

A History of the Higher Criticism

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In order to fully understand the present view of the structure and formation of the Old Testament (particularly the first five books), it is worthwhile to study the history of such theories. Let us first look at the course of events in Old Testament studies leading up to and following the presentation of the so-called Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis in 1878. Then we shall consider these events in the context of similar work done in general literature, making appropriate observations as we go.

A History of the Present Critical Theory of the Pentateuch

Origin of the Documentary Theory

The first five books of the Old Testament, variously known as the Pentateuch or the Torah, were universally ascribed to Moses in the Old and New Testaments, the Talmud, and both Jewish and Christian tradition. It was not until the eighteenth century that this view was seriously questioned, at a time when deism in England, skepticism in France, and rationalism in Germany provided a climate favorable to rejection of the supernatural and skepticism toward the historicity of ancient documents.

In 1711 a German pastor, Heinrich Bernhard Witter, first advanced the idea that the variation in the use of the terms "God" and "LORD" (as rendered in our English Bibles) indicated that two documents had been fitted together to form the book of Genesis. Witter's speculation had no historical impact, however; it was soon forgotten, not to be rediscovered until 1924. The next person to advance such a view was a French physician Jean Astruc, who in 1753 published a book entitled *Conjectures Concerning the Original Memoranda Which It Appears Moses Used to Compose the Book of Genesis*. As the title shows, Astruc's proposal was not very radical, as he did not deny Mosaic authorship to Genesis. He did divide the book into two main sources and ten small documents, however. Though no one paid much attention to Astruc's book for some 30 years, he is usually recognized as the "Father of Higher Criticism."

In 1780-83, the German scholar Johann Gottfried Eichhorn produced his *Introduction to the Old Testament*. He divided all of Genesis and two chapters of Exodus into two documents which he called J and E, corresponding to the Hebrew words (as transliterated into German) "Jahve" and "Elohim," each representing the name used for God in that document. He correlated alleged "parallel accounts" with these sources and determined the stylistic characteristics of each document. Eichhorn's work was much more influential than Astruc's and really marked the beginning of "higher criticism" of the Pentateuch.

The Fragmentary Theory

The three authors so far discussed had rather similar views regarding the division of Genesis into documents: that there were two main ones with marked differences in style and vocabulary. But other theories soon appeared to vie for the approval of Old Testament scholars. The so-called Fragmentary Theory was the next to appear, as presented by the Scots Roman Catholic priest Alexander Geddes in his *Introduction to the Pentateuch and Joshua*, published in 1792. Geddes suggested that the Pentateuch was compiled in the time of King Solomon (10th century BC) from many small fragments, some of which dated back to the time of Moses. Ten years later, he was followed by Johann Vater, who divided Genesis into 39 fragments, which he felt had been put together in the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (6th cen BC).

The Supplementary Theory

While the proponents of these views debated, another German, Heinrich Ewald, published *The Composition of Genesis* in 1823. Ewald stressed the remarkable unity of the Pentateuch, especially Genesis, and suggested that most of it was a single foundation document (German *Grundschrift*) of early, if not Mosaic, composition. This document was roughly similar to Eichhorn's E, though larger, comprising about two-thirds of Genesis and Exodus, most of Numbers and all of Leviticus. Ewald held that the *Grundschrift* had been supplemented later by a writer using the name "Jahve" for God, so his view came to be known as Supplementary Theory. Ewald was later supported by Friedrich Bleek and Wilhelm DeWette. Notice that this theory contrasted sharply with the fragmentary view (as did Eichhorn's two-document view), as the supplementary view recognized two distinct styles in the Pentateuch, while the fragmentary saw many. Eichhorn and Ewald both thought they could distinguish two styles, but disagreed over whether certain passages belonged to J or to E.

Although the work so far described has been that of Germans (with one Frenchman), the English were not to be entirely shut out of the contest. John William Colenso, the Anglican Bishop of Natal (South Africa) studied the Old Testament as a hobby for many years. He claimed to have found many "flaws, inconsistencies and contradictions" in the Pentateuch, most of them in Ewald's *Grundschrift*. This weakened the supplementary view in the eyes of many. Colenso's work was finally published between 1862 and 1879 as *The Pentateuch and Joshua Critically Examined*.

The Crystallization Theory

As a result of Colenso's work, Ewald tried to find another theory which would take these observations into account. In 1840, in his *History of Israel*, Ewald advanced the so-called Crystallization Theory. Just as a seed-crystal will collect ions of sodium and chlorine from a supersaturated solution to form a large salt crystal, so Ewald suggested that there had been an alternating series of J- and E-type writers building up material around a small core to form the Pentateuch. This also fitted Ewald's own observation that certain statements in J assumed the existence of others in E and *vice versa*. However, the crystallization theory never became widely accepted.

Developmental Ideas

While many were thus engaged in dividing the Pentateuch into small pieces and grouping the pieces into documents in accordance with various notions, others were constructing the notions by which to sort the pieces. The most important of these was the idea that Israel's religion must have developed from a lower, primitive form to a later, higher type. Views of this sort began to appear in 1805 when DeWette published his *Dissertation*. Looking at the reforms instituted by King Josiah (narrated in 2 Kings 22), he noticed that they corresponded very closely to the teaching of Deuteronomy, a fact which few would deny. DeWette went on to say that the "book of the law" found in the temple (2 Kings 22:8) was actually the book of Deuteronomy. This is certainly a possibility, though it might have been the whole Pentateuch. But DeWette did not stop here. He claimed that the book was a fraud which had been written by the priests and planted in the temple in order that it might be "found" and used to advance their own religious views. Thus a development of Israel's religion is postulated, of which a big step was alleged to be the discovery of Deuteronomy in 621 BC. Later critical scholars have held to this date, though many of them have shied away from the fraud idea.

The theme of development was continued in the teaching of Eduard Reuss, a popular professor at Strassburg in the 1830s and beyond, who wrote little but had many students who became influential. Reuss felt that the Biblical religion had developed by a long process, during which monotheism arose from polytheism, worship became more formal and centralized, and the laws became more complex. To this type of development, Wilhelm Vatke added Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history, by which one movement provokes a counter-movement, the two later combining after a long period of struggle to form a synthesis. In his *Biblical Theology Scientifically Presented*, published in 1835, Vatke reversed the Biblical order of the law and the prophets. The prophets, he suggested, had developed the idea of one God, then fought the polytheistic priests in the realm of theology and ethics. Finally there was a compromise in which the law was written, retaining both the ethical monotheism of the prophets and the sacrificial system of the priests.

Production of the Graf-Wellhausen Theory

In these two strands – the idea that the Pentateuch is made up of documents woven together, and the theory that Israel's religion developed from primitive beginnings – we have the basis of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis. Let us see how these two came to be combined.

In 1853, Hermann Hupfeld published *The Sources of Genesis*, in which he sought to solve the problems of the supplementary theory by dividing E into two sources E¹ and E², so that there would now be three documents in the first four books of the Pentateuch. Although many had previously thought there were two documents, each with a very different style and a different name for God, Hupfeld now split E in two, claiming that E¹ was filled with genealogies, details and statistics (this document is today called P).

whereas E² was mostly narrative, with a style *very much like* that of J, but using "Elohim" for God. This second document was later given the old name E.

Thus Hupfeld split the two original criteria by which the sources of Genesis had been identified, so that two documents now used "Elohim" for God and two documents had almost the same style. Some have called this the "Copernican revolution of Higher Criticism" because of the drastic change it wrought in the documentary theory of the Pentateuch. Unlike Copernicus' theory, however, this view was more complex than its generally-accepted predecessor. This was not the first time E had been split, as Karl Ilgin had done so in 1798, But Ilgin had found 17 documents in Genesis, and his work was not influential.

Hupfeld also suggested that the documents composing the Pentateuch had been written in the order P, E, J, D (using the modern labels, with D for Deuteronomy), and that they had been assembled by an editor or redactor (labelled R) who added a few comments and occasionally put a "Jahve" in P or E or an "Elohim" in J.

But Hupfeld's dating was not satisfactory to those who believed in the evolution of religion. The complex laws of P could not have come first! Therefore Karl Kenirich Graf, in 1866, suggested that P be split up and the legal material in it be dated even later than D. The Dutch scholar Abraham Kuenen replied to Graf in 1869 (in his *Religion of Israel*), arguing that P could not be split because of its uniformity of style. He suggested that all of P should be dated after D.

With this revision, the stage was finally set for the appearance of Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, published in 1878. The book contained no significant innovations in dividing the Pentateuch into documents, but Hupfeld's view was stated brilliantly, and the documents were dated in accordance with the theory that Israel's religion had developed from a primitive to an advanced state. Wellhausen's unusually readable German style helped give the book a wide circulation, and the evolutionary view of religion he presented for ready acceptance in a time when Darwin and Hegel had such influence.

In Germany, Wellhausen's presentation of the theory almost immediately gained the support of the younger scholars. The older men in Old Testament criticism did not rush to endorse the view, but men do not live forever, so the theory gained almost complete acceptance within a generation.

In the English-speaking countries, Wellhausen's views spread more slowly among the scholars but more rapidly among laymen. This seems to have been the case because the major proponents of the theory writing in the English language were Samuel R. Driver and William Robertson Smith, both pious men who took a more conservative approach to the New Testament than their continental counterparts. Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, which appeared in 1891, has been the standard work on the documentary theory in English. It was recently reprinted in paperback by Meridan Books.

Recent Developments

Since the time of Wellhausen there have been few changes in the documentary theory which have gained wide acceptance. One exception has involved the relative dating of E and J. Opinion has gradually shifted to favor J as the earlier. However, many of the outstanding scholars in Pentateuch studies have advanced views which differ on the number of documents from which the Pentateuch was formed, usually dividing J into two parts.

Thus Otto Eissfeldt, in his *Hexateuchsynopse* of 1922, identified a Lay Source (L) which he claims has a nomadic outlook hostile to the Canaanite way of life. Smend and Eichrodt have isolated a similar document which they call J¹. In 1927, Julius Morgenstern wrote *The Oldest Document of the Hexateuch*, in which he claims to recognize a Kenite Source (K), which is similar to Eissfeldt's L and was used in the reform of King Asa about 900 BC.

Robert H. Pfeiffer, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, published 1941, splits J quite differently, calling the material in Genesis 1-11 previously assigned to J by the name S, standing for Mt. Seir in Edom. He claims this document is the earliest of all those in the Pentateuch, but that it was added to the others last.

Georg Fohrer, whose *Introduction to the Old Testament* was translated into English in 1965, divides Wellhausen's J into N and J, the latter document reflecting the attitudes of the farmer and the former those of the nomad.

Thus some of the leading writers in the field of Old Testament studies have felt the division of sources generally accepted is false. They are each convinced that their newly discovered document is very different from J in style. Certainly this must raise questions concerning the objectivity of stylistic determinations.

In addition, various scholars who generally accept the documentary theory have attacked different features of it, so that virtually every aspect of the theory has been questioned by several critical scholars. This is discussed briefly in Gleason Archer's *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 1964. Some have raised questions about the criterion of divine names as evidence of different documents. Others have wondered whether J, E and P were ever separate documents written at different times. Even among those who felt that J and E were separate, there is controversy over which was written first. Finally, there have been doubts expressed about the origin of D in the reign of Josiah, a result once hailed as assured.

It must be admitted that the majority of Old Testament scholars still hold to a division of documents like that favored by Wellhausen, even though they have abandoned most of his development theory (a major factor in its original acceptance). The question to be answered is, do they do so because the evidence favors it, or are they caught in a traditionalism which will not leave a sinking ship?

A Brief History of "Higher Criticism" in General Literature

Having seen something of the history of the higher criticism of the Pentateuch, it will be valuable now to see how similar methods have fared in the study of literature outside the Bible.

The Rise of Higher Criticism in General Literature

The beginnings of higher criticism in modern times can be traced back to the Renaissance. The first important triumph of this art was that of Lorenzo Valla, a Latin scholar and Papal secretary, who showed that the *Donation of Constantine* was not genuine. This document, which claimed to be an official paper of the Roman emperor Constantine (4th cen AD) and which assigned the central part of Italy to the Pope, was shown by Valla to be a forgery written in the 10th century.

About this same time, the Dutch humanist Erasmus questioned the authenticity of a group of 148 letters reputedly written by Phalaris, a tyrant who ruled Sicily in the 6th century BC. But it was not until 1699 that these letters were actually shown to be inauthentic, when Englishman Richard Bentley demonstrated they were written about AD 200. Apparently, the letters were not intentional frauds, but composition exercises for students. Less successfully, Bentley attempted to show that about half of Milton's *Paradise Lost* was written by his secretary.

In 1761 and 1763, two epic poems were published in Scotland, later collected under the title *The Poems of Ossian*. These were presented by James Macpherson as ancient Celtic epics which he had found and translated. In an age of great sentimentality and interest in the heroism of primitive people, the poems became very popular. Goethe translated them into German. Napoleon carried an Italian translation with him on his campaigns. But Dr. Samuel Johnson, a noted literary critic, questioned their authenticity. When he was presented with the "original manuscripts," he showed they were of recent origin. Nevertheless, the controversy continued well into the 19th century. Today it is agreed that the poems are almost entirely Macpherson's own compositions, with only a few links to poetry he had found in the Scottish highlands.

Extremes of the Wolfian School

About this time, higher criticism began to enter the field of Biblical studies with the work of Astruc and Eichhorn. In general literature these methods began to be applied extensively by Friedrich Augustus Wolf (1754-1824) and his followers. Wolf carried skepticism toward ancient writings to an extreme, not trusting any statement he found in them unless supported by other evidence. Working especially with the writings of Homer, he published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in 1795. In it he claimed that Homer did not write the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Instead, they grew up by a natural process, being a collection of songs sung by wandering Greek minstrels. Goethe was very much impressed by Wolf's thesis at first. Later, however, Goethe concluded that works of this caliber could not have been the result of a haphazard process of collection.

Karl Lachmann followed Wolf, dividing the German epic poem *Nibelungenlied* into twenty short lays which he felt were written much later than their setting would suggest. Lachmann felt these lays had been combined almost accidentally to form the epic. Later, Lachmann wrote *Reflections on Homer's Iliad*, in which he divided that poem into eighteen separated lays, some of which were supposed to have been intertwined when they were combined.

Thereafter the prevailing view of the *Iliad* was that it had formed by accretion, with a short poem, "The Wrath of Achilles" gradually accumulating additional material in the course of several centuries. George Grote's *History of Greece*, 1856, reflects this view.

Another work which came under the scrutiny of higher criticism was *Beowulf*, the oldest known Germanic epic. This work survived to modern times in only a single manuscript (now lost) written in Anglo-Saxon. During the 19th century, critics following the example of Wolf decided that *Beowulf* was the work of six authors, the earlier ones pagan and the later ones Christian. Again, it was thought that the material was compiled rather informally.

Likewise *Pier's Plowman*, an English work dating back to the 14th century, was said to be the work of five writers. J. A. Manley wrote an article in support of this view early in the 20th century, which may still be found in the most recently revised edition of the *Cambridge History of Literature*.

A somewhat similar situation developed in the study of medieval ballads. The Grimm brothers (of fairy-tale fame) advanced a theory for the communal origin of folk songs and ballads. These works, they claimed, were produced spontaneously by the people during folk dances and similar festive occasions. This view came to be summarized in the German phrase, *Das Volk dichtet* (the common people compose poetry).

Another important area analyzed by higher criticism was Shakespearean literature. The group of plays traditionally attributed to William Shakespeare are recognized throughout the world as among the greatest ever written. Not much is known about Shakespeare's life. The fact that he left school at the age of 14 led Herbert Lawrence, shortly before 1800, to suggest that Shakespeare could not have had the qualifications necessary to produce the works attributed to him. Thereafter, certain scholars began to suggest alternative authors.

In 1857, William Henry Smith wrote *Bacon and Shakespeare*, in which the literary endeavors ascribed to Shakespeare were transferred to his noted contemporary Francis Bacon. Certain phraseology common to both, together with Bacon's well-attested intellectual gifts, led to this suggestion. Later men extended this reasoning to the point where it looked like most of Elizabethan literature had been written by Bacon! This seems to suggest that the phraseology was characteristically Elizabethan, not an individual style.

In 1888, Ignatius Donnelly went even further. In his *Great Cryptogram*, he claimed that Bacon had written secret messages in the plays to show that he wrote them. Donnelly's methods of deciphering "messages" were so arbitrary that virtually anything could be found in the plays. Consequently the Baconian authorship theory is generally discredited today. In the meantime, others claimed that the plays attributed to Shakespeare had been written by other writers or noblemen of the period, but none of these views have been widely accepted.

A less extreme application of higher criticism to Shakespearean literature has been to seek sources for the material used in his plays. Obviously many of the ideas in the plays come from older sources. Some of the plays are even very similar to earlier plays, although there is an enormous difference in literary quality. An examination of style suggests that both *Henry 6* and *Henry 8* involved collaboration with another writer. But here also, certain extreme views have been advanced. For instance, Dover Wilson assigns certain lines in most of Shakespeare's plays to inferior authors.

In the meantime, the higher criticism of the Pentateuch was being extended to the entire Old Testament. Eichhorn's view that Moses used documents in writing Genesis was discarded in later editions of his *Introduction* where the documents were continued into Exodus, Leviticus, etc., where Moses would have been an eyewitness of the events described. Meanwhile DeWette proposed his fraud theory for the writing of Deuteronomy. By the time that Vatke's idea of reversing the chronological order of the law and the prophets had been accepted, such evolutionary ideas required that the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles be rejected as reliable history (since they did not show an evolutionary development). Similarly the Psalms could not be regarded as written at the time of King David. Stylistic theories and the rejection of predictive prophecy (which is supernatural, and therefore not allowed) then led to the dissection, and later the trisection, of the book of Isaiah. This latter principle required that the book of Daniel be dated in the Maccabean period (170 BC) rather than during the Babylonian captivity (6th century BC) as the book itself claims. Such are "the assured results of higher criticism" when applied to the Old Testament.

The Decline of Higher Criticism in General Literature

One of the earliest events to cast doubt on some of the results of higher criticism in general literature came in 1887 with the discover of some old manuscripts in a house where the German poet Goethe had lived as a young man. Goethe had worked on his masterpiece *Faust* throughout most of his life, finally publishing it shortly before his death in 1832. Some years later Wilhelm Scherer, a noted philologist, applied the principles of higher criticism to the prologue of *Faust*, publishing his results in a book entitled *Goethestudien*. Scherer showed that some sections of the prologue were written when Goethe was young, having an enthusiastic and idealistic tone. Other passages showed the disillusionment of old age and must have been written late in Goethe's life. These results were hailed as important achievements of higher criticism at the time. However, the manuscripts found in 1887 included an early version of *Faust* in which the prologue had almost the exact form of that finally published. Scherer's assignment of

passages to Goethe's old age, based on stylistic considerations, were shown to be incorrect when objective, external evidence came to light.

In the field of ballads and early prose narratives, the idea that a work was composed by a group has fallen into disfavor. Dr. Louise Pound, in her 1921 work, *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (reprinted 1948, 1962), summarizes here findings as follows:

Songs composed and sung by individuals and songs sung by groups of singers (or "throng," if you prefer) are to be found in the most primitive of living tribes. That in the earliest stage there was group utterance only, arising from the folk-dance, is fanciful hypothesis. That primitive song is of group composition or collaboration, not individual composition, is quite as fanciful.

This view is corroborated by Paul Radin in an article "Primitive Literature" in *The World Through Literature* (1959), edited by Charlton Laird:

I think we can safely dismiss all theories of communal authorship. The evidence at our disposal today proves overwhelmingly that poems and prose narratives are composed by individuals, no matter how communal the setting in which they are composed. Nor is there any reason for believing that at any time in the history of the world it has been otherwise.

As regards medieval literature, for example, the *Nibelungenlied* and *Beowulf*, R. W. Chambers (in *Man's Unconquerable Mind*) and others have pointed out that, although these works show a combination of ideas from different sources, the quality of composition does not allow merely sticking lays together. Chambers well remarks, "Half a dozen motorbikes cannot be combined to make a Rolls-Royce." Concerning the view that *Beowulf* was the work of both pagan and Christian writers, he says:

... most students have long ago abandoned the attempt [to sort the poem into Christian and non-Christian sections], and have come to agree that the Christian elements are, almost without exception, so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the poem that they cannot be explained away as the work of a reviewer or later interpolator.

Today only a few scholars argue for the multiple authorship of *Pier's Plowman*, most feeling that William Langland was the sole author. It is true that the recently reprinted *Cambridge History of Literature* still contains an old article advocating multiple authorship, but Helen Gardner in *The Business of Criticism* (1959) says:

The importance of the single author and the single work dominates literary studies, as can be seen if the plan and treatment of the new *Oxford History of English Literature*, now in progress, is compared with that of the old *Cambridge History*.

In Homeric studies there has been a strong shift toward the unity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, though many think the two have different authors. Of course no one argues that Homer made up his material from nothing, so there may well be sources behind Homer. But this does not deny the unity of authorship. C. M. Bowra, in *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (1930, reprinted 1950, 1958, 1963) discusses the criticism of Homer. Where repetitions have been cited to show multiple authorship, he questions the method used to assign an earlier date to one of the passages. He admits that the *Iliad* contains some inexplicable contradictions, but they no more indicate multiple authorship than a fallible single author:

Homer's name, remembered and honoured, is perhaps the best evidence for his early fame and influence, and the best answer to those who think that the *Iliad* is the work of several great poets and several bunglers. Even the *Odyssey* in antiquity was sometimes taken from him, but the *Iliad* remained his until scientific criticism strained at the gnat of some difficulties in composition, and swallowed the camel of multiple authorship. The credit for the *Iliad* rests primarily with Homer who gave the poem its shape, its unity of character and style, its dramatic impetus and high, imaginative life. Such gifts come only from genius, and genius does not belong to compilers or guilds.

Albert Guerard, Professor of General and Comparative Literature at Stanford University, summarizes the present situation regarding Homer as follows:

... internal evidence, of a convincing nature, reveals a commanding artistic personality. To dissolve Homer into a myth or a committee, much stronger acid would be needed than the Wolfian school has been able to supply.

In the study of Shakespeare, the theory of Baconian authorship was never widely accepted among scholars and is considered absurd today. Thus in the article "Shakespeare" in the 1956 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* we read:

Thus a kind of thesis which finds its motive in the assumed improbability of the possession of abnormal literary genius by an actor who left school at 14, has accumulated through all its variants a mass of improbabilities not to be matched in speculative research on any other field.

A somewhat less radical view of the Shakespearean plays is discussed by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *The Theory of Literature* (1942, 1949):

... The work of Dover Wilson more legitimately belongs to "higher criticism." Wilson makes very large claims for the method: "We can at times creep into the compositor's skin and catch glimpses of the MS through his eyes. The door of Shakespeare's workshop stands ajar." No doubt, the "bibliographers" have thrown some light on the composition of

Elizabethan plays and have suggested, and possibly proved, many traces of revision and alteration. But many of Dover Wilson's hypotheses seem fanciful constructions for which evidence seems very slight or even completely lacking. Thus Dover Wilson has constructed the genesis of *The Tempest*. He claims that the long exposition scene points to the existence of an earlier version in which the pre-history of the plot has been told as a loosely constructed drama in the style of *The Winter's Tale*. But the slight inconsistencies and irregularities in line arrangement, etc., cannot yield even presumptive evidence for such farfetched and needless fancies.

Thus a view identified as "higher criticism" of Shakespeare is today generally rejected.

Not only has higher criticism now been rejected in many works of general literature (of which we have cited only a few), so that its application to the Bible almost stands alone, but the principles themselves by which higher criticism is conducted have recently come under general attack. Richard Altick in *The Art of Literary Research* (1963) says:

The determination of authorship requires the gathering and judicious assessment of as much evidence, both internal and external, as can be found. Internal evidence is normally more abundant, but it is also very slippery ... The premise underlying its use (statistical studies of word usage, meter, etc.) is that every author's work has unique idiosyncrasies of style ... Theoretically, this manner of proceeding is legitimate enough, and some of the results obtained have won wide acceptance. Many authorship studies, notably in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth, laid claim to scientific rigor, and were published with an imposing panoply of statistical charts and tables. F. G. Eleay's *Shakespeare Manual* (1878) is an easily accessible example of such work.

It is to be admitted that "unique idiosyncrasies of style" may be valuable in determining authorship, but only if we have known examples of the suggested authors' styles already in hand. Even then there may be problems. Altick continues:

Sometimes, too, the styles of several authors, all of whom may have contributed to a work, are so similar that differentiation of their respective portions is impossible. Though we know that a dozen men (Swift, Arbuthnot, Pope, Gay, Parnell, and the Earl of Oxford) composed the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, we cannot positively isolate the contributions of any one of them.

The easy assumption of multiple authorship has come on hard times, as Helen Gardner (cited above) points out:

In field after field theories of composite authorship, earlier versions, different strata have been discarded. The kind of analysis which was once

thought to be the particular duty of literary criticism is now markedly out of fashion. The assumption today is more and more in favour of single authorship, unless there is clear external evidence to the contrary, and of taking works as they stand and not postulating earlier versions to account for inconsistencies. Even where the inconsistencies in the work as published are as glaring as they are in *The Faerie Queene*, most people would agree with Professor C. S. Lewis that it is "quite impossible to reconstruct historically the phases in Spenser's invention of which particular inconsistencies are, so to speak, the fossils," and would applaud him for taking the poem as it exists and not speculating on its growth ... "Schools of influence" are now out of fashion. Old disintegrating theories which assumed that Shakespeare spent much of his career revising other men's plays, and later attempts to show him as almost continuously engaged in revising his own, theories of *Beowulf* being based on heroic lays, and laater theories of a pre-Christian *Beowulf* were all in the air, or at least being debated, thirty years ago [~1930], although they were then being increasingly challenged. The modern undergraduate is not troubled by these discussions. Occam's razor has been applied to the critical postulates beloved by the nineteenth-century scholars. The modern scholar or critic concentrates in the first place on making what he can of his text as it has come down to him. There has been a strong reaction against the study of even extant and known sources, much more againt the discussion of hypothetical ones.

Even in the case of a work generally recognized to be of multiple authorship, the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, division into component documents is uncertain. Charles Drekmeier (in *Kinship and Community in Early India*, 1962) says:

Hopkins many years ago concluded that the original narrative core of the epic is impossible to isolate from the later mythical and moralistic accretions, and few present-day students of the *Mahabharata* would question his judgment.

In conclusion, it appears that many of the methods and assumptions of higher criticism have been discredited in general literature. Why has this not been so in Biblical studies?

Written about 1970 as a chapter in a book that was never published. For a detailed critique of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis, also known as the JEDP theory, see Allan A. MacRae, *JEDP: Lectures on the Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1994).