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OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES
Intertextuality and Midrash

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The Soviet Structuralists call these phenomena "poetic quota-
tions." They are much more important in Mandel'stam's work
than it might seem from these few passing remarks for they
function as tools for building the cultural paradigm, for super-
imposing the past upon the present, thus reversing the flow of
time. The poet himself conceived of poetry as a tool by means of
which the past can re-enter the present. "Poetry is the plough
tearing open and turning over time so that the deep layers of it,
its rich black undersoil, ends up on the surface. There are peri-
ods when mankind, dissatisfied with its today and yearning for
the deep layers of time, crave, like a ploughman, for the virgin
soil of time."[1]
Such a time was the time in which midrash was created.

1

In recent theoretical writing, the concept of intertextuality
plays a significant role. Júlia Kristeva's insight (inspired by
Bakhtin) that, "every text builds itself as a mosaic of quota-
tions, every text is absorption and transformation of another
text" (1979:146) has inspired both an enrichment of "practical
criticism" and descriptive poetics. In this paper, I would like
to study the workings of intertextuality in a specific non-West-
ern literary tradition, the *midrash*. Midrash is the way the
Sages of the Talmudic Period (the first five centuries of the
Christian Era) read the Bible, as well as the written evidence
for that way of reading.[2] Much of midrash presents itself in

the form of a paraphrase of the Biblical text in which verses and parts of verses from many places in the canon are combined into a new discourse. It is accordingly openly and radically intertextual (by Kristeva's definition) in its very foundations, inasmuch as it lays bare (almost precisely in the formalist sense) the mosaic-structure of quotations from which the text (all texts) is built.[3]

The specific question I would like to address here has to do with the cultural function of texts which build themselves openly out of more or less transformed *tesserae*[4] of known earlier texts.[5] In this, midrash is paralleled by a well-studied literary movement, the Russian Acmeist poets. Accordingly, some theoretical writings on Acmeist poetics may be of heuristic significance for our inquiry. Elaine Rusinko, who described both the Acmeist poetics of intertextuality as well as the descriptive poetics of its major critics, has compared Russian and French accounts of intertextuality. The Russian versions emphasize the preserving functions of the quoting text:

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3. Implied here is a solution to a general source of confusion about the notion of intertextuality. It has been claimed that what distinguishes "intertextuality" from the traditional study of "sources and influences" is the anonymity and generality of the former as "discursive space," as opposed to the specificity and identifiability of the latter. Jonathan Culler (106) has raised this question. If this is true, then, as Culler claims, it becomes quite impossible, by definition, to study the intertexts of a specific text. The solution may be assayed by distinguishing differently between "sources and influences," which are a diachronic concept and "intertexts," which are a synchronic concept and therefore may constitute a specific discursive space which makes a specific text intelligible. Now we may assume that, while the intertexts of a given text will often be unremembered consciously ("anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost"), there is no reason why there should not be other intertexts whose origins are not lost and discursive practices which "make possible the signifying practices of later texts" but are not anonymous. Accordingly, we can then proceed to study allusions and even quotations in literature as a synchronic semantic phenomenon, intertextuality, without thereby confusing it with the diachronic study of sources and influences. This is a different sort of distinction than the one usually made between allusion which is intentional and intertextuality which is not, cf. James Chandler (464–465). In my matrix, allusion and quotation, as well as the lost codes and anonymous discursive practices, are all species of one genus, as opposed to sources and influences. For a similar perspective see Ben-Porat (170) and passim.

4. This term is a particularly apt one for the fragments of earlier text out of which new ones are built, for it means in Latin (ex Greek) both a piece of stone used for making a mosaic as well as a small tablet with a password, establishing the right of a person to enter the Camp. Bloom uses the term in a somewhat different sense in his *Map of Misreading* (1975:98 ff.).

5. Compare the following statement of Morawski: "Quotation, therefore, lays bare the fundamental dilemma of every age—choosing between innovation and the duplication of canonized exemplars—and the way in which the past is consciously or unconsciously filtered" (691–692). The reason for using the concept of "intertextuality" and not just quotation is precisely that the former includes "the way in which the past is unconsciously filtered," as part of the same structure as quotation and allusion.

The [Russian, D.B.] Structuralists[6] see Acmeism as a paradigm-creating force in a period of general dislocation of cultural models.... The poet's task in history, according to Mandel'stam, is "to Europeanize and humanize the twentieth century" that is, to preserve and perpetuate the values of humanistic culture ... (225).[7]

In contrast, French theoreticians see intertextuality as a decentralizing and destabilizing force:

Intertextuality functions both as a mechanism for challenging and subverting the literary ideologies that dominate the writing, reading, and criticism of most contemporary fiction and as the means of producing a text written and structured according to new theoretical concepts. The introduction into *La Bataille* of other texts serves the ultimate purpose of calling into question the privileged status of literature by implicitly integrating *all* texts into a literary system that defines itself as being in constant motion and, therefore, potentially capable of an infinite reinvention of meaning.... By fragmenting and assimilating as generative elements texts that have the status of classics, *La Bataille* removes them from the privileged position in which these texts as immobilized totalities are usually placed (Grosselin 1978:23).

Rusinko argues that the only conflict here is one of emphasis:

Though these "disruptive" factors are implicitly present also in the Russian conception of the method, they are subordinated to the positive, generative, and reconstructive features of subtext as preserver and renewer of culture and humanistic values (232).

Our study of midrash[8] will bear out this perspective that explicit intertextuality can carry with it both "disruptive" and "reconstructive" features and I will argue that, with reference to midrash at least, this double movement of disruption and regeneration is precisely its *raison d'être.*

It is not sufficient, however, to compare midrash to poetry; it must also be studied as a species of hermeneutic discourse. Here also, the function of quotations has been analyzed by contemporary theoreticians. One of the most useful analyses for the study of midrash is that of Stefan Morawski. In his taxonomy of functions of quotation in modern texts, he has described

a particularly fascinating phenomenon which deserves separate analysis, namely the selection and interpolation of quotations in such a way that they make for a reinterpretation, for instance, of the philosophical

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6. Prof. Itamar Even-Zohar informs me of the crucial work of Taranovsky and his students at Harvard.

7. Cf. also Peter Steiner, and see below.

8. Although I have been writing of "midrash" as if it were a unitary phenomenon, it is, in fact, quite variegated. Midrashic texts were produced over a period of more than a thousand years, and therefore, show different rhetorical and hermeneutic styles. In my work, I am studying the earliest layer of rabbinic midrash we have, the *tannaite* texts of the first centuries of the Common Era and particularly the commentary on *Exodus* from this period, known as the *Mekhilta.*

tradition on to which the investigator has fastened.... This phenomenon can be explained in terms of the hermeneutic interpretation of the classical texts of each school of thought. Every period of history approaches its heritage anew. By rearranging and regrading the basic elements of this legacy, it also gives it a slightly altered meaning. In such a restructuralization of a particular philosophical theory, the quotation plays a double role: *it both continues and breaches the tradition*, that is, uncovers angles of inquiry which were unknown or forgotten. Hermeneutics is a corroboration and fulfillment of the vitality of the theory involved; hence quotation operates in this context equivocally. At one level it encapsulates accepted philosophical propositions, but, above all, it performs in a new whole designed to modify this acceptance (694).

The thesis of this paper is that studying midrash on the background of these theoretical analyses of the functions of intertextuality and quotation in modern texts will provide a fruitful avenue for overcoming the strangeness of midrash without violating and reducing that very otherness.[9] Midrash, it will be claimed, provides a particularly special and interesting case of the intersection between the intertextuality of the poetic text and the quotations of the critical text.

2

One of the most characteristic features of midrash is the way in which, as a reading practice, it violates the context of the texts being interpreted and cited. This is often cited as evidence for either the naïveté or hermeneutic bad faith of the rabbis; however, it is precisely the question of the power of context to determine meaning that is at issue in contemporary theory. This power necessarily implies the continued presence of the author or, at any rate, the author's intention, in his text, which is exactly what is denied by contemporary philosophies of meaning such as Derrida's:[10]

By the same token, a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is the set of presences which organize the moment

9. The full quotation I am paraphrasing here is from Bakhtin: "In the human sciences, accuracy consists in overcoming the other's strangeness without assimilating it wholly to oneself (all sorts of substitutions, modernizations, non-recognition of the stranger, etc.)" (Todorov:24).

10. Note that this denial goes much further than the denial of the "intentional fallacy," which privileges context, "the organic *work*" as a feature of the text determining meaning, while the grammatological perception explodes the borders of the work as being also implicated in the same fallacy. Moreover, when I said here, "such as Derrida's," this was meant very seriously. There is a growing recognition that many of his ideas are paralleled by the thinking of American analytic philosophers. Samuel Wheeler III of the University of Connecticut is doing some impressive work in this area. It seems to me, therefore, that those proponents of a philological interpretation which searches for certainty as to *original meaning, intended by the author* seem increasingly naive, while midrash looks more and more sophisticated as a hermeneutic model.

of its inscription. This force of breaking is not an accidental predicate, but the very structure of the written. If the issue is one of the so-called "real" context, what I have just proposed is too obvious. Are part of this alleged real context a certain "present" of inscription, the presences of the scriptor in what he has written, the entire environment and horizon of his experience, and above all the intention, the meaning which at a given moment would animate his inscription? By all rights, it belongs to the sign to be legible, even if the moment of its production is irremediably lost, and even if I do now know what its alleged author-scriptor meant consciously and intentionally at the moment he wrote it, that is abandoned to its essential drifting. Turning now to the semiotic and internal context, there is no less a force of breaking by virtue of its essential iterability; one can always lift a written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it is caught or given without making it lose every possibility of functioning, if not every possibility of "communicating" precisely. Eventually, one may recognize other such possibilities in it by inscribing or grafting it into other chains. No context can enclose it. Nor can any code, the code being here both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity) (Derrida 1982:317).[11]

As we will see presently, midrashic reading is precisely "lifting the written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it is caught" and "recognizing other such possibilities [of 'communicating'] in it by inscribing or grafting it into other chains," in short, recontexting. There is, however, a fundamental distinction between midrash and deconstruction: for the rabbis, this reading practice is a recuperation of presence, albeit not in the sense of access (mediated or not) to the originary vocal moment of the text but rather by recreating a new moment of "Oral Torah," which is, at the same time, always a new and present text as well as a reading of the Written Torah.[12] In literary terms, there is a tension between the meaning of the quoted text in its "original" context and in its present context.[13] What is so striking (and strange) about midrash is its claim that the new context is implied by the old one, that the new meanings (Oral Torah) revealed by recontexting of pieces of the authoritative text, are a legitimate interpretation of the Written Torah itself and indeed given with the very revelation thereof.[14]

11. Cf. also Vincent B. Leitch (123–157).
12. It is interesting to compare the following description of Chinese intertextuality: "it is quite true that almost every ancient Chinese text is an intertext, but an intertext significantly different from that understood in deconstructive criticism. While a deconstructive *intertexte* is a trace without an origin, a Chinese intertext is always a trace leading back to the origin, to the fountainhead of tradition, the great thinkers of Taoism and Confucianism" (Zhang Longxi:397).
13. Hasan-Rokem (55) has described well the semantics of this tension.
14. Without, nevertheless, meaning that one can say anything one wants about the text and that all interpretations are equally legitimate. I only make this point because this seems to be a common misconception about midrash (and, for that matter, deconstruc-

The Talmud preserves a narrative which contains a virtu-
ally explicit commentary on midrashic intertextuality:

> We have learnt there: If it [a stove] was cut into coils and he put sand
> between the coils; R. Eliezer calls it pure and the Sages call it impure.
> This is the stove of Akhnai. What is "Akhnai?" Said Rav Yehuda, said
> Shmuel, "They encircled it with words like this Akhna [species of
> snake] and called it impure. A sage teaches: On that day. R. Eliezer used
> all the refutation in the world, but they did not accept it from him. He
> said, "If the law is as I say, this carob will prove it." The carob was up-
> rooted from its place one hundred feet. Some say it "four hundred feet."
> They said to him, "One does not quote a carob as proof." He further said
> to them, "If the law is as I say, the water pipe will prove it." The water
> began to flow backwards. They said to him "One does not quote a carob as
> proof." Again, he said to them, "If the law is as I say, the walls of the
> House of Study will prove it." The walls of the House of Study leaned over
> to fall. R. Yehoshua rebuked them, saying to them, "If the Disciples of
> the Wise are striving with each other for the Law, what have you to do
> with it?" They did not fall because of the honor of R. Yehoshua, and did
> not stand straight for the honor of R. Eliezer. He said to them, "If the
> law is as I say, let it be proven from Heaven." A voice went out and said,
> "What are you next to R. Eliezer, according to whom the law is in every
> place?" R. Yehoshua stood on his feet and said, "It is not in heaven!!"
> What is "It is not in heaven?" Said R. Yermiah, "Since the Torah has
> already been given from Mt. Sinai, we do not pay attention to Heavenly
> Voices, for You have written already at Mt. Sinai, 'Incline after the
> majority.'" R. Natan found Eliahu [the prophet Elijah] and asked him
> "What was The Holy One—Blessed be He doing at that moment?" He
> said to him, "Laughing and saying, 'My children have defeated Me. My
> children have defeated Me.'"[15]

This story has been studied from the point of view of its
manifest content, that is, on the one hand, as a reflection on
the nature of interpretation and the role of intention in deter-
mining (or not determining) meaning,[16] and on the other, as a
manifestation of rabbinic power struggles.[17] The case of the
purity or impurity of a certain type of earthenware stove is
made a synecdoche for the question of the Oral Torah as a
whole. What is the Snake-Stove? "Said Rav Yehuda, said
Shmuel, They encircled it with words like this snake." For R.
Yehoshua, "Oral Torah" means the Torah expounded orally in

the interactive process of dialectical reading for the Law. Meaning is not in Heaven, not in a voice behind the Text, but in the House of Midrash, in the voices in front of the Text. The Written Torah is the Torah which is written and Oral Torah is the Torah which is read.

What has not yet been shown is the structure of significa- tion of this text itself, not what it talks about but what it says by how it talks. The point which has been missed is that R. Yehoshua's "It is not in heaven" is an out of context citation.[18] R. Yehoshua is arguing with God from God's own Text. You have given up Your right as Author and even as Divine Voice to interpret Your Torah when You said, "It is not in heaven." But R. Yehoshua's act is not only constative, describing or making a claim about interpretation, it is also performative, instituting and creating by its doing, the Oral Torah. For "it is not in heaven" is itself not in heaven. R. Yehoshua breaks it out of context and re-cites it in his own.

In the Torah which is written, the verse seems to say only that the fulfillment of the Torah's commands is not beyond the reach of the human being:

> For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you or too remote. *It is not in heaven*, that one should say, Who will arise to the heaven, take it and make it heard that we might do it. And it is not over the sea, that one might say, Who will cross to the other side of the sea and take it for us, and make us hear it, that we might do it. Rather, the word [thing] is very close to you in your mouth and heart, to do it [Deut. 30:11-14].

Without fanfare, R. Yehoshua uncovers radical new meaning in this verse, simply by reinscribing it in a new context. "It is not in heaven" does not mean only that the Torah is not be- yond human reach but that it is beyond Divine reach, as it were. And God laughing with pleasure admits that R. Yehoshua, the faithful disciple, has indeed discovered a meaning which was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, even though He Himself was not aware of it until now. "My children have defeated Me"; they have striven with Me and won. God laughed and, in that laugh, midrash was born.

However, present within the narrative is a commentary on itself, namely the sentences:

> What is "It is not in heaven?" Said R. Yermiah, "Since the Torah has already been given from Mt. Sinai, we do not pay attention to Heavenly

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18. See Handelman, *Moses* (42), who does not italicize the words "It is not in heaven" although she does italicize "Incline after a majority," indicating that she missed the point that the former is a cited verse as well. She thus implicitly accepts the "tame" late reading of R. Yermiah [see below] of what R. Yehoshua says and ignores precisely the radical implications of how he says what he says.

> Voices, for You have written already at Mt. Sinai, 'Incline after the majority.'"

What this late[19] addition to the text tends to do is to ignore or reduce the radical implications of R. Yehoshua's act by substituting for them another act. The question is asked: what is the meaning of "It is not in heaven," and R. Yermiah answers by supplying another subtext, namely the verse from Exodus 23:2, which says explicitly (i.e., in its own context) that the law is in accordance with the view of a human majority and therefore, a voice from heaven cannot control its interpretation. R. Yermiah's approach is tamer than the "original" meaning of R. Yehoshua's statement, precisely because it does not involve the wresting of the Torah from Heaven in its very utterance, as his does. R. Yermiah talks about the absolute right of the interpreter to interpret; R. Yehoshua demonstrates how radical that right is. Note that the implications of both are the same in terms of the arrogation of the ultimate right to interpret on the part of the bearers of the Oral Law, the Readers, and in this sense, R. Yermiah certainly does not suborn R. Yehoshua's statement. He does, however, reduce it as an act of midrash making and as a performative of the act of midrash making by reinscription of texts in new contexts. Thus the radicality of R. Yehoshua's move, both in his explicit claim and in the act of doing it, figures the disruptive nature of the intertext, which rips its tessera out of the signifying chain in which it is inscribed by its Author. God's assent to this radical act, His laugh of pleasure, establishes its legitimacy and thereby figures the regenerating and preserving function of the intertext.

Every use of a Hebrew word or phrase recalls a network of association with other uses of the same or related or even unrelated words that resonate with it. If I wish to pray, argue with God, interpret, or read, all I have is God's words with which to do so. Midrashic reading is discovery of meaning through the interanimation of recontexted verses. On this point, midrash is different from other texts only in its laying bare of this truth.[20] In the evocative words of Bakhtin:

> The dialogical orientation is obviously a characteristic phenomenon of all discourse. It is the natural aim of all living discourse. Discourse

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19. Demonstrably so, since R. Yermiah, its author, lived centuries later than the *tannaitic* protagonists of the story itself.

20. This text of mine is one of a series of explorations I am undertaking of midrashic reading practices and especially the relationship of those practices to the concept of intertextuality. My overall perspective in this work is that midrash is less different from the way we normally read than it is usually presented. However, "if it's so much the same, why is it so different?" is also a question my work must not ignore. Various parts of the final work will, accordingly, treat the sameness and differences of midrash to and from other hermeneutic models and practices.

comes upon the discourse of the other on all the roads that lead to its ob-
ject, and it cannot but enter into intense and lively interaction with it.
Only the mythical and totally alone Adam, approaching a virgin and
still unspoken world with the very first discourse could really avoid al-
together this mutual reorientation with respect to the ... discourse of the
other, that occurs on the way to the object (Todorov 1984:62).

This "dialogic orientation" (Bakhtin's original term for what
is now called "intertextuality") belongs to semantics, to
meaning and thus to interpretation. As an act of interpretation
texts may be placed in juxtaposition:

> Two verbal works, two utterances, in juxtaposition, enter into a particu-
> lar kind of semantic relation, which we call dialogical. Dialogical re-
> lations are (semantic) relations between all the utterances within ver-
> bal communication (Todorov 1984:60–61).

At this point, midrashic reading may be defined as exegesis
by radical explicit intertextuality. Midrash is interpretation
because it shows how meaning is created in the (nearly) infi-
nite dialogical relations of text to text within the Torah and of
the readers' discourse to that of the Other. As opposed to the
hermeneutic model, such as Schleiermacher's and its de-
scendants, which pictures the reader as going back into the
past and becoming one somehow with it, midrash figures in-
terpretation as digging into the past and appropriating its trea-
sures for the present[21] and it achieves this appropriation via
textual recombination and recontexting:

> Ben-Azzai was sitting and interpreting (making midrash), and fire was
> all around him. They went and told Rabbi Aqiba, "Rabbi, Ben-Azzai is
> sitting and interpreting, and fire is burning all around him." He went
> to him and said to him, "I heard that you were interpreting, and the
> fire burning all around you." He said, "Indeed." He said, "Perhaps you
> were engaged in the inner-rooms of the Chariot [theosophical specula-
> tion]." He said, "No. I was sitting and stringing the words of Torah [to
> each other], and the Torah to the Prophets and the Prophets to the Writ-
> ings, and the words were as radiant/joyful as when they were given
> from Sinai, and they were as sweet as at their original giving. Were
> they not originally given in fire, as it is written, 'And the mountain
> was burning with fire' [Deut. 4:11]?"[22]

3

The "recontexting" of midrash takes different forms. Some-
times, verses are collected into sets in which their similari-
ties and differences are the interconnection which re-
leases/creates their meaning. At other times, the newly con-
texted verses are placed together in a narrative structure. I call

the first type "paradigmatic recontexting" and the second is
called, of course, "syntagmatic recontexting."

The most dramatic form of paradigmatic intertextual dia-
logue is the confrontation of texts, revealing in the process
hitherto unrealized possibilities of meaning:

> Rabbi Shim'on ben Gamliel says, Come and see how beloved is Israel
> before Him-Who-Spoke-And-The-World-Was, for as they are beloved,
> He reversed the Act of Creation. He made the low into the high and the
> high into the low. Formerly, bread came up from the land, and dew
> came down from the heaven, as it says, "A land of grain and wine, and
> His heavens drip dew [Deut. 33:28]." But now, the matters are reversed.
> Bread began to come down from heaven and dew to go up from the land,
> as it says, "Behold I rain down to you bread from heaven [Ex. 16:4]—and
> the layer of dew went up [Ex. 16:14]."[23]

R. Shim'on's move here is to place these "two utterances in
juxtaposition" so that they "enter into a particular kind of se-
mantic relation"—dialogue or intertextuality. Meaning is re-
leased in this interaction of texts which neither text had on its
own, in its own context. What is in Deuteronomy a poetic
statement of the richness of the land becomes background for
a high drama of cosmic intervention. What in Exodus reads as
physical description of the events of the miracle comes to
have an axiological significance unfelt in the original context.
This miracle was so great it involved nothing less than a total
restructuring of the universe. That meaning is already there
in verses or rather between them, that is in the potential dia-
logue between them. It is neither imposed on the verses "from
outside" nor does it lie behind them as "intention" but is re-
vealed/created in their coming together—in the bringing to-
gether performed by the midrashist, R. Shim'on.

What is the function, however, of R. Shim'on's "come and
see how beloved is Israel before Him-Who-Spoke-And-The-
World-Was?" This is clearly an assertion which is not
"literally" there in the verses as they stand in their Biblical
contexts. We sense here accordingly the disruptive factors in
intertextuality. The stability of the Biblical text is somehow
threatened. However, at the same time, this meaning emerges
so powerfully from the interaction of this set of recontexted
signifiers that it does seem to have always been there.
Whether or not we wish to call this a misreading (indeed
whether or not this term has any meaning), it is nevertheless
so strong a reading that it has power to regenerate at the same

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23. *Mekhilta* to Ex. 16:4 and 14. Characteristically, R. Shim'on's very verse is an amal-
gam of two verses. We have here an excellent example of the "polygenetic quotation"
discussed infra. This is my own translation, as are all the translations from Hebrew in
this paper. The texts translated are based on the best manuscript readings and not on
standard editions.

time that it disrupts, which is indeed the claim we are making (in the wake of Rusinko) for intertextuality itself. This invitation to come and see is a rhetorical figure through which the meanings of the verses may be read in association. If you will, it is a kind of generic pattern which enabled the midrashist, R. Shim'on, to cause the verses to speak with each other and a kind of axiological code, by which we can read the juxtaposition. W.S. Towner has characterized this midrashic method as a "device for 'setting up' the scripture so that it can be seen and heard" (1973:99).[24]

An even more striking type of disruption and regeneration as a way of reading are the examples of syntagmatic recontexting, those in which narratives are constructed around a verse or concatenation of verses, as a new context for them. One such case in the *Mekhilta* is particularly significant because it openly announces its strategy:

> And the angel of God, going before the Camp of Israel, moved and went behind them. And the Pillar of Cloud moved from before them and went behind them [Ex. 14:19]. R. Yehuda said: This is a Scripture enriched from many places. He made of it a *mashal*;[25] to what is the matter similar? To a king who was going on the way, and his son went before him. Brigands came to kidnap him from in front. He took him from in front and placed him behind him. A wolf came behind him. He took him from behind and placed him in front. Brigands in front and the wolf in back he (He) took him and placed him in his (His) arms, for it says, "I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them on My arms [Hosea 11:3]."

> The son began to suffer; he (He) took him on his shoulders, for it is said, "in the desert which you saw, where the Lord, Your God carried you [Deut. 1:31]." The son began to suffer from the sun; he (He) spread on him His cloak, for it is said, "He has spread a cloud as a curtain [Ps. 105:39]." He became hungry; he (He) fed him, for it is said, "Behold I send bread, like rain, from the sky [Ex. 16:4]." He became thirsty, he (He) gave him drink for it is said, "He brought streams out of the rock [Ps. 78:16]."[26]

This text is exceedingly important to us because it is one of the few places[27] where we find an explicit comment by the rabbis on their hermeneutic method. R. Yehuda says that the way to interpret our verse is to consider it in the light of many other verses. This is a reflex of the general rabbinic principle that the "words of Torah are poor in their own context [lit. in their place] and rich in another context [Palestinian Talmud, *Rosh*

24. W.S. Towner (99). Note that Towner clearly sees that these juxtaposing figures are interpretive.
25. Usually translated "parable" but see discussion below.
26. Also drawn from my new translation of the *Mekhilta*, this text has been completely corrupted in current editions, both vulgate and critical, and may only be restored by recourse to the oldest manuscripts.
27. For another, see below.

Hashana, 3:5=58d]." Far from being limited to being inter-preted in its context, the verse is considered as impoverished in meaning when only read there.

R. Yehuda's stated purpose is to provide commentary for the verse "And the angel of God, etc." The reading is accom-plished by bringing together other texts which relate to the same subject, the behavior of God toward Israel in the wilder-ness. These texts, which form a semantic field or paradigm, are reinscribed in a new narrative, in a new syntagmatic strcture, by the midrashist. This move is emblematic of the whole midrashic program, in which the verses (sentences) of the Bible are approached as elements in a semiotic system. This is a difficult and (I am sure) controversial point, so I would like to spend some time getting at it.

Ricoeur (68–70), following Benveniste, holds that the sen-tence does not belong to semiotics but to semantics, that is, that the sentence is a non-iterable moment of discourse. I am sug-gesting that the concept of intertextuality, as theorized by Kris-teva and realized in midrash, shows how the sentence belongs both to semiotics as well as to semantics. That is, once we conceive of the text or, as in midrash, openly compose the text as a mosaic of quotations, those very quotations function in the way linguistics conceives of the word as sign as functioning in building sentences.[28] Or in slightly different language, the Written Torah is conceived of on the paradigmatic plane, the Oral Torah [midrash] on the syntagmatic. Compare the fol-lowing statement of an important Soviet theoretician: "In Lot-man's terms, this approach to the semantics of a text can be expressed as various syntagmatic realizations of a single paradigmatic unit; the context forms the paradigmatic plane and individual poetic expressions represent syntagma."[29] A similar point has been made by Hasan-Rokem with regard to the use of the proverb in narrative, however, expressly excluding quotation from its purview:

28. See also Hrushovski (11), who suggests that there is another unit of discourse, the *"frame of reference,"* or world the text projects. Working on that basis, Prof. Hrushovski suggests to me that we could say that the midrash, using the sentences of the Bible as signs, creates discourses with them which are defined by having new frames of refer-ence. This is a more powerful formulaton than merely referring to context.

29. Rusinko (219, n. 3). Context is used by Rusinko/Lotman in the broad sense in which it is used in Russian literary theory, namely as the entire corpus of an author's works (at the very least!). "Context" is accordingly equivalent, or nearly so, to Canon for midrash. Lest there be any confusion, these categories are not mutually exclusive. That is, a text can be both a syntagmatic performance of language and be *about* the paradigmatic plane of that language (or another). One need only think of a grammar book to realize this truth. Are the paradigms in such a book an example of selection or combination? Obviously both. Therefore, I can speak of the Written Torah as paradigmatic, the Oral Torah as syntagmatic and still have "paradigmatic" as a sub-category of midrash.

It seems that the main difference between the quotation and the proverb consists of the difference in the systems to which the speaker relates when he interjects the text into the new context. All of the proverbs of one ethnic group comprise the proverb repertoire of that group. Each single proverb exists in the Saussurian *langue* aspect, that is, as a paradigmatic unit with the potential of being applied in *parole*, of being put to actual use. In quoting, on the other hand, the speaker refers to an already existing specific *parole*, which he applies to a new, intertextual *parole*. It is not possible to speak of a repertoire of quotations, since any text, poetic or non-poetic, regardless of formal, contentual or structural characteristics, may become a quotation (56).

However, this last statement is obviously not true of midrash, in which it is indeed possible to speak of a repertoire of quotations. The Biblical text, therefore, takes on a *langue* aspect, as well as being, of course, a *parole*. This point of view is only strengthened when we remember that the combination of verses into new discourse of midrash, at any rate, follows certain set patterns, of which the *mashal* is only one example, thus providing an elegant analogy for syntax at a level higher than the sentence and allowing sentences indeed to be conceived of as signs, which *can* be integrated at a higher level (*pace* Benveniste's definitions).[30]

The full meaning of a sign (never realizable, of course) is the exposure of all of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations into which it can enter. Just as the words of any language can be placed into new syntagmatic relations, so can the verses of the Bible. Accordingly, the re-citing of the sentences of the Bible in ever new paradigms and syntagms is interpretation. Let us come a bit closer to the hermeneutic structure of this text of R. Yehuda's. Specifically the question is: what is the role of "He made of it a *mashal*" and how does it relate to "This is a Scripture enriched from many places?" What is the nexus of these two forms here? Let us begin by questioning "mashal" itself. The term translates as "likeness" in English, a translation expanded as well by the phrase "to what is the matter similar?" in the introduction formula to the midrashic *mashal*. This fact and the apparent similarities between these midrashic texts and parables of the Gospel have led to the translation "parable" for these as well.[31] In fact, the structure of signification in the Gospel parables is very much at issue among Gospel scholars—an issue far beyond the scope of this essay—but by all accounts it is a narrative placed beside a

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30. This conception of the text as being both a *parole* in its own right and a *langue* with respect to future texts, may provide for the possibility of a *rapprochement* between structural linguistics and Bakhtinian "translinguistics" (cf. Todorov: 25 ff.). A great deal of further thought is indicated on this complex matter.

31. For an excellent description of the rabbinic exegetical *mashal*, see David Stern, "Rhetoric" (1981).

concrete situation, alluding to it and causing us to draw some conclusions (usually moral) from it.

That is not what is happening here. The parable does not stand beside the concrete situation but creates it or allows it to be created. The story itself did not exist before the parable; it is enfolded in the parable. A similar structure of figuration has been exposed by Louis Marin in a parable of Pascal's:

> The function of the parabolic narrative therefore appears through an ambiguity which gives it great practical efficacy: the parable designates in its fiction a real narrative (situation, position) that it assimilated to itself in the process of showing that this narrative is the revealing figure of one term of the code by which the parable was encoded into a fictive narrative (1979:246).

This ambiguity is greatly heightened in our text of R. Yehuda, for the two narratives are physically assimilated to each other. Ostensibly R. Yehuda begins by telling a fictive narrative of a king and a king's son, which we would expect to be placed beside a real narrative of God and the people but, as soon as he begins, it becomes clear that only one story is being told at all, for God is the king and Israel is the son. This ambiguity is embodied in such sentences as: "He [the son] became hungry, He [Who, the King of God?] fed him, as it says, 'Behold I [God] will rain bread down.'!"

The *mashal* is thus reduced to a narrative pattern,[32] a syntactic structure, meaningful only when the elements of the real story are present and which in turn endows them with meaning. In short and perhaps more clearly, what I am suggesting is that *mashal* in this usage common in midrash is a figure within which verses can be read together as a story, encoded into a narrative but the meaning is not revealed in the translation of the story to a secondary level of meaning but rather in the interaction of the verses within the narrative structure. A parable is a narrative which stands beside; a *mashal* is a narrative pattern which enables the recontexting of verses. There is, therefore, no ultimate difference between this text of R. Yehuda's and the previous one of R. Shim'on's. Both employ set structures to frame the reading-together of verses. Both understand the verse through their interaction within the frame and both are completely new readings yet also already there in the Text. Both illustrate the disruption and regeneration given to intertextuality.

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The examples I have presented here are just two forms among many of the available ones for midrashic intertextual reading.

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32. For fuller discussion of this text see Boyarin.

I would like to suggest (without any possibility of proving it) that the defining feature of midrash is precisely this all-pervasive and open intertextuality. Many of the formal characteristics of midrashic use of verses can be shown to be shared by those other types of literature which depend heavily on open quotation for their construction:

> He [Timencik] enumerates the various dialogic relationships that pertain between quotation and source-text and between quotation and quoting text .... Even "direct" quotations are complex in Axmatova: a fragment from an "alien text" can be quoted for its metonymic relationship to another part of the source-text, or a quotation can be distributed among several of Axmatova's texts, leaving the reader to put the pieces together to reconstruct the source-text; moreover, a quotation can be "polygenetic," that is, it can have more than one source; and finally quotations from various authors can be combined in a single text, presenting a "dialogue" of subtextual voices.[33]

It is no exaggeration to say that every single one of these features can be found in the structures of quotation of midrashic intertextuality. We have seen several of these types in our midrashic texts. The last two categories, of the polygenetic quotation[34] and the combination of quotations from different authors [books of the Bible] to present a "dialogue of subtextual voices" have certainly been illustrated above, both of them together in R. Shim'on's text and the latter in R. Yehuda's. A final midrashic example will illustrate all these points. The text is, once more, drawn from the *Mekhilta*:

> And they went out into the Desert of Shur. This is the Desert of Kub. They have told of the Desert of Kub that it is eight hundred by eight hundred parasangs—all of it full of snakes and scorpions, as it is said, "Who has led us in the great and terrible desert—snake, venomous serpent and scorpion [Deut. 8:15]." And it says, "Burden of the beasts of the Dry-South, of the land of trial and tribulation, lioness and lion, ... *ef'eh* [Is. 30:6]." *Ef'eh* is the viper. They have told that the viper sees the shadow of a bird flying in the air; he immediately conjoins, and it falls down limb by limb. Even so, they did not say, "Where is the Lord Who has brought us up from Egypt, Who has led us in the land of Drought and Pits, land of Desolation and the Death-Shadow [Jer. 2:6]." What is Death-Shadow? A place of shadow that death is therewith.

33. Rusinko (222). Cf. also the following description of a text from a completely different literary tradition, "In the opening words of the matins responsory for the first Sunday in Advent, for example, the precentor assumes the voice of Isaiah (see Is. 33:17): 'Gazing from afar, behold, I see the power of God coming and a cloud covering the whole earth. Go to meet Him and say: Tell us whether. Thou art He Who is to reign among the people of Israel.' The choir repeats a portion of this opening, and then there follows a kind of incremental repetition and progression of key ideas and texts associated with Advent (and pulled together from widely separated books of the Bible) which *almost* becomes a dialogue between precentor and choir ..." [Fowler: 15, emphasis mine]. In a forthcoming study, I will have much more to say about the structural similarities between midrash and some Middle English texts.

34. See n. 23.

We have here a brilliant piece of rhetoric, combining Scrip-
tural and folkloristic materials to increase the strength of the
point that Israel was blindly faithful to God in this time. The
passage begins by identifying the wilderness mentioned only
here with a well-known Desert, so well known, in fact, that
there is a folk tradition of its immense size. Not only is it im-
mense, it is also terrible, completely filled with venomous
snakes and scorpions. Moreover, in the verse from Isaiah, we
are told that one of the reptiles is called *ef'eh*, identified as the
viper Another folk tradition is cited indicating how terrible
this viper is indeed and, even so, the Israelites did not doubt;
they did not say, "Where is God" but followed Moses faith-
fully. This is the general meaning of this passage in my view.

Let us look now at the very complex structure of citation in
this text, for indeed it is made up entirely of quotations. First,
let us note the two quotations of folk traditions, explicitly
marked as such by the rubric, "They [i.e., the people] have
told." The folklore is *quoted*: "They have told" and is accord-
ingly part of the intertextual structure of the text.[35] The snakes
and scorpions, however, are not folklore; they are explicitly
signified in the verses from Deut. and Is. but the terrible na-
ture, the fearfulness of the viper is greatly enhanced by the
quoted legend of what happens to birds by the snake's conjon-
ing with their shadows.[36] We have here, accordingly, another
composite text whose mosaic structure is indicated openly on
its surface.

It is the use of the verse from Jeremiah, however, that most
powerfully manifests the paradoxical nature of intertextuality
in the midrash, for it is used here in a sense almost opposite to
that of its original context. In the Prophets, it is "what fault did
your ancestors find in Me that they have grown far from Me,
and they follow nonsense; and did not say, 'where is God who
took us up ...,'" i.e., "they did not say" means there that they
should have said it; they should have sought God. However, in
the midrash, "They did not say" is to their credit, i.e., they
trusted and didn't say where is God Who took us up, now that

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35. This is a very different position from those interpretations of midrash which see it
as belonging to folk literature. For another case in which folk traditions are cited and
made part of the intertextual structure of the *Mekhilta*, cf. Lauterbach's edition (176 ff.).
36. It is important to note that both the text and its interpretation are somewhat obscure.
Some have understood that the snake falls apart from fear of the bird! (The Hebrew al-
lows both readings.) However, it is the horror of the snake which the text wishes to con-
vey and that reading renders it incoherent. Moreover, in Stith Thompson's Motif In-
dex, we read of birds that die when their shadows are stepped on (D 2072.0.4), to which
type I believe our tale belongs. B 765.14.1 "serpent reduces man to a heap of ashes by its
gaze" also seems tangentially relevant.

we need Him? This placing of a verse in a new context with a different meaning is quintessentially midrash but, it should be noted, this reading of the verse is consistent with Jeremiah's own theology of the desert period. It is, after all, that prophet who says "I have remembered for you the faithfulness of your youth, your going after me in the desert [2:2]." In short, what, in the context of Jeremiah is an attack on his generation, is made in the midrash an approbation of the generation of the Wilderness, a sentiment with which the prophet would be in complete sympathy. Only the rhetoric is new, not the ideology.

It seems to me that it is not too much to suggest that the rabbis, faced with the disruption of their times, the destruction of the Temple and Jewish autonomy in Palestine and with the necessity for appropriation of Scripture for their times, found in the creation of a radically intertextual literature the ideal generative and reconstructive tool, which preserved the privileged position of the Biblical text by releasing it from its position of immobilized totality. The paradoxes of quotation, implicated in the general "dialectic of cultural processes," were utilized by the rabbis as a way of *avoiding* the seeming necessity of "choosing between innovation and the duplication of canonized exemplars" (Morawski 1970:691). The midrash realizes its goal via a hermeneutic of recombining pieces of the canonized exemplar into a new discourse. We thus see how its intertextuality served both the revolutionary and conservative needs of the midrash and its authors, preserving the old wine by pouring it into new bottles.

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