

FROM THE EDITOR ON FOOTNOTES

With this issue we introduce the use of genuine footnotes in *Hebrew Studies*.¹

¹ I take this opportunity to inveigh against endnotes and to praise footnotes.

Endnotes, particularly in books, are a nuisance. Endnotes are usually (I would imagine) imposed on authors by publishers who claim that (1) endnotes are cheaper than footnotes, and (2) they do not clutter up the page with pedantic trivia.

If excuse #1 is true, it shouldn't be. Nowadays even primitive wordprocessing packages include footnoting. Why should typesetting programs be unable to count to the end of the page and reserve space for footnotes? Most, in fact, can.

Excuse #2 is invalid. The need to search out an endnote burdens reading far more than the presence of footnotes ready at hand. This search includes at least some elements of the following process, exemplified with the aid of Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*.¹

Having reached p. 378, we may want to know about the relation between technology and repetition, and n. 14 promises to tell us something about that. So we go looking for n. 14 somewhere in the back of the book. Upon arriving in that region, however, we realize that we must first know the chapter number, so we turn back to p. 378, then start paging forward until, on p. 365, we learn (unless we have gone too far forward and must backtrack) that we are in chapter 11. Returning to the end of the book, we flip backward and forward until we find the beginning of the notes to that chapter (on p. 533), then page forward until we find n. 14. At last we can read n. 14 (what was it about anyway?), unless the book shut itself as we reached for a pen. Recovering both pages, we reach around with the hand we don't write with, grasp p. 378 with an index finger while keeping the book open to p. 534 with the right wrist, and then take notes, if we remember what we intended to write. Now it is time to return to p. 365. If we are wise, we leave a marker in p. 534, which helps us until it slips out shortly thereafter. If we haven't lost our place (p. 365), we have probably lost track of what we were reading about.² What is worse, we must often go through this exercise to find nothing of value in the endnote.

The tediousness of the above description replicates the tedium of searching out endnotes. There are, to be sure, ways of organizing endnotes that will reduce these difficulties (for example, providing every page of endnotes with a header indicating what pages these notes refer back to), but if you care about reducing difficulties, why not use footnotes? With footnotes we need merely glance at the bottom of the page to decide if the note is of interest, and

if it is, it is right there to read in a moment or is easily found if we wish to return to it later.

Footnotes are not merely useful, they are intrinsically significant. Their presence signifies the dialectic of past and present that is the process of scholarship. While the body of the text presents the author's line of thought, the footnotes anchor the thought in the earlier scholarship from which it proceeded. In the footnotes, the author may state indebtedness to earlier scholars,³ take issue with them, deal with side issues,⁴ suggest ideas slightly off the main track of the argument, or indulge in a bit of speculation.⁵ Endnoting pushes all this out of sight.

Endnotes trail behind everything else. They make the author declare: See, I've done my homework folks; now let's push all that trivia to the rear where it won't bother us.⁶ Footnotes, on the other hand, go *along with* text. Their location says that the author takes them seriously, that the author's own work is accompanied by that of the past—rests upon it, uses it, argues with it, and finally goes beyond it.

Good footnoting can even be a literary art form. In a fascinating defense of footnotes, G. W. Bowersock⁷ reminds us that:

a text is a continuous thing—everything in it has a context; but the footnote is more or less free... It is like a variation on a theme. The composer offers a new perspective on what he or someone else has already expressed. (55)

Bowersock tells how Edward Gibbon⁸ used footnotes as "a work of art and an instrument of power"—explaining or elaborating unfamiliar matter, demolishing incompetents, and bringing his history of the Empire into relation with the cultural and political life of his own time.⁹

Looking for examples of fine footnoting in my own field, I think first of all of H. H. Rowley, whose works are valued at least as much for the long footnotes as for the text proper.¹⁰ Sharp remarks and insights can, not surprisingly, be found in the work of one of the great rhetoricians of Bible scholarship, Julius Wellhausen; for example, on p. 111 of the *Prolegomena*.¹¹

"If Lev. xvi belongs to the original of the Priestly Code, and the entire Pentateuch was published by Ezra in the year 444, and yet the day was not then celebrated, then it has *ipso facto* been conceded that it is possible that there can be laws which are not yet carried into effect." So writes Dillman in his introduction to Lev. xvi (1880, p. 525); every one will grant him that the law, before it could attain public currency, must have been previously written and promulgated.¹²

Another note that caught my fancy concludes:

This point was first observed by Vatke (p. 344 seq.), then by Kuenen (*Theol. Tijdschr.*, iii, p. 463-509), and lastly by me (*Text der B. Sam.*, p. 48-51).

I am more accustomed to seeing notes that so much as say: "I thought of it first"; or: "this theory was actually available *in potentia* in a footnote I wrote fifteen years ago."¹³

I myself may not have written the cleverest footnotes,¹⁴ but I think I have herewith written the longest one.

-MVF

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- ¹ Indiana Literary Biblical Series, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- ² Bowersock observes that "there is no audience out there for footnotes without a text, which is really what endnotes are" ("The art of the footnote," *The American Scholar*, 1983/84, p. 55, q.v. for many additional insights).
- ³ This should not be overdone. Masses of references bewilder the reader. A reader appreciates guidance from an author who selects from a large bibliography a few works that not only "can be consulted for further information" but that *should* be.
- ⁴ In fact, I consider it quite suitable to dispose of mere references by use of the "sociological form" of reference (author date:page) in the body of the text, leaving the details for the bibliography.
All that is immediately important in a reference is who said it and (less important) when it was said. (*Anything*, by the way, is better than "op. cit.'s" and "loc. cit.'s" that send us searching through footnotes at an indefinite distance forward to find where the work was last mentioned.)
In bibliographies, incidentally, one should eschew the practice of citing an author by last name + initials. The style sheet of a coterie of journals in Bible studies requires initials instead of first names, then, perversely, insists on having the publisher included in book references, thus displaying the wrong priorities. What does one do with a reference to "Schmidt, J." This system is particularly awkward to use with computerized catalogs, some of which will not search by initials.
- ⁵ Thereby suggesting that this is not what he's been doing in the body of the text.
We should also note Bowersock's dictum that "Lunacy in small print is lunacy nonetheless, and it is particularly reprehensible when it is not even amusing" (op. cit., 61).
- ⁶ Of course this statement may be imposed on the author by the publisher.
- ⁷ See above, n. 2.
- ⁸ *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London, 1776. It is ironic that the first edition used endnotes. (Annoying facts like this are best relegated to endnotes.)
- ⁹ The latter course is best not imitated, especially by Bible scholars whose homiletic tendencies lurk just below the surface anyway.
- ¹⁰ It is an exaggeration, however, to say that his main text is entirely pedestrian. His own ideas and particularly his evaluations of others' are well thought out and often enlightening, perhaps because they are so well and clearly rooted in earlier scholarship.
- ¹¹ Some works don't really require referencing.
- ¹² Note that Wellhausen reserves his best barbs, whether in the text or in the footnotes, for other scholars of stature. There is no point in raking up all the naive, sloppy, or pietistic tracts that litter the landscape of Jewish studies just to show how quickly you can rebury them.
- ¹³ As a matter of fact, many of the insights and clever observations in Bowersock 1983/84 I thought of already in 1982/83.
- ¹⁴ But see Fox, loc. cit.