of three criteria: (1) *dissimilarity*, that is, “language features attested early but not later” (which raises the question of how we know already which texts are the examples of the “early” and the “later”); (2) *replacement*, that is, do we see later terms replacing a “corresponding earlier term or feature” (again, prompting the question of how we know at the onset what is early and late); and (3) *culture*, that is, looking for features that “combine linguistic and cultural information” (from archaeology, comparative analysis, geography, and so on—potentially allowing escape from the problems of historical circularity based on language; 219).

Smith’s attempt to apply these criteria to analyze Judges 5 is, in my view, the highlight of the book. Through a deft handling of the term *pērāzôn* (“village militia”; Judg. 5:7, 11) Smith argues for an early date for the poem because the very notion of a “village militia” “best fits an Iron I context prior to the sorts of standing armies described for Israelite kings” (226). However, the phrase “described for” in this quoted section reveals a larger problem—who or what is it, exactly, that is doing this “describing”? The clear subject here would be the Bible itself. One may rightly wonder, then, how it is that Smith knows the descriptions of any part of the monarchy in the Bible or its standing armies represent a truly historical memory, on which further conclusions may be made. This is a subtle example of a type of problem that comes up at various points, but Smith attempts to get beyond it—with marked success—by comparison with the more securely dated Ugaritic poetry, archaeology and iconographic analysis, and the linguistic analysis of Hebrew.

Smith contends that the history of the development of Judges 5 into its current form reveals something like two poems in one: the second half of the poem, nearly devoid of references to Yahweh, is the older core, dating to the Iron I period (1200–1000 BCE), while the introduction, the first half, filled with references to Yahweh and Israel, is later, in the tenth century. Thus the primacy of Yahweh and Israel, not present in the earliest heroic tradition, comes to characterize the older material. On analogy with his other work in *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford: Oxford

The Journal of Religion

University Press, 2001), then, Smith sees his vision of the rise of Yahwism in Israel writ small in the old heroic poetry. Put another way, the older heroic poetry follows a pattern of religious development that Smith has already schematized in his previous body of work—just as Second Isaiah’s soaring monotheism came to color or even overwrite Israel’s polytheistic origins as revealed in other texts, so too the northern monarchy of the tenth- or ninth-century Israel (not Judah, notably) took up the older vision of tribal chieftains and fighting stars and transformed it into Yahweh poetry and Israel poetry (265).

All of the hallmarks of Mark Smith’s previous work on the history of Israelite religion are on display in this book, in full force: masterful invocation of the Ugaritic corpus; detailed philology; and a meaningful hypothesis about the historical development of Israel’s literature, deity, and national self-understanding. There is no other book on this topic that can be adequately compared to this one in terms of its scope and depth, and Smith is to be congratulated for providing a weighty contribution to the study of Israel’s heroic past.

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STOKES, CLAUDIA. *The Altar at Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 296 pp. \$59.95 (cloth).

The book jacket for Claudia Stokes’s *The Altar at Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion*—a rich study of the multiple respects in which the heyday of American sentimental literature refracts the theological, liturgical, and moral concerns of nineteenth-century religionists—features an arresting image from the August 1898 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* entitled “The Prayer.” An impeccably coiffed mother in Victorian dress sits in front of a draped and turned-down bed, modeling the hand posture of prayer for her (androgynous) child. The child’s nightgowned form arcs over the mother’s voluminous, skirted lap, hands pressed together in dutiful mimicry, eyes fixated on the mother’s (seemingly) placid visage. For the most part, the tight framing and devotional tone of the picture’s representational content render it of a piece with a rather large archive of similar such nineteenth-century images depicting the motherly pedagogy of domestic interiors, but the most prominent visual rhyme in the image—between the hands and gazes of the mother and child—warrants further scrutiny. The mother’s eyes, slightly downcast and ruminative, do not quite meet those of the child, nor are their hands a perfect match: unlike her child’s, the mother’s middle fingers bend more fully toward one another, out of sync with the rest of her digits, perhaps suggesting calculation.

I belabor the dust jacket, of all things, because I regard it as a fitting metonymy for the argument that animates the enclosed text. The faint suggestion of calculation in the mother’s hands and face captures and signals the ways Stokes’s authors balance the renown and moral authority that accrues to their literary efforts against the prevailing norms of female agency and authority—this in an effort to outmaneuver an “unseemly eminence” (8). Charting a critical path between prior scholars’ characterization of sentimental literature as, on the one hand, a thoroughgoing usurpation of the seat of power in this republic of letters and, on the other, a demure, albeit pleasing, capitulation to the protocols of feminine respectability in the nineteenth century, Stokes thoroughly substantiates the claim that women writers espoused tendentious positions in hotly contested theological debates (about ecclesial authority, ecumenism, and the proper employment of conversion and the role of affect therein)