layers of tradition deposited by the cumulative experience of the Johannine community over the long period in which the gospel was gestating. He suggests that most of the passages in which *loudaioi* denotes a hostile group unable to receive the revelation of Jesus belong to a relatively late stratum of it; though he is cautious about identifying this, as J.L. Martyn does, with the polarization that followed the proto-rabbinic revival of Judaism associated with Yavneh after A.D. 70.

The diachronic approach is not confined to this specially intractable problem; it informs his whole method. This is evident in the last three of the six remaining essays in which he confronts contemporary literary approaches as they have been applied to the gospels, and endeavours to clarify in what sense this one, the present form of which, in his view, is not the product of a single process or the creation of a single mind, can properly be called a literary work. He is not opposed in principle to the introduction of literary insights. He brings to his task a wide-ranging familiarity with the world's literatures (as well as with critical evaluations of them from Aristotle to Derrida) from which he can draw illuminating comparisons: thus the category that best fits the Fourth Gospel is not tragedy but romance (especially in its medieval form), and the most helpful Shakespearean analogies are to be found in the 'histories'. But he is resolutely opposed to those versions of narrative criticism which keep the literary study of a text in its present form and the historico-critical analysis of how it reached that form in watertight compartments, the latter having no bearing on the former. To say this is tantamount to claiming that Eliot's autograph of *The Waste Land* with the deletions suggested by Pound is irrelevant to the interpretation of the poem, and it reflects a phase in the history of literary criticism in this century which the mainstream has long outgrown. Historical criticism is thus both essential and prior to any profitable use that can be made of other disciplines; and it is better that the critical scholar should add these to his armoury, as Ashton (to say nothing of predecessors whom he names) clearly has, than that he should surrender the control that his own discipline makes possible to those who care nothing for it. The proposition has my vote.

H. BENEDICT GREEN CR

AT THE START: GENESIS MADE NEW translated by Mary Phil Korsak, New York: *Doubleday,* **1993, xiii & 237pp. $22.00**

The publishers' blurb for Mary Phil Korsak's new translation of Genesis is on the racy side. "Feminists will be delighted to learn that Genesis is not sexist" it crows. (Substitute "sceptical" in the name of all those who remember its casual depictions of the humiliation of barren wives, their being bartered for like livestock and a statistical imbalance of mentions of sons and mentions of daughters that would seem to leave reproductive possibilities under some considerable threat.) It promises us "the startling experience of a prehistoric tribe whose values and way of life are exotic and alien."

The titillating tone may raise a quizzical eyebrow, but it also raises some seminal questions for all who cherish the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text, whether at a popular or a scholarly level. How do we address the fact that, both in the cultural ethos they describe and in the language in which they are written, these stories are both our own and not our own? They tell of human beings who recognisably share our own fixations, aspirations and general emotional machinery, and yet operate with social structures, assumptions and mores which strike us as bizarre in the extreme. In addition, they come down to us through layers and layers of the tradition of later cultures.

We do not know when they were finally edited into the book as it now stands, or by whom, but it seems to have been several, perhaps many centuries, after they were originally told, by people who had long ceased to live the nomadic life they describe, or its social institutions such as private animal sacrifice and polygamy. The placing of this book among the other books of the Hebrew Bible sets it in the context of the self-understanding of a nation which came, in the case at least of a significant portion, to see its whole history in terms of being groomed to be the specially chosen nation of the only God of heaven and earth. The Hebrew Bible's redigestion by the increasingly less Judaism-literate Christian world and redesignation as the "old" Testament, subordinate in important ways to the "new" Testament of Jesus Christ, gave it an added layer again of ambiguity—the Church Fathers, the schoolmen, the preachers and the mystics differed considerably in the extent to which they saw it as superseded, or saw the actions it ascribes to God and to those who enjoy God's favour as acceptable or normative. (God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac stretched the ingenuity of Aquinas and Duns Scotus as it does that of today's Christians who hear it read at the Easter Vigil. Can God command something which is patently morally wrong? Scotus thought bad things become good if God commands them to be done — Aquinas didn't.)

In English, we have the majestic, Shakespearian language of the King James Version, which lends even the most questionable events in the book considerable dignity and authority. Most modern English versions attempt a similar dignity; those which adopt a freer or even a colloquial style tend to disappoint those who see dignity and authority as seminal to any sacred text. They can come across as trendy, ephemeral; the very up-to-dateness of their English enshrines another whole reliquary of cultural assumptions tied to their own particular date and time.

A sacred text, and any translation of it which is aimed at those who hold it as sacred, is perforce caught in this kind of cultural historical minefield. Interacting with this problem is the difficulty which is always inherent in the act of translation itself. The Book of Genesis we now have in Hebrew is a frozen moment of culture realised, among other things, by its frozen expression in an ancient, long-developing and now long dead language. That expression Mary Phil Korsak, as all translators do, seeks to recapture by giving it another incarnation, in our very different cultural

and linguistic world. She seeks fidelity to both worlds at once; to that ancient, text-caught world, as far as we can ever understand it, and to the present one to whom she hopes to make the text make cultural and religious sense, both in spite of and because of the impact it and its interpretive history have already had. She seeks, also, to afford the religious establishments a new insight into the sacred writings they eternally look to understand more deeply.

Korsak pulls it off with aplomb. There is nothing jarring, nothing cheap in her translation. It sheds the authoritative dignity of "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" for the dignity of a rhythmical prose-poetry, set out in cadences to force a slow, musical reading which brings the emphases of the stories out as though for the first time:

> At the start Elohim created the skies and the earth
> —the earth was tohu-bohu
> darkness on the face of the deep
> and the breath of Elohim
> hovering on the face of the waters—

The verbal plays and cross-references of the Hebrew, which are nearly always ignored in translation, are brought out by rendering the same root in Hebrew always by the same root in the new language. ("Come, let us brick bricks!/ Let us burn them in a burning!") If the result is "Janet and John" English, this is emptied of any bathos by the strong narrative impact of the stories themselves and the musical impact of the poetry. The stories stand rather on their own merit as gripping human dramas full of the raw stuff of folktale and song—treachery, jealousy, ambition, bloodshed, rivalry between brothers and sisters, come-uppance and forgiveness—with the one constant and unexpected additional feature, that their heroes and heroines are supported and rescued by an interesting, insouciant and extremely tolerant character, known variously as YHWH, Elohim and El. He makes promises to or covenants with nearly all of the characters in the stories, including those who seem to be the anti-heroes and heroines: Cain, Hagar, Ishmael, Esau and Leah:

> YHWH's messenger found her
> by the pool of water in the wilderness
> by the pool on the road to Shur
> He said, Hagar, maid of Sarai!
> Where have you come from? Where are you going to?
> She said, I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai
> YHWH's messenger said to her
> Return to your mistress
> be afflicted under her hands
> YHWH's messenger said to her
> Increase! I will increase your seed
> it shall be too abundant to be counted

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YHWH's messenger said to her
Here, you have conceived and shall breed a son
You shall call his name God Hears (Ishmael)
for YHWH has heard your affliction

There are one or two infelicities of language — notably the decision to translate "hinneh" throughout as "Here!" rather than "Behold", which leads to Abraham's complaint to YHWH in v. 15:3 being rendered as "Here, to me you have given no seed!", as though he had only just noticed. But largely, the translator is extremely successful in finding words to reflect the connotations of the original. "Adam" is rendered "groundling", to bring out its connection with "ground" ("adamah") in the second chapter (she presumably thought of, and rejected, "earthling"); "yalad" is rendered "breed", because the same word can apply to men, women and animals, as in the Hebrew. (A postscript points all of this out, in unexpressed indictment of previous, gender-biased and anthropocentric, translations.)

A. D. Moody in the introduction calls this translation "radical, scholarly and brilliantly effective." It is in truth all three: going back to the original text (in the Stuttgart critical edition), rendering it with knowledge and care, and setting it out with taste and some flair. If it is also "exotic", "earthy" and on target to appeal to feminists and environmentalists, so much the better. Above all, it is probably about as near to the Hebrew as the reader or hearer is likely to get without actually learning the language.

SARA DUDLEY EDWARDS O.P.

SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION IN THE FATHERS, Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (eds). *Four Courts Press*, **1995, Pp.xi + 370, £35.00. AILERANI: INTERPRETATIO MYSTICA ET MORALES PROGENITORUM DOMINI IESU CHRISTI, Aidan Breen (ed.),** *Four Courts Press*, **1995, Pp.215, £37.50.**

Four Courts Press deserve the gratitude of scholars in many fields. The volume of the Proceedings of the Second Patristic Conference at Maynooth, *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers*, offers a wide-ranging collection of papers under this heading, examining the approaches of, among others, Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius, Origen, Athanasius, Ephrem Syrus, Augustine and Eucherius of Lyons. These are the names that one would expect to appear in a patristic conference anywhere, but the Maynooth collection also attends to a more locally rooted patristic tradition. The final three chapters, *Patristic Background to Medieval Irish Ecclesiastical Sources*, *The Irish Augustine's Knowledge and Understanding of Scripture*, and *Exegesis and the Book of Kells*, all draw us into the early medieval Irish world of biblical scholarship and imagination.

Such explorations of medieval Irish scholarship are to be warmly welcomed for the sake of the interest of the texts themselves, but also for the light they shed on the links between continental and insular churches.