

# Reading in Dangerous Places

*We are the roses in the garden,  
beauty with thorns among our leaves.  
To pick a rose you ask your hands to bleed.  
What is the reason for having roses,  
when your blood is shed carelessly?  
It must be for something more than vanity.*

—10,000 Maniacs<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

For a previous book, I read a selection of biblical texts in order to discover what they communicate about violence.<sup>2</sup> Following that detailed analysis of limited texts, I now wish to step back and take a more panoramic view of issues of danger and death in the Bible. In this study, I intend to read whole biblical books and ask questions about death and the threat of death in these books. The approach to the biblical text will necessarily be different. Concise discussions of whole books cannot rely on close readings. Instead, I wish to use the concept of “narrative worlds”<sup>3</sup> to explore whole books. The past three or four decades have witnessed an explosion of attention to biblical narrative. With varying success, numerous critics and theoreticians have attempted to describe how biblical narrative, and narrative in general, operates. This exertion of effort is in part a backlash against the historical tendencies of the previous two centuries, which tended to devalue the stories found in the biblical text in favor of analysis of the events and transmission processes that lay behind them.

This book begins with a discussion of the nature of biblical narrative, but I hope it will not be one that ultimately removes, or even obscures, a sense of mystery about how stories operate. The narrative books of the Bible create worlds of their own. I invite the reader to enter these worlds with me to observe how violence operates within them.

How and why do we read the Bible differently than we read other books? Gabriel Josipovici made an enlightening attempt to answer this question.<sup>4</sup> Many may be uncomfortable with his analysis because he demonstrated the inadequacy of the most common kinds of answers, those emphasizing the sacred content of the Bible. Josipovici came closest to the heart of the matter in his assertion that only in reading the Bible is “our childhood way with books...prolonged into adulthood.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many people begin “reading” the Bible long before they learn to read by listening to Bible stories in their church, synagogue, or home. Some continue reading the Bible fervently until the end of their lives. No other book is treated this way by a significant number of people. Only certain parts of the Bible receive this kind of usage, however. Nobody reads Leviticus or the Epistle to the Hebrews to four-year-olds. The parts that are read in this way for a lifetime are stories.

Such use of the Bible, however, presents special problems in regard to the subjects of violence and death. The Bible stories we read to children, like those we listened to as children ourselves, are edited.<sup>6</sup> Two favorite stories illustrate this practice most clearly. In 1 Kings 18:16-40, the Hebrew prophet Elijah engages in a contest against hundreds of prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The humble Elijah wins the contest by praying successfully for YHWH to send fire from heaven to consume a sacrificial offering that he soaked with water. For children, the story almost always ends with v. 39, when all the people in the audience fall down and worship YHWH. It can be a shock for adolescents or adults who come to this story later in life and, reading all the way through v. 40, discover that the people, under the leadership of Elijah, brutally murder the 450 prophets of Baal.<sup>7</sup> Something similar takes place in the popular usage of the story of Daniel in the lions’ den from Daniel 6:1-24. In the story, royal officials observe Daniel as he prays in violation of a specific decree. He is sentenced to death in the den of lions but is protected by God. The king and his officials find Daniel alive and well in the lions’ den the morning after they throw him in, and here the story often ends. In many situations where the story is read, v. 24 is omitted. In this verse, Daniel’s accusers and their wives and children are fed to the lions. Daniel does not participate explicitly in this act, but neither does he raise any objection. In the case of both of these stories, the narrative world created by the text is radically altered, from violent to peaceful, by the reader’s choice to omit a single verse. It is understandable that we want to omit these portions of the story. The Bible is not supposed to be like that. At some point, however, a childish reading must give way to a mature one. Omissions like the two illustrated above are among the tendencies I hope to overcome by reading whole books of the Bible

and exploring the narrative worlds they create, without editing disquieting passages.

Josipovici carried his understanding of reading further when he expressed the ability of literature to “draw me out of myself.” This ability of a text is destroyed “if I only accept as belonging to it what I have already decreed should be there.”<sup>8</sup> What the text draws the reader into may be called a “narrative world.” This concept is difficult to define, particularly in its relationship to the reader’s own world. Nevertheless, my use of this approach demands a preliminary discussion of theoretical and methodological issues.

## UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE WORLDS

Modern attention to biblical narrative and how it operates can be traced to the foundational work of three individuals: Erich Auerbach, Hans Frei, and Paul Ricoeur. In 1953, Auerbach published his highly influential work titled *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Though not a biblical scholar, Auerbach opened his study of general narrative theory with a comparison of biblical narrative to other ancient narratives. His primary illustrations are the story of Odysseus’s return home in book 19 of the *Odyssey* and the *Akedah* story in Genesis 22.<sup>9</sup> One intriguing feature of Auerbach’s work is that it seems to provide fuel for all sides in modern debates about the function of narrative.

The most prominent feature of the current debate over biblical narrative focuses on the problematic use of the term “realistic” to describe it. The term has been brought to the center of the debate by the influential work of a second writer, Hans Frei. Frei defined “realistic narrative” as “that kind in which subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other.”<sup>10</sup> Frei argued further that because of these qualities, realistic narrative is much like history. Therefore, he also labeled biblical narrative “history-like.” Frei’s conclusions, despite the problems I will discuss below, have provided a great service for the field of biblical interpretation. He has been at the forefront of bringing narrative, or stories, back to the center of attention. Most importantly, he has reminded us that a story and its meaning are inseparable. Biblical stories do not illustrate meanings that can be extracted and stated as principles.<sup>11</sup> The way to their meanings is to enter the stories and hope to emerge transformed. Frei cited Auerbach in support of his argument that the biblical world is not just *a* real world but *the* real world.<sup>12</sup> Frei went on to argue that the neglect of realism, as the Enlightenment moved on to modernity, led to a separation between biblical stories and the real world of history. Thus, in Frei’s words, the narrative was “eclipsed.” Rather than fitting their life experiences into the real

world of biblical narrative, readers began to try to fit the Bible into their perceived reality.<sup>13</sup> Frei's position has received support from George Lindbeck, who argued that "no world is more real than the one [the biblical stories] create."<sup>14</sup> Consequently the task of theology is to "redescribe reality within the scriptural framework rather than translate scripture into extrascriptural categories."<sup>15</sup>

The shortcomings of Frei's understanding of narrative are best illustrated by examining the narrative theory of Paul Ricoeur. Extensive attempts to compare and contrast Frei and Ricoeur have been made by others,<sup>16</sup> so only a brief summary is called for here. Among other differences, Ricoeur's theory of narrative places greater emphasis on the role of the reader. While Frei's insistence on the realistic nature of biblical narrative led him to stress the autonomy of the text,<sup>17</sup> Ricoeur has argued for the importance of the reader's contribution to the determination of the meaning of biblical language.<sup>18</sup> Mark Ellingsen, a strong critic of Ricoeur, has correctly understood that "correlation" is vital to the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and others who take a similar view.<sup>19</sup> Correlation may be understood most simply as the need for some experience of correspondence between the world of the reader and the narrative world of the text in order for a narrative to have significant meaning. Ricoeur illustrates this mode of reading in his recent collaborative effort with André Lacocque. Ricoeur even goes so far as to suggest that the narrator of Genesis 2–3 assumed a correlation of experience between the reader's world and the world of the text. Readers of the Edenic creation story, following the narrator, seek "to return to an origin starting from experiences belonging to their own sphere of observation."

Ellingsen has insisted, more strongly than most others, that Ricoeur's approach is inappropriate because it requires correlation between the experience of the reader and the biblical story. Drawing on Auerbach, Ellingsen has defined the task of narrative preaching as one of helping the hearer into the realistic world of biblical narrative.<sup>20</sup> Ellingsen was incorrect, however, in supposing that meaningful reading of narrative can take place without correlation.<sup>21</sup> Somehow, the world of the text must fit together with the world of the reader. The text cannot remain completely autonomous and self-referential once the act of reading has begun. Lewis Mudge observed the problem in his statement that "It is hard for us to see scriptural language, full as it is of figure, metaphor, vision, and myth, as having to do with reality."<sup>22</sup> Mudge has aptly labeled Ricoeur's approach "anti-Cartesian."<sup>23</sup> Our pure, objective, and unaccompanied minds do not enter biblical narrative worlds.<sup>24</sup> Simplistic notions about readers inhabiting biblical narrative worlds and experiencing them as the real world do not stand up to close scrutiny. Amos N. Wilder stated that "the ancient rehearsals may be recognized

in some sort as the archetypal molds of our own histories and fabulations.”<sup>25</sup> In plain terms, when modern readers travel through biblical narrative worlds, they carry a great deal of baggage.

The world of metaphor and symbol has been the focus of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Through metaphor and symbol, narrative opens up a pathway to understanding. It is one thing to say that this newly opened world is “real” and quite another to say that it is “realistic.” The former description may be used of a narrative’s ability to draw people in so that they may experience something of the story. The narrative world is real at that moment, in the sense that the reader is capable of entering the story.<sup>26</sup> But, as Walter Brueggemann has observed, the biblical texts’ ability to generate a world is at least partly dependent upon a lack of the “checks and restraints” of reality.<sup>27</sup> Reading is an interaction between the text and the reader’s experience and choices.

There are important issues at stake in this debate. Perhaps the most important is the Bible’s ability to transform readers and the world in which they live. For those who follow Frei, it is vital that the Bible be able to stand apart from human culture, in critique and judgment.<sup>28</sup> The supposed autonomous nature of biblical narrative, which means that the text does not rely on the reader or the reader’s culture and experience to determine its meaning, would seem to guarantee the Bible’s supra-critical position. This notion of how narrative operates, however, relies on a highly idealistic understanding of the reader and the reading process. Many critics of Frei have noted this problem. Francis Watson, for example, has contended that “it is one thing to identify the role these texts outline for their implied reader, quite another to show how a real reader might be able to fill that role.”<sup>29</sup> This gives rise to the key question of whether complete textual autonomy is the only situation that allows for reader transformation. Might readers’ experiences of their worlds interact with the world of the text within the reading process in a way that transforms both the text and the reader?<sup>30</sup>

The preceding question, offered from a narrative perspective, blends into developments from the fairly recent application of reading theory to the study of the Bible. Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco have most successfully analyzed the role of the reader. Iser identified the problem of a supposed “ideal reader.” Such a reader would have to have what he calls an “identical code” as the author of a text.<sup>31</sup> In Gadamer’s terms, the author and reader would have to share the same horizon from the beginning. Of course, this is impossible for modern readers of the biblical text. Iser placed limits on the reader’s role, however, by asserting that “competent” reading narrows the possible meanings of a text.<sup>32</sup> If the text is not autonomous, then neither is the reader. Eco labeled opposing views of textuality

as “opened” and “closed.” The latter roughly corresponds to the notion of autonomy. Eco rigorously questioned this understanding of texts, at the same time emphasizing the role of the text in defining a “competent” reader. In the end, the need for the reader to perform a large set of tasks that Eco has outlined causes all texts to remain open.<sup>33</sup>

A profound illustration of the effect readers’ choices have on their experiences of biblical narratives can be observed in the African debate about the meaning of the Cain and Abel story in Genesis 4. The character with whom the reader chooses to identify, Abel (murdered herdsman) or Cain (dispossessed farmer who responds with violence), determines how the narrative world is experienced.<sup>34</sup> Allen Boesak’s reading represents the traditional understanding of Cain as the powerful villain and Abel as the innocent victim.<sup>35</sup> In opposition to Boesak and the traditional reading, Itumaleng Mosala took the side of Cain, who represents the dispossessed farmer. Stories such as Genesis 4 that characterize the dispossessed as murderous savages function as propaganda to justify the taking of their land by an elitist group that poses as morally superior.<sup>36</sup> To illustrate the problem in a different context, we might pose the question, how can the story of the battle of Jericho in Joshua 6 operate autonomously when read by a modern Palestinian Christian, for whom this text is supposed to be the inspired word of God?

## VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN THE BIBLE

Mention of the Cain and Abel story brings us to the issue of violence and death in the Bible. My earlier work focused specifically on violence. Though I wish to expand that horizon to examine death and danger in the Bible, violence cannot be separated from the biblical understanding of death. This subject of violence has received rapidly growing attention over the past two decades. The impetus can probably be attributed to the work of literary critic René Girard, who has often applied his general literary and anthropological theories to biblical texts.<sup>37</sup> Studies of violence in the Bible have continued and multiplied in the work of Walter Wink, Robert Hamerton-Kelley, James G. Williams, Mieke Bal, Regina M. Schwartz, and many others. What explains the sudden prominence of this issue? The texts have been there all along. Something has changed in the collective manner of reading. Surely this has something to do with the increasing awareness of violence and changing attitudes toward violent death in our world. Late-twentieth-century culture has produced readers who approach the Bible with a new set of questions, who find a stunning correspondence between their dangerous world and the dangerous worlds of the Bible. Those who enter the

Bible with an awakened sensitivity find that it is filled with violence and death from beginning to end. The book of Genesis establishes a pattern of violence, death, and the threat of death that continues straight through to the book of Revelation.

My earlier work, *The Blood of Abel*, concluded that violence is a central issue about which the Bible is concerned, and it pointed to three key conclusions about biblical violence. The ideas themselves may not be as surprising as the indications that the biblical narrators are so keenly and consistently aware of them. First, violence alters human identity. Both victim and perpetrator are changed by acts of violence. The Bible's protagonist, Israel,<sup>38</sup> experiences a series of changes in identity through the course of the biblical story. These changes in identity are brought about by acts of violence committed against, by, and for Israel. Second, violence is an inevitable and ultimately uncontrollable element of human existence. Any attempt to harness violence for carefully controlled use eventually fails. Even visions of peace and order, so common in the visions of Israel's prophets, are consistently predicated by violent preparation. Third, God's involvement in violent events is typically indirect and ambiguous. Biblical narrators go to great lengths to keep God's hands from getting bloody. The destroyer in Exodus 12:23, the ark of the covenant in Joshua 6, and the confusing syntax of 2 Chronicles 36 all serve to keep God at a distance from bloodshed.<sup>39</sup>

At least the first two of these conclusions fit well with Girard's theory of violence, and the third is not inconsistent with it. Girard's theory, therefore, will continue to play a role in this study of danger and death in the Bible.<sup>40</sup> He began with the observation that both in the real world and in the worlds of literature, human relations are thoroughly infected with mimetic desire. This desire to have what the other has and to be like the other brings about rivalry and conflict. Left unchecked, such conflict threatens to disrupt or even destroy the entire human community. Therefore, some mechanism to control this process is necessary if human civilization is to be ordered. Individuals and groups resolve their conflicts by choosing a surrogate victim. By joining together against this victim, they temporarily overcome the threat of uncontrolled violence. This mechanism of victimization becomes institutionalized because the effect is temporary and must continuously be renewed. What Girard has described is a rather delicate mechanism, so it is not surprising that it frequently breaks down. The result of these failures is the overflowing of violence, perhaps in intensified form, after being pent up for a time. This is illustrated in 1 Kings 12:18 where Israel and Judah avert war for a moment by tacitly agreeing on Adoram as a unanimous victim, sealing their peaceful division. The ensuing relationship between the two nations,

however, is characterized by warfare (1 Kings 15:6). The surrogate victim mechanism ultimately fails.

Regina M. Schwartz raised the discussion of biblical violence to a higher pitch with her work, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. The foundation of her poignant analysis is the Bible's preoccupation with the "myth of scarcity."<sup>41</sup> Life is a zero-sum game, according to the majority voice in the Bible. Therefore, violence is typically the result of struggles for identity and status. Such a conclusion sounds like the precise converse of my assertion above that violence alters human identity, but this is probably a chicken-and-egg argument. More important is the question of how the Bible functions in relation to human violence. Does the Bible promote violence by asserting the myth of scarcity? Schwartz has called for a reforming of the canon that replaces the biblical focus on scarcity with an emphasis on plenitude and generosity. Apart from the problem that the relevant canons (Hebrew, Catholic, Protestant, etc.) are far too entrenched to be changed, I have to ask whether Schwartz's new canon would do anybody any good. She arrived at her conclusions, with which I largely agree, by an astute reading of the Bible as it is, combined with careful observation of the world. That other people have read the Bible and used it to condone and promote violence is undeniable, but were they reading the wrong Bible or reading the Bible wrongly? I believe the latter is truer than the former and that if the same people were handed this new Bible, they would read it wrongly too. Hamerton-Kelly addresses this question with great insight in his debate with Pieter Tijmes concerning Girard's reading of the New Testament. In Hamerton-Kelly's words, "It does not seem important to settle the question whether Girard discovered the sacrificial [or surrogate victim] mechanism in the Bible or whether he merely found it disclosed there with exceptional clarity. We all come to the text with preunderstanding."<sup>42</sup>

The discussion of narrative hermeneutics with which this chapter began and this discussion of the implications of canon may both come down to a fairly simple question of the Bible's purpose. Is the Bible's primary purpose to give us the right answers to all of life's questions? If so, then we are discovering that it does a rather poor job. Instead, might we accept that the Bible's primary purpose is to lead us to ask the right questions and to live in this world with those questions burning in our hearts? Increasing sensitivity to issues of violence in the Bible is an indication that Bible reading changes in response to the changing world of the reader. For centuries, the Bible was typically used to justify the practice of slavery and promote the cause of war. The latter use has not entirely disappeared, but the past two centuries have witnessed a significant shift in the

way the Bible is read in relation to issues like war and slavery. The same Bible is being read, so this change must come from readers' changing perceptions of their world and how they bring their world into contact with the world of the Bible. In addition, such shifts may be attributed to the increasing access to the Bible enjoyed by people living on the margins of society. Perhaps the most important new directions in biblical hermeneutics today are the result of the increasing influence of interpretive voices from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.<sup>43</sup> The lives of real readers apparently have a tremendous impact on how they read the Bible.

My earlier book, *The Blood of Abel*, presented a picture of violence in the Bible as it emerges when selected texts are read closely, giving careful attention to details of language and structure. The question posed in this study is what picture emerges when the reader backs away and experiences the world created by an entire biblical book, without focusing too closely on how such narrative worlds are created. How do stories of death and the threat of death in the Bible affect modern readers? How do readers' experiences of violence, danger, and death in their own "real" worlds interact with their perceptions of the world in the text?

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The remaining issue is the choosing of biblical texts on which to focus. These choices will be somewhat arbitrary and will be questioned by some readers, but they must be made. The biblical books selected should consist primarily of narrative. Beginning with the book of Genesis is an obvious necessity. It sets the tone for the rest of the Bible, both in terms of establishing a narrative pattern and portraying human violence. The next selection is more difficult. I will move on to the book of Judges, primarily because it portrays a significantly different world from Genesis. This is a world in which Israel is settled into the land but beset by dangerous neighbors. Israel is also a danger to its neighbors and to itself in the chaotic world of Judges. The books of Samuel portray another different world, one in which Israel is busy establishing itself as a nation working out its monarchical institutions and its ways of relating to other nations. The grand, sweeping story of the Israelite monarchy stands in contrast to the colloquial world of Ezra-Nehemiah. Death and danger in Ezra-Nehemiah are less overt, and the narrative is of a different character, particularly because of the halting pattern caused by the narrator's insertion of written documents. In the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts clearly fit the narrative pattern established in the Hebrew Bible. Acts is an obvious choice because it tells the story of the church in the Mediterranean world. The remaining question is which of the Gospels to choose. I have chosen the Gospel of Matthew because it establishes patterns at the beginning of the

New Testament, much as Genesis does at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible. Matthew invites the reader into the world inhabited by Jesus. In addition, its position and a number of literary elements provide the clearest sense of continuity with the story of Israel.

Each chapter will begin with a discussion of the narrative shape of a particular biblical book. We are not the first travelers in these narrative worlds, and much work has been done to find a way through them and to produce useful maps. I will attempt to trace the path of past attempts to describe an overall narrative structure for each book, and move toward my personal perception of the narrative shape that will provide the map for my reading to follow. Each chapter will then provide a trip through the book, which follows the contours observed in the discussion of narrative shape, paying careful attention to issues of life and death. The end of each chapter will present observations and conclusions about how human experience in the modern world might connect with experiences of life and death in the given biblical world.

Thus, we will examine the worlds created by six different biblical books that form part of a continuous story beginning with the misty portrait of the creation and ending with Paul's arrival in Rome. Hopefully, the observations about danger and death in these worlds will apply in many ways to the Bible as a whole.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From the song "Eden" on the 10,000 Maniacs album *Our Time in Eden* (Electra/Asylum, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violent Plot of the Hebrew Bible* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> It is not easy to establish who first used this term. It certainly represents an ancient idea. The modern understanding owes much to the work of Erich Auerbach, Paul Ricoeur, and Amos N. Wilder. I will discuss the work of each of these critics in more detail below.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 1-28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Kirsch, an American journalist, tells the story of deciding to read the bible to his five-year-old son. Upon reaching the story of the drunken and naked Noah in Genesis 9, he discovered that he needed to do careful editing and paraphrasing to make many of the stories suitable for his young audience. See *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible* (New York: Ballantine, 1997), 2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Some adults who do not read freely on their own continue to avoid the full ending because lectionaries and devotional reading guides sometimes leave off the final verse of the story.

<sup>8</sup> Josipovici, *The Book of God*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 7-23.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 13. Frei acknowledged the influence of the work of Erich Auerbach on his own understanding of narrative. Most significant is Auerbach's discussion of the *Akedah* story of Genesis 22 in *Mimesis*.

<sup>11</sup> *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 280.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-8.

<sup>14</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 117.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>16</sup> The most balanced and informative of such analyses has come in a pair of related articles by Gary Comstock. See "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 117-40 and "Two Types of Narrative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 687-717. In the end, Comstock gives much credit to Frei but positions himself closer to Ricoeur. A somewhat polemical attempt to analyze Frei and Ricoeur has been made by Mark Ellingsen, who follows Frei closely and rejects Ricoeur's views entirely. See *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), xiii-xvii.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 77-82.

<sup>19</sup> Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-52

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-52. Here, in a sample of Ellingsen's own narrative interpretation, he relies on correlation. Comstock has also noted a "tacit" need for correlation in the interpretations of Frei. See "Truth or Meaning," 124-27.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> Note that this idea is close to Hans George Gadamer's influential description of a "fusion of horizons" as a model for the hermeneutical process. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 269-78. Dan R. Stiver has provided an excellent illustration of the advantages of Gadamer's "fusion" model over Frei's concept of "absorption" in *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 50-55.

<sup>25</sup> Wilder, "The World Story: Biblical Version," in *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths: Essays on Imagination in the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 52. Note also that Wilder's description of biblical narrative raises problems with notions of realism: "The human actions [in the Bible] burst the wonted course of affairs and explode, as it were, into the hyperbolic. They go over the limits of human scale, in heroism or immolation, in ecstasy or horror" (58).

<sup>26</sup> On this capacity of biblical narrative, see Robert Paul Roth, *The Theater of God: Story in Christian Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 10; Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 351; and Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Advocacy, Dispute* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 57-58. Here Brueggemann draws on Ricoeur's understanding of a "world in the text."

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*, 27; or George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 117-18.

<sup>29</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 36-37. In addition, the self-referential view relies on an unclear notion of how narratives are related to history. This problem has been described by a number of critics. See Watson, *Text and Truth*, 39, and Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 194-95. According to David Lee, Frei may have been moving late in his life toward a second stage that emphasizes a consensus reading of the Christian community through history as the "literal sense" of Scripture. See David Lee, *Luke's Stories of Jesus: Theological Reading of the Gospel Narrative and the Legacy of Hans Frei* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 77-96. But this equation of literal sense with community consensus leaves the role of the present reader's experience still inadequately addressed.

<sup>30</sup> For a highly developed hermeneutic that may point in this direction, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 8-29.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>33</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 3-23.

<sup>34</sup> For a more complete discussion of the competing understandings of Genesis 4 in Africa, see McEntire, "Cain and Abel in Africa: Using Competing Hermeneutics as a Pedagogical Method with Ethiopian Students," in *the Bible in Africa*, ed. Gerald West (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 248-59.

<sup>35</sup> See Alan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 137-40.

<sup>36</sup> See Itumaleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 33-37.

<sup>37</sup> Girard's first extended application of his theory of violence to biblical texts came with the publication of *La Violence et la sacré* in 1972. This work was published in English as *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

<sup>38</sup> Not all readers will agree that Israel is the protagonist of the Bible. To some extent this is the choice of the reader or critic. A primary premise of Jack Miles's masterpiece, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996; see pp. 9-24), is that God is the protagonist of the Bible. Of course, if Israel is protagonist, then God is the antagonist, and vice versa, so this may simply be a question of point of view.

<sup>39</sup> McEntire, *The Blood of Abel*, 115-26.

<sup>40</sup> This theory is developed thoroughly in *Violence and the Sacred*. It is worked out in even greater detail, particularly in reference to the Bible, in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). For a fairly concise and helpful summary of Girard's work, see Robert Hamerton-Kelley, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 13-59.

<sup>41</sup> See Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), xi.

<sup>42</sup> Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, 196.

<sup>43</sup> For a powerful statement of the impact of such voices, see Justo L. Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 57-58.