

## AJS Proposal

### Kindred Metaphors: Literary Criticism at the Confluence of Narratology and Jewish Mysticism

In this paper I lay out the foundation for what I hope to develop into a system of literary criticism: a subfield of narratology that employs as its basic grammar biblical interpretation and Jewish mysticism.

My analysis focuses on a metaphor family – kindred metaphors – in Jewish mysticism. This family includes the World as *Book*, The Torah as *Blueprint*, God as *Author*, and *Letters* as Building Blocks. The resulting conceptual system – as demonstrated by the emphasized terms – is narratological in nature. That is, the religious and spiritual system of Judaism is conceived of as a story. Consequently, it useful to draw on the insights of narratology for tools of analysis, and, vice versa, to analyze this system so as to elucidate the field of narratology.

The interpretations of scripture that form this metaphor family abound in multiple sources, including Hayyim Nahman Bialik's and Y. H. Rawnitzky's collection *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* and Howard Schwartz's collection *Tree of Souls*, as well as Gershom Scholem's works. The ubiquity of these metaphors in Jewish myth and biblical interpretation indicates their status as crucial metaphors in the conceptualization of Jewish mysticism.

The kindred metaphors have already entered the general arena of literary criticism, as evidenced by their frequent utilization outside of biblical studies. I will discuss how these metaphors are involved in the work of Marilyn French, Brian McHale, Umberto Eco, George Steiner, and Scholem, and in the fiction of John Barthes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Jorge Luis Borges. Each author examines an aspect of the following: the essential and constructive power of letters in the make-up of the universe. The examples from different authors substantiate the relevance of the kindred metaphors to literary criticism.

Narratology and biblical studies have yet to be systematically combined into a mutually informative framework, and I believe that such a framework would benefit both fields immensely. My proposed paper

would introduce such a framework and render it applicable to literary criticism as well as biblical interpretation.