

LITERARY STRATEGIES AND AUTHORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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While seventeenth-century Englishman John Dryden was taking stock of his literary heritage, he was awed by the many vivid characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: "There is such a variety of game springing upon before me that I am distracted in my choice and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, here is God's plenty."¹ So too with the book of Daniel, displaying presumptuous monarchs, crafty soothsayers, a worldly-wise queen, and zealous Hebrews—in addition to the supernaturally wise Daniel himself. Moreover, as with Chaucer studies, scholarship on the book of Daniel has developed with relatively little biographical data, necessitating a modified new-critical approach that focuses upon the book itself in relation to and generally in deference to genre studies, linguistic analysis, and redaction and canon criticism. The results have extended Porphyry's argument that the book was written during the Maccabean period, not during the Babylonian exile—and thus non-Danielic authorship and a fictional plot.²

These methodologies do function together quite well, and any particular one serves as an effective entree for supporting the Maccabean theory. The argument beginning with genre criticism, for example, proceeds along the following lines. Because Daniel 7–12 resembles apocalypse, a form that came into its own during the second century BC, surely these latter chapters were written no earlier and the author could not have been the sixth-century Daniel, if he even existed. In turn the "abomination of desolation" would refer to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, not to either a previous or a future such event. Further, a late date of composition excludes any possibility of eyewitness accounts of the neo-Babylonian court, so the "court tales" (chaps. 1–6), and perhaps the visions too, are not histories but fictional stories written by highly imaginative, pseudonymous editors. No wonder the Daniel text shows impressive literary depth: allusions to or borrowings from the Babylonian creation epic, the Joseph narrative in

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¹ J. Dryden, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (5th ed.; ed. M. H. Abrams et al.; New York: Norton, 1986) 1.1850.

² Cf. e.g. N. W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 13–16; R. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) xiii; E. W. Heaton, *Daniel* (London: SCM, 1956) 17–40, 47–56, 79–96.

Genesis, and the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Indeed, Chaucer holds no candle to the redactors of Daniel.

This scenario always has been hypothetical due to the limited range and depth of evidence from extra-Biblical sources. Consequently researchers have faced a hermeneutical quandary: Which has preeminent authority—the text of Daniel? canonical teaching? historical and linguistic materials about the ancient reader and literary practice? The following argument does emphasize the primary text, with evidence from pertinent theology and literary criticism—much of it the same source material used to support the Maccabean theory. My thesis, however, is quite different. According to Jesus' words in Matt 24:15 and literary analysis of Daniel itself, the sixth-century prophet composed the book, creating a unified, artistic narrative of historical events theologically critiqued by a highly crafted ironic vision.

I. THE AUTHOR DANIEL AND HIS LITERARY-PROPHETIC VISION

The external and internal evidence for an historical person named Daniel is well known, though much modern scholarship has ignored particular data outside the book of Daniel and classified the in-text references to him as the conventional language of apocalypses. But such claims fail on theological grounds. Outside the book stands Jesus' reference to "the 'abomination of desolation' which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet" (Matt 24:15 NASB),³ attribution that deserves much more consideration than it has received.⁴ The historical existence of Daniel the

³ Unless indicated as NASB, all Biblical references to English texts follow the NIV

⁴ Research attempting to identify the author of an OT book, M Sternberg notes, is destined to fail, due primarily to a lack of biographical data (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington Indiana University, 1985] 64) His larger discussion of the inquiry into authorship (pp 58–75) is highly useful in analyzing the problems of reading texts in search of the author and suggests as one resolution to the problem the well-established distinction between author as historical person and author as writer The two should not be totally dissociated, however, since they are "two faces of the same entity" and "no more mutually exclusive than identical" (p 69) As for expositors' references to Matt 24 15 none appears in Heaton's brief discussion of the author (*Daniel* 19–24), who is supposedly a second-century "pious scribe" with an "indifference to historical accuracy" (pp 17, 115) In Heaton's 111-page introduction to the book of Daniel, here are the total comments on the Matthean passage "The same tradition [i e about the rise of Antichrist] is reflected in the references to the 'abomination of desolation' in the Synoptic Gospels The description of the image in Daniel is applied to an individual person in Mark 13 14, and Matt 24 15 correctly acknowledges the sources of the idea" (p 95) To Heaton, Matt 24 15 says nothing about the authorship of Daniel, as if Jesus' deity and accompanying inerrant words refer only to the book, not to the man Both Porteous and Anderson introduce the book of Daniel without mentioning Matt 24 15 at all Porteous' overview says little, in fact, about the author "Apart from the book itself, we know nothing about this Daniel whom it describes as living in Babylon during the exile" (*Daniel* 17) Anderson claims that since researchers have only an "inconclusive" case for linking an historical Daniel with the protagonist in the book, "it would now appear best to allow Daniel to stand in his own right" (*Signs* xiv–xv) If the Daniel of the text is so treated, why not take the same position on "Daniel the prophet"? Such allowance, it seems, would uphold the integrity of the primary text and of Jesus' quotation and attribution of it to Daniel the prophet By design

prophet is clearly asserted by Jesus, and his phrasing in Matthew indicates his intention to speak with specific accuracy, not in a symbolic, figurative sense that he sometimes uses.⁵ After warning his listeners about "false prophets" (24:11), Jesus points to an event yet future in his own day, "the abomination of desolation," then attributes the phrase to "Daniel the prophet." Of final authority here is the deity of Christ: If Matthew has recorded Jesus' words accurately, the phrase in 24:15 must be factual and true—factual in its occurrence and true in its conformity to the divine intention. Consequently, despite the conventionality of first-person narration of visionary literature (see Dan 9:2–4, 20–22; 10:2 ff.; 12:5 ff.), the clarity of Jesus' statement highlights the need for additional genre analysis of Daniel 9–12 and, more to the point, establishes the actual existence of Daniel himself. While these chapters, along with chaps. 7–8, display some features of apocalypses—including the phrase "son of man," the presence of heavenly messengers, and dire warnings of destruction—these passages are not necessarily fully-developed apocalypses.⁶ Indeed, as acknowledged by some proponents of the Maccabean theory, the book of Daniel has important affinities with prophecy.⁷

or default, in other words, one's Christology inescapably comes to bear upon the issue of authorship in the book of Daniel

⁵ In John 15 Jesus uses allegory, some of which is clear enough—"I am the vine, you [my disciples] are the branches"—but other statements are less easily comprehended. One example, the unfruitful branches being cast into the fire and burned, leaves readers with the question of how much imagery Jesus is using when he refers to "the fire." None, it seems to me, though Jesus does not say. He is merely reminding his listeners that useless branches do not remain on the trees or lie around but are destroyed. Still, the context is allegory, a genre with inherent and purposeful ambiguity. Another example of intentional connotative language is the phrase "bear much fruit." What does he mean by "fruit"? Commentators have different suggestions, but the matter remains unresolved—as it should be. Again, Jesus' context is allegory, whose very nature lies not in total explicit systematic treatise but in suggestive, descriptive narration, a later expression of the dense narrativity that R. Alter has discussed so instructively in terms of OT narrative (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic, 1981] 114–130, *The World of Biblical Literature* [New York: Basic, 1992] 87–106). Later John records the disciples' impatience at Jesus' use of symbolic statements, to which Jesus responds "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father" (16:25).

⁶ Chapters 8–12 are, to P. Davies ("Eschatology in the Book of Daniel," *JSOT* 17 [1980] 33–53), not apocalypses but visions that demonstrate eschatology, which he defines as "a dimension of belief that history moves in a direction, that this direction is set by God, and that God acts within history to ensure this direction" (p. 38). Accordingly, Davies continues, the visions flow from the earlier written tales (chaps. 1–6), and Daniel should be viewed as a developing book with its own theological and thematic unity. J. J. Collins agrees that a "significant continuity" exists between the tales and the visions, noting that "all aspects of the visions cannot be explained from the apocalypses" ("Apocalyptic Genre and Mythic Allusions in Daniel," *JSOT* 21 [1981] 89). However, he says, the "structure and internal coherence [of the visions] are similar to those of the apocalypses," so that the genre is "an integral factor in the message of the book" (pp. 88, 94).

⁷ Porteous observes that the book of Daniel "shares with the oracles of the great eighth- and seventh- and sixth-century prophets the view that history has an end which will be brought about by God and that, when that consummation comes, there will be a judgment which will make manifest who are on God's side and who are at enmity with God. Certain of the alleged

In addition to Jesus' claims in Matthew 24, Daniel itself has internal evidence of the prophet's own authorship. One such detail is the first-person references (e.g. 9:2, 20; 10:2). Evangelical scholarship has well cautioned against classifying an ancient text as an autobiography based only on the presence of first-person pronouns,⁸ themselves a post-Enlightenment sign of literary self-consciousness with its underlying premise of *cogito ergo sum*. But where and how to apply this caution in exegesis of Daniel remains unclear, especially in light of some highly complex questions: Is the "I" Daniel or, perhaps, an amanuensis or some other person assuming a literary mask (i.e. writing as if he were Daniel)? Even if the first-person pronouns refer to Daniel—no simple concession to make—are the third-person passages (chaps. 1–6) written by someone else? If so, how can one argue for continuous Danielic authorship for the entire book? And more generally, if Daniel 1–6 is ancient historical narrative, does the text indicate literary self-consciousness despite the use of third-person point of view?

Before we proceed further, two basic qualifications are in order. (1) If the first-person pronouns are assumed as literary conventions of apocalypse, the aforementioned questions are either unanswerable or irrelevant. (2) These pronouns locate the visions (chaps. 7–12) within a narrative voice. Therefore even critics who ignore Jesus' words and their full implication cannot deny that this use of "I" creates at least the semblance of authorial self-consciousness. The first-person pronouns in chaps. 1–6,

differences between the Book of Daniel and the great prophets of Israel are actually developments of the prophetic teaching adapted to a later time. The early prophets pronounced doom upon Israel for its sin, whereas the Book of Daniel is concerned with the doom that is about to overwhelm the nations. In the book "something of the old prophetic inspiration is present again confronting the challenge of a new day" (Daniel 14–15, 17). Anderson comments that some importance lies in "how the author used specific prophetic texts, i.e. how he consciously bound his words, and the community for which he wrote, to the great tradition of the prophets." Some evidence lies in the declaration in 1:1–2 about God's allowance of Babylon to take Judah captive, a statement similar to sentences in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Another example includes "the interpretation he placed on Jer 25:12 and 29:10 in considering the duration of the Exile" (Signs xiii). And, according to Collins, "there is considerable continuity between Daniel and the prophetic tradition. The continuity is not only a matter of citations from biblical texts but is also found in the vision form and in the eschatological expectation of supernatural intervention for the deliverance of the people [although] these elements are transformed in Daniel beyond what we find in the prophetic corpus" (pp. 89–90). The subgenre of vision within classical prophecy and the gradual shift from prophecy to wisdom and other later genres may help to explain the complexities about the form and structure of Daniel. If genre analysis guides the exposition the bipartite structural break occurs after chap. 6, with court narratives preceding and visions following. But this division awkwardly separates the Aramaic section (2:4–7:28) from the larger book. On the other hand, allowing linguistic analysis to predominate raises a troublesome question: How can chap. 7, obviously a vision, be grouped consistently with the court narratives comprising chaps. 2–6? Perhaps the resolution of the problem lies in Porteous' remark about the ways in which prophecy became adapted to later events, teachings and literary purposes. For additional help cf. R. D. Patterson, "Holding on to Daniel's Court Tales," *JETS* 36/4 (1993) 445–454.

⁸ Cf. e.g. Gleason Archer, "Daniel," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelein, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 7:4–5.

however, do not refer to Daniel and serve different purposes that seemingly suppress rather than reveal his own authorial self-consciousness.⁹ How then could Daniel the prophet have written the court narratives?

II. AUTHORIAL DISTANCE, ESTHETICS, AND THE CRITICAL VOICE

One of the most reasonable starting points for this investigation is a presumed unity of the book, a position held by some defenders as well as detractors of the Maccabean theory.¹⁰ This wholeness is achieved primarily through thematic development, the text seen as a continuous exposition of God's sovereignty despite the ephemeral strength of earthly kings. Another unifying device is setting, earthly courts in chaps. 1–6 and the heavenly court in 7:9 ff., together serving as a transition to the other settings in chaps. 8–12. Still another means of achieving unity is the presence of a supposedly fictional Daniel—the respectful phrase is the “legendary Daniel”—around whom an unnamed postexilic writer/redactor shaped the stories into their present form.¹¹ But why must the Hebrew figure be legendary rather than actual? One reason may be the assumption that third-person narrative cannot or does not exhibit authorial self-consciousness

⁹ Primarily the ordinary function of self-reference as the person speaks (e.g. 1:10, 2:3, 5:8–9, 24–25, 3:14–18, 5:7, 14, 6:5, 22, 26). The only significant exception occurs in chap. 4, where Nebuchadnezzar narrates his dream, Daniel's interpretation, and the king's own response to the fulfilled prophecy. This rhetorical situation, in which a Hebrew prophet records the king's vision, resembles the situation in chaps. 7–12 where Daniel is recording his own visions. That this narrative stance appears not only in the visions but also in the court narratives adds credibility to the thesis of single authorship and broadens the basis for unity of the entire book.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Porteous (*Daniel* 13), Heaton (*Daniel* 17–19). Yet, again, assumptions about dating significantly affect judgments about the Daniel in the plot as well; consider L. Humphreys' comment: “The reader must stretch his credulity to the breaking-point in being asked to accept that the Daniel, who is both completely loyal to his Jewish heritage and God and is able to function as a skilled and loyal courtier holding the highest office in the court of foreign monarchs, is also the Daniel whose visions in the latter part of the book reveal these same monarchs and nations as oppressive and completely condemned in the divine plan” (“A Life Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92 [1973] 223). But why cannot the same writer speak in two quite different rhetorical stances—one a third-person chiasmic narrative, an historical report sprinkled with pungent irony, and the other a series of emerging apocalyptic visions revealing future events (i.e. history not yet made)? Such a suggestion is hardly incredible if indeed an historical Daniel excelled intellectually among the young Hebrew exiles and learned Babylonian literature and language (Dan. 1:4–6). Indeed the book of Daniel testifies of a prophet with the intellectual and spiritual capacity to create an artful synthesis of dream-visions and classical prophecy.

¹¹ This reference to a fictional Daniel has led one critic to quite a curious theory about the genre of the book. Finding a sort of “conceptual unity” at work, he classifies the book as “inverted plagiarism,” in which “an author bent on attaining public acclaim of his writings would willingly suppress his own name, ascribing his creations to a worthy figure of old whose name alone would suffice to assure them of general acceptance” (S. Talmon, “Daniel,” *The Literary Guide to the Bible* [ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode, Cambridge: Harvard, 1987] 346). Here is one astonishing claim that seems impossible to refute, but due only to the nebulous grounds on which it is built. The general concept used in Talmon's article is pseudonymous authorship, though a strange set of particularities is constructed perhaps to justify use of the term in a novel sort of way, all of which leads to needless complication.

because the textual "I" seldom appears. As a result the court narratives of chaps. 1-6 cannot have autobiographical reference to Daniel. This supposition, however, is problematic in the light of basic principles from esthetic theory.

Years ago M. H. Abrams sought to narrate the development of western esthetic theory from the dialogues of Plato to modern poetry. Constructing his argument around four variables—universe, artist, work (or text), audience—he spoke briefly but instructively about the ancient critical perspective. Emphasizing mimesis as the controlling metaphor in classical theory of literature, Abrams noted that ancient texts were evaluated as reflections of the world out there, not as confessionals, diaries, or other "private" revelations of the authors' own individual experiences.¹² These general observations are worth relating to Daniel, with proper care taken not to westernize a Semitic text.

The task, then, is to examine chaps. 1-6 for indications of authorial self-awareness that are attributable to Daniel himself. One indication, perhaps surprisingly, is the third-person stance itself, whose rhetorical purpose is less the disclosure of the author and more the description of the state of things, the "imitation" of the condition of Babylon. This rhetorical stance and purpose, establishing the appropriate esthetic distance to describe the world out there, corresponds to the mimetic theory sketched by Abrams. Accordingly the author does write about himself and about his own personal experience but treats them indirectly, as assumed components within the motive and decision to write. Thus the written details and chronology emanate from an objective narrative stance constantly mediating Daniel's embodiment of divine love and the ironic touch that keeps Babylon's best on its knees. In other words the imitative plot includes artistically crafted historical details within a larger theological critique, achieved mainly through a penetrating irony. All in all, the authorial perspective sees beyond the temporal crises in Nebuchadnezzar's court, constantly undermining the monarch's proud claims of total supremacy.

The clash between what is and what seems to be provides depth and dimension to one important source for Daniel: the Joseph narrative in Genesis. A few examples of irony in Genesis 37-50 identify some of the rhetorical skill at Daniel's disposal. For instance, when Joseph's brothers refer to him they speak with sharp verbal irony (37:19): "Here comes that

¹² M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958) 3-14. Elsewhere Abrams discusses three different ways to read a text in relation to its author: "One looks to an author for the explanation of his work, another reads an author out of his work, and the third reads a work in order to find its author in it. The first type is primarily an investigation of literary causes. The attempt is to isolate and explain the special quality of a work by reference to the special quality of the character, life, lineage, and milieu of its author. The second type is biographical in aim; it sets out to reconstruct the author as he lived, and uses the literary product merely as a convenient record from which to infer something about his life and character. The third, however, claims to be specifically aesthetic and appreciative in purpose; it regards aesthetic qualities as a projection of personal qualities and in its extreme form, it looks upon the poem as a transparency opening directly into the soul of its author" (p. 227).

dreamer [master of dreams, dream expert].¹³ Dramatic irony is evident in Jacob's words (37:33), which contradict the reader's knowledge based on information already disclosed: "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." The reader also knows the facts about the claims of Potiphar's wife to the servants (39:14): "This Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed." Similar phrasing and more dramatic irony are noticeable when the wife explains the situation to her husband (vv. 17–18). Scholarly exposition of the irony in this narrative offers further hints about the passage as a literary and rhetorical background for the court episodes in Daniel.¹⁴

The cosmic irony by which Daniel distances himself from his material appears from the start. Immediately we learn that "the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand" and allowed the very temple articles to fall into the most repugnant of circumstances, being "carried off" to "the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." Dramatized by repeated reference to pagan religion, these background details seem to state explicitly that Yahweh has forsaken his people. The potential for disaster increases, momentarily anyway, as the Babylonians attempt to nullify the Hebrew identity of Daniel and his friends by assigning them non-Hebrew names (Dan 1:7).¹⁵ No such

¹³ R. Youngblood, *The NIV Study Bible* (ed. K. L. Barker, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 62

¹⁴ Scholarly comment on irony in these and other passages has shed further light on Hebrew narrative art. According to A. Berlin, Gen 37 10 ff. is "ironic for several reasons. First of all, Joseph has never shown any concern for his brothers before, in fact, he has always appeared insensitive towards them (because the narrator has never given an indication of his feelings for them). Secondly, the reader knows (because he knows how the brothers feel about Joseph), even though Jacob may not, that any confrontation between Joseph and his brothers is dangerous. Thirdly, the language of the text promotes the irony by using the word *šlwm* in 'see about the well-being [*šlwm*] of your brothers' when it had previously used the same word in 'they hated him so much that they could not speak a friendly word [*šlm*] to him' (v. 4)" (*Poetics and Interpretation in Biblical Narrative* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983] 49). Additional irony results from the fact that "only from [Jacob's] point of view is Joseph dead—the brothers, Joseph, and the reader all know otherwise" (p. 51). Alter adds details about irony elsewhere. In Gen 42 6, for instance, Joseph's brothers' ignorance about his identity "is an ironic complement to their earlier failure to recognize his true destiny" (*Art* 163). Later, Alter points out, the reader sees that "the ten brothers, of course, are throughout the object of dramatic irony, not knowing what Joseph and we know, for example, when they announce, 'We are all the sons of one man' (42 11). But this is dramatic irony which outdoes itself through a series of psychologically fraught double meanings that trace the chief convolutions to their troubled fraternity" (pp. 164–165). And finally "Money—specifically, pieces of silver—passed from the hands from the Ishmaelite traders to the brothers in exchange for Joseph, who was carried down to Egypt. Then Joseph sent money hidden in the bags back northward to Canaan. Now Jacob orders double the money to be sent back to Egypt (The money/silver motif will be given one more climactic twist). The ironic connection with the Ishmaelite traders is ingeniously reinforced by the other half of Jacob's instructions that caravan long ago was seen (Gen 37 25) 'carrying gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt,' and now the brothers will constitute another such caravan, bearing exactly the same goods together with a few extra items, not bringing Joseph as a slave but headed, unawares, to the discovery of his identity as supreme master" (p. 172).

¹⁵ Ancient Semitic names were integral to, not detached from, personal being. A nameless person, in short, did not exist. For additional details see R. D. Patterson, "A Multiplex Approach

abandonment has occurred, of course. In fact, not only has Yahweh prompted the "chief official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel" (1:9), as God had done centuries before, involving the Egyptian warden and Joseph (Gen 39:21), but also the Hebrew boys turn away the pagan food (Dan 1:8–16) with remarkable results. Hebrew wisdom is evidently superior to Babylonian. Moreover when the youths eventually appear before the king himself they are identified by their Hebrew, not Babylonian, names. So much for Nebuchadnezzar's decrees! Reversal of royal intention also appears repeatedly in chaps. 1–6 and actually deepens the theological critique so as to fashion a near-comic vision throughout the scenes at court.

With the first royal crisis (chap. 2), the irony builds. Surely an embarrassment to Babylon, the wise men lack the wisdom to help their monarch. Unwittingly producing a bit of dramatic irony (i.e. the conflict between a person's words and what the reader knows to be factual), the helpless advisors exclaim: "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks [i.e. interpret his dream]. . . . No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men" (2:10–11). But Daniel can, as the reader has reason to surmise from 1:17, 19–20—statements illustrating how at times Hebrew narrative uses repetition to dramatize and complicate a plot.¹⁶ More repetition follows, heightening the king's foolish order to execute his own advisors (see 2:12–14, 18, 24 [twice]), the climax of which has implications for the literary function of Daniel's interpretive task within the total context of the scene. The wise men are commanded both to identify the content of the king's dream and to interpret it (2:5), no small feat. Since Nebuchadnezzar will not reveal the details, his advisors cannot explain the significance of the dream either.

Expositors have struggled long with the futuristic application of the four kingdoms (2:31–45). More pertinent to the present argument, though, is the developing irony by which the prophecy achieves its total effect. Most important here is not so much pinpoint correspondence between each prophesied kingdom and an actual monarchy but the pointed corrective to Babylonian foolishness, a rhetorical subtlety that occurs repeatedly in the court narratives—the reproof by divine wisdom and power, expressed in the prophecy that God's kingdom will transcend all others (2:44–45). Further, Daniel's "wisdom and tact" (2:14) in delivering his prophecy contrast with the soothsayers' fearful whines. One particular repetition—God's showing future events to Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 27, 45)—further sharpens the irony. Though Edwin Good exaggerates the case by calling the entire book of

to Psalm 45," *Grace Theological Journal* 6/1 (1985) 37–38 and notes, especially his citation of the opening lines of *Enuma elish* to illustrate the ontological significance of names and naming "When on high the heaven had not been named, / Firm ground below had not been called by name, / When no gods whatever had been brought into being, / Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined— / Then it was that the gods were formed within them / Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, / by name they were called" (*ANET* 60–61). Interestingly, one type of scribe in ancient Babylon was the "name-writer" (J. Oates, *Babylon* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1979] 166).

¹⁶ See Alter, *Art* 88–113, *World* 42

Daniel a comedy,¹⁷ his thesis helps us focus our attention on the comic perspective that is intended to debunk proud pagan rulers. For example, the humorous effect of otherwise wearisome, superfluous repetitions in chap. 3 has been explained convincingly by Hector Avalos, though some synthesis of literary criticism and historical analysis remains to be done.¹⁸ At this point evangelical studies of Daniel need a much more integrated treatment of historical, theological, and especially rhetorical criticism.¹⁹

Some context for this needed synthesis is available from several details in chap. 3 that Avalos does not address. They reveal a developing irony made possible through Daniel's authorial distance from the world that he is describing. To begin with, while God already has broken Nebuchadnezzar's decree by sparing the lives of Babylonians and Jews (chap. 2), the reader may look twice at Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent threat directed at the three young men: "If you do not worship it [the image of gold], you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (3:15). One episode earlier, the same speaker was calling God "the God of gods and the Lord of kings" because God had revealed the monarch's mysterious dreams to Daniel (2:47). Even allowing for the notorious forgetfulness inherent in magisterial privilege, the reader at least must realize that Yahweh can deliver the boys, though he may not intend to do so. The issue is not his will, though, but Nebuchadnezzar's pompous denial of God's very existence.

Again we confront situational irony. Like his own advisors earlier, Nebuchadnezzar denies that any divine deliverer exists, while indeed One does and displays his power before the king's very eyes. Moreover the corrective

¹⁷ E. Good, "Apocalyptic as Comedy: The Book of Daniel," *Semeia* 32 (1984) 41-70.

¹⁸ H. Avalos, "The Comedic Function of the Enumerations of Officials and Instruments in Daniel 3," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 580-588, though Avalos assumes that the book of Daniel is late and therefore denies Danielic authorship and the historicity of chaps. 1-6. A conservative study of chap. 3 appeared shortly before Avalos' article, some historical and lexicographical research by C. Dyer that identified the musical instruments not as peculiar to Babylon but as "representative" of the ancient world ("The Musical Instruments in Daniel 3," *BSac* [October-December 1990] 426-436). Dyer noted the repetition of the list but not the literary effect of that repetition (see 3, 5, 7, 10, 15). One point to be emphasized here and elsewhere in the court narratives synthesizes the fine literary analysis of Avalos and the historical details in Dyer's study: The comic features do not result from any fictionality of the plot but from the author's artful treatment of historical events so as to generate situational irony. This form of irony, unlike verbal or dramatic, creates a conflict between appearance and reality. Nebuchadnezzar seems to be in complete control, but he is not. The Hebrew youths seem moments from death, but they are not. The question is not simply whether the boys were miraculously delivered from the furnace. Of course they were. But the fuller question—the one that exegetes must ask—is this: How has the author shaped his narrative of the account so as to achieve the desired effect on his intended audience? This larger issue at once brings together the historical basis for the events in the narrative and the rhetorical impact of that narrative as it fulfills its literary function.

¹⁹ J. Goldingay, for example, concedes that western readers may smile at the enumerations in chap. 3 but that this response probably was not intended by the author (*Daniel* [Dallas: Word, 1989] 68). Why then was it there at all? Was the chapter written for readers presumed to be nearly incompetent? Rather, it seems, Goldingay overlooks the significant rhetorical effect of repetition in Hebrew narrative art, as Alter's works have explained so instructively and for quite some time.

is sharpened by the clauses describing the boys' condition after the ordeal. The first part reports the boys' total protection from the fire, so why the final four clauses: "The fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them" (3:27)? If the author's purpose is to narrate pure history, why should he describe the men's clothing or the lack of smoky air about them? Granted, the boys were clothed when they were thrown into the furnace (3:21). But is God's omnipotence not easily enough seen already in delivering the lads unharmed, with not so much as discolored eyebrows? Parataxis may provide some illumination. But perhaps more importantly the final two clauses add historical details that emphasize the extent of God's protective power, all of which serves as a scorching rebuke of Nebuchadnezzar's foolish unbelief. His denial, in fact, has dominated the chapter from its beginning. Avalos rightly calls our attention to the humorous effect of the mechanical repetitions of the Babylonian officials (vv. 2–3), but he says nothing about another repetition, one whose frequency exposes Nebuchadnezzar to deep embarrassment. Six times in seven verses (vv. 1, 2, 3 [twice], 5, 7) the narrator states that Nebuchadnezzar "set up" the image of gold,²⁰ and several times the clause includes the phrase "Nebuchadnezzar the king" (vv. 2, 3, 5, 7). The same Hebrew verb for "set up" reappears later (vv. 12, 14, 18), continuing the initial wordplay and heightening the ironic effect. Oddly, the king who sets up images for religious purposes fails to acknowledge and worship the Supreme Being who has set up the Babylonian monarchy and, according to Daniel's interpretation of the dream in chap. 2, sets up all kingdoms. Avoiding modern proclivities for overreading and for neglect of authorial intention, can we not surmise that the author has "set up" the king for a fall?

III. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DANIEL IN CHAP. 3

Within this passage, moreover, lies another potential indication of self-effacement by the author Daniel. In most of the court narratives he is the protagonist, the recipient and communicator of God's revelations about the future. The powerfully dramatic episodes in chaps. 1–2 establish Daniel as the main character, and chaps. 4–6 enlarge his presence and status in Babylon.²¹ Others such as Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are introduced and aligned with Daniel against the pagans (1:7; 2:17–18), and

²⁰ The phrase "set up" may point back to 2:21, 44, where Daniel states that indeed God sets up monarchs and kingdoms. In 2:44 "set up" is the translation in NASB, NIV and NKJV, while in 2:21 the verb and perhaps the context apparently complicate translators' renderings "establishes" with "sets up" as an alternate reading (NASB), "sets up" (NIV), "raises up" (NKJV), and, interestingly, "setteth up" (KJV). Perhaps here is one case in which KJV provides a stronger verbal clue than does NKJV to the repetition of the verb and, as such, to its rhetorical function in the passage.

²¹ Daniel's devotion to God gives him heroic proportions. L. Ryken considers Daniel "one of only a handful of completely idealized heroes in the Bible" (*Words of Delight* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 113), "idealized" here meaning morally and spiritually exemplary. Humphreys

Nebuchadnezzar functions as an interesting foil. But the identity of the primary character is indisputable. So why in chap. 3 does he disappear for awhile? Why do the Hebrew boys dominate?

These questions make little difference from the perspective of non-Danielic authorship because chaps. 3 and 6 both describe the same major theme: the defeat of paganism by Jewish zealots. The questions are significant, though, if Daniel is the author. The different protagonists in chap. 3 can be explained, of course, on historical grounds: The young men actually were delivered from the furnace. Some literary reasons are relevant too. One is the chiasmic structure at work in chaps. 2–7.²² Accordingly chaps. 3 and 6 (“court conflicts,” as Lee Humphreys calls them)²³ display similar internal structures, themes, and narrative types. Another explanation is that in chap. 3 Daniel is shifting the emphasis away from himself to show the power of God at work in others’ lives too.

This hypothesis might be dismissed easily based upon silence, were there no other textual evidence of self-effacement. There is, however—and here is an appropriate place to examine it because it broadens the prophet’s identity and rhetorical stance within the court narratives.

Daniel’s expressions of humility appear throughout the book. In chap. 2 he prayerfully acknowledges God’s wisdom and might (vv. 20–23) and then continues that motif by attributing his own understanding of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams to the revelation of God (v. 28). How strikingly this trust clashes with the self-reliance of the king’s advisors, who heretofore have proven ineffective! Later, according to 4:19, Daniel is astounded by his own thoughts about another dream by Nebuchadnezzar, who must reassure Daniel before the prophet will speak. To be sure, Daniel is addressing the king and bears a most unpleasant message (vv. 23–26). But again, why describe Daniel’s alarm and need of encouragement to tell what he knows? One reason is what some commentators call Jewish piety, but another more literary reason is deliberate authorial self-effacement. Whatever divine wisdom comes to Daniel, he states explicitly that such supernatural insight exceeds his own capacity to comprehend and to cope. That is godly humility.

Elsewhere Daniel is presented at times to be anxious, fearful, and physically weak. After being shown the significance of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel is “greatly perplexed” and “terrified” by his thoughts (4:19),

adds an important qualification about Daniel’s character: “In this stress on the devotion of the hero characteristic elements in the tale of the courtier are submerged. The God of Daniel is the central figure and not the courtier” (“Life Style” 220–221).

²² See A. Lenglet, “La structure litteraire de Daniel 2–7,” *Bib* 53 (1972) 182–185. For an opposing view see Good, who reasons that “the only parallel between chs. 4 and 5 is a passing reference in 5:21 to Nebuchadnezzar’s madness, not enough to give us a full-fledged chiasmic structure. The progressions from one tale to another, which ch. 7 does not advance, make better sense of the whole. The putative chiasmus invites us too easily to ignore the sequence” (“Apocalyptic” 66 n. 23).

²³ See Humphreys, “Life Style” 219–220.

perhaps as much about the king's reaction to his words as about the content of the dream itself. Later, as he beholds the awesome visions about the future—who would not tremble at those?—he can hardly endure the spiritual weight. Further, these moments of weakness occur more than once or twice in the book (see 7:7, 15, 28; 8:17, 27; 9:21; 10:2–3, 8, 11, 15–17). Such expressions may be typical of apocalyptic writing. But if written by Daniel himself, they also demonstrate the spirit of a self-effacing prophet (see also Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6; Ezek 1:28; 3:23). In short, the various potential signs of authorial humility justify Daniel's inclusion of other courageous believers in chap. 3, all of which adds intensity and scope not only to Daniel the triumvir in Babylon but also to the ironic vision that he crafts in the book.

IV. RHETORICAL EFFECTS OF CHAP. 5

Within the court narratives the ironic voice creates a thematic and rhetorical linkage. In chaps. 2, 4–6 the pagan rulers' confusion about how to interpret events conflicts with Daniel's understanding of those events and submission to the God who controls them, all of which brings into sharp relief God's revelation of mysteries and reassertion of his sovereignty over the ancient world. Time and again this plot is retold in the six chapters, each account ending with the same theological truth. No doubt, the total effect of the irony and critique differs somewhat from chapter to chapter, depending on the directness of Daniel's prophetic response to Babylonian defiance of God. Chapter 5, for instance, displays an ironic reversal that offers special comfort for the exiled Jewish reader. The other court narratives about God's punishment of Babylonian rulers offer some encouragement, but Belshazzar's downfall in particular offered a needed reminder that God's judgment on the defiant remained swift, sudden and sure.

As chap. 5 begins with the idolatrous king preparing his feast, Daniel's audience hardly expects a blandly factual account of the events. The OT simply is not so written. Also, the earlier episodes in Daniel in which Nebuchadnezzar behaves more like a groveler than a monarch must have made readers smile, less in humor than in satisfaction that God indeed rules everyone—Babylon included.

The ironic description of the proud Nebuchadnezzar is recounted in 5:18–23. Already the defiant Belshazzar is dumbfounded by the handwriting on the wall and utterly dependent on Daniel for interpretation, during which the prophet reminds Belshazzar about his grandfather's past folly of self-reliance. As Daniel speaks, the reader has just heard Nebuchadnezzar's lengthy confession about his period of sin and punishment (chap. 4). Together the two accounts create a narrative repetition that makes Belshazzar look simply stupid for repeating the elder king's mistake. That sin, in fact, seems brazen as chap. 5 begins. Belshazzar orders a sacrilege: idol worship and Babylonian revelry with gold and silver vessels, the very ones that he knew once stood in the temple at Jerusalem. The younger king commands the blasphemy to commence, then joins in the act. More is

taking place here, though, than mere reporting of facts. With that skilled technique of irony through repetition that creates comic effect in chap. 3, Daniel again shows who really controls the court. Some perspective is provided by Avalos' comments:

On Nebuchadnezzar's orders in v 2, the following officials are summoned to dedicate and worship the statue on the plain of Dura: "The satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the province." . . . This entire list is repeated not only in the story, but also immediately in the next verse.

It is not impossible that the author intended to provide an accurate portrayal of such an event. But if this were the only purpose, then the list need not have been mentioned more than once. . . . The lengthy list is not meant simply to provide the reader with an accurate descriptive analysis [but to] emphasize the mindlessness of the entire Chaldean bureaucracy. . . . The immediate and mechanical reproduction of the enumeration of v 2 in v 3 is an effective reflection of the immediate and mechanistic acceptance of the king's request by the entire pagan bureaucracy.²⁴

Now we turn back to the opening verses of chap. 5, where again repetition achieves a similar effect. Belshazzar

gave orders to bring the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them.²⁵

Is the reader's memory so short that Daniel must repeat elementary information in such rapid succession? Hardly. As the mindless Babylonian court gathered earlier at Dura to worship the golden image, here a similarly unthinking group drinks from the sacred vessels, either oblivious or hostile to Yahweh. More important is the presence of irony of situation. What seems to be a glorious denial of God's power is in fact a puny exercise in futility, and the hand of judgment is about to write Belshazzar's death warrant.

But not yet. A bit more comic effect takes place first. As the hand wrote, Belshazzar's "face grew pale, and his thoughts alarmed him; and his hip joints went slack, and his knees began knocking together" (5:6 NASB). The same clausal intensification occurring in 3:27 appears here, though with different effect. To say the least, there is nothing funny. Yet what comedy, in the larger sense of the word, to witness the proudly indignant ruler of all Babylon reduced—and quickly—to an ancient type of Ichabod Crane shivering in fright as he stares at the headless horseman! Of course any Babylonian king in his right mind has the sure answer to such a dilemma. Relief is just minutes away, readily available from the diviners. Once more, though, the counselors have no counsel. They cannot explain the handwriting on the

²⁴ Avalos, "Comedic" 584–585.

²⁵ Similar terms appear in v. 23 also, during Daniel's summary about Nebuchadnezzar's earlier mistake.

wall, a fact noted in the background narrative (v. 8) and repeated as Belshazzar speaks to Daniel (v. 15). What is achieved through such repetition? Again, the artistry emphasizes Belshazzar's pointless attempts to circumvent the wisdom and dominion of God.

But even at this point the shadow of irony in chap. 5 may cover still more of the royal palace. How does the king learn about Daniel? Not through a soothsayer or any other familiar figures but through an obscure woman, the queen. Research is inconclusive about the royal status and reputation of Babylonian women or of the respect paid to them, although some suggestions have implications for the passage before us. For example, during the Old Babylonian period women participated considerably in divination. Elderly women engaged in the practice using lots, and the divination of dreams was in fact "originally in the hands of women."²⁶ Perhaps, then, the queen's role has ancient precedent that adds credence to both her mention of Daniel's service to Nebuchadnezzar and her exhortation to summon Daniel to court. The irony emerges as a weak and uninformed ruler is once more juxtaposed with a confident, knowledgeable subordinate whose discernment and insight enable her to gain control of a difficult situation and to provide some much-needed advice of her own.

At any rate Daniel appears before the ruler and summarizes an incident from Nebuchadnezzar's life with interesting parallels to Belshazzar's present dilemma. The drama steadily building, two particular features of his account heighten the repugnance of Belshazzar's presumptuous sins. (1) As already mentioned, the king is fully aware of Nebuchadnezzar's earlier wrongdoing (v. 22) as well as God's response and the ultimate outcome. (2) Daniel levels the present charge at Belshazzar by using a specific word in two different senses, a technique that generates a pointed

²⁶ See A L Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46/3 (1956) 221-222. The status of women in general is difficult to assess due to sketchy data, primarily from the Old Babylonian period and deriving from the Code of Hammurapi. The few marriage documents to survive from neo-Babylonian times imply "a change in the relationship between the sexes from the Old to Neo-Babylonian period, in harmony with the observation that women had a higher social position in the earlier period, when they could act as witnesses and be scribes" (A L Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* [rev ed., Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977] 77). J Wellard suggests that women were hardly better off than house slaves, though the Code of Hammurapi did protect marital relationships for women in the event of unjust treatment by their husbands (*Babylon* [New York: Saturday Review, 1972] 123-126, 131). G R Driver and J C Miles have edited and translated commentary on legal documents with specific commentary on marriages (*The Babylonian Laws* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1952] 1:245 ff.). And E A W Budge claims that women could elect to "become scribes, and even members of judicial bodies, and many of them owned and managed large businesses" (*Babylonian Life and History* [2d ed., New York: Cooper Square, 1975] 163). In the context of home life, "Babylonian wives took no part in public affairs or meetings, their influence, which was very great, was exercised from their own houses" (p. 167). One relevant philological issue here is the ambiguity of Old Babylonian *awilum* ("free man"), a term that outside the laws referred also to a woman (see Driver and Miles, *Babylonian* 86 n. 3, 88-89, 88 n. 3). However, "the only woman described in the Laws as an *awiltum* is a priestess turned innkeeper" (88 n. 3). For linguistic as well as archeological reasons, then, the literary role of the queen in Daniel 5 is unclear.

irony that inscribes Belshazzar's downfall. Verses 23–24 display two different referents for the word "hand": "You [Belshazzar] did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore, he sent the hand that wrote the inscription." This is powerful wordplay, a common vehicle for irony in the OT. But is Belshazzar moved by Daniel's message? The text does not say directly. It states only that following Daniel's explanation of the mysterious writing, the king orders gifts for Daniel and declares him the third highest ruler in the kingdom. Yet in the characteristically subtle, indirect and detached authorial voice within the court narratives a terse remark explains Belshazzar's end, with a final ironic twist that echoes the truth about the real King of kings: "That same night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain" (5:30). Again, Daniel's reader needs no reminder of Belshazzar's royal status, so the repetition must be intended as a solemn obituary sprinkled with a quiet rejection. So much for blasphemy, revelry, foolishness and impenitence. Idolaters may worship their precious metals but will not escape the hand of God. Indeed, "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

V. CONCLUSION

This brief study of the authorial voice in Daniel 1–6 has attempted to identify available theological and literary evidence supporting Danielic authorship and textual unity. While much evidence within my argument is well known, the present context may be somewhat new, and the position on authorship stands diametrically opposed to various modern theories. In any case, this article may serve as a preliminary statement about a different way to read Daniel, but a way that I believe the author intended and certainly a way that many evangelicals are only beginning to take seriously. Ultimately evangelical scholarship on Daniel must probe further the implications of the relationship between historiography and the literary imagination. After all, the one always deals with more than sterile fact, the other with more than pure fiction. Indeed the multiple dynamics present at the intersection of fact and imagination carry both a blessing and a curse. Dynamics such as Daniel's ironic touch and artful use of repetition have the power, on the one hand, to relativize the hermeneutical process and reduce the exegesis to a capriciously chosen set of esthetic niceties. The same dynamics, on the other hand, can challenge the reader to understand the Biblical text in its literary richness, its historical accuracy and its theological substance. Only then has criticism been properly submitted to the authority—which presumes the historical-theological-literary nature—of Scripture. The literary dimension of that nature is nowhere more evident in its artful sophistication and didactic power than in the book of Daniel.