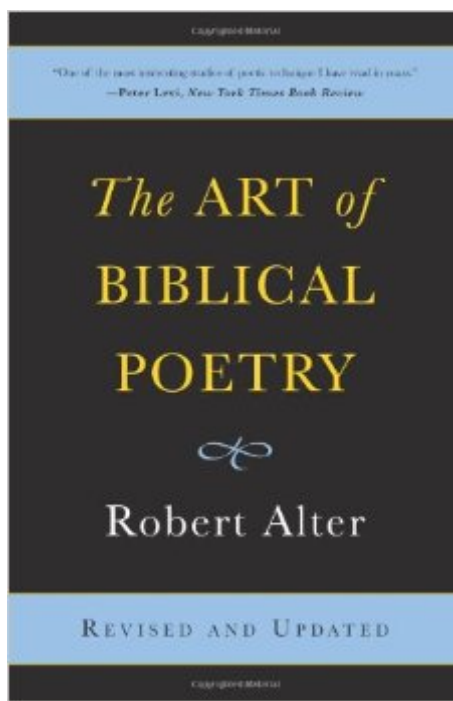


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# The Art Of Biblical Poetry



## Synopsis

Three decades ago, renowned literary expert Robert Alter radically expanded the horizons of biblical scholarship by recasting the Bible as not only a human creation but a work of literary art deserving studied criticism. In *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, his companion to the seminal *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter takes his analysis beyond narrative craft to investigate the use of Hebrew poetry in the Bible. Updated with a new preface, myriad revisions, and passages from Alter's own critically acclaimed biblical translations, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* is an indispensable tool for understanding the Bible and its poetry.

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## Customer Reviews

This companion volume to "The Art of Biblical Narrative" is equally illuminating although the subject matter is very different. Still, Alter is to my mind the deepest and most perceptive literary analyst I have ever read. His writing is not easy and I sometimes have to look up words he uses -- but he reads so closely and with such sympathy and sensitivity that his insights are often simply revelatory. Here he examines Biblical poetry with close readings from selections of the prophets, the Song of Songs, Psalms, Proverbs and most of all Job. Some of the texts he examines were fairly familiar to me. Others not so much. Biblical poetry is based on a technique called "parallelism" rather than on rhyme or meter. Parallelism splits each line into two parts and the second somehow reflects upon, amplifies, intensifies or illuminates the first. The form is quite stiff and unyielding at first sight -- yet Alter shows how in the hands of the anonymous authors whose names are mostly lost to us, it

can become an instrument of tremendous power. Anyone interested in the Bible should read this.

Alter continues here what he started in 'The Art of Biblical Narrative' and applies the techniques of literary criticism to the Biblical text. He does not discard Lowth's discovery of parallelism as the key technique of Biblical poetry but rather sharpens and intensifies the meaning of this concept. He shows the way different kind of parallelism operate in the text. He illustrates how intensification of meaning comes through repetition and variation. He closely reads some of the great Biblical poetry. This is a wonderful work for all those who love the Bible and all those who love Poetry.

This is one of the books that I was supposed to read for a class but didn't get around to it until now. I am halfway through this book and it is one of the most readable academic books that I've read. It is no wonder that Robert Alter has set and will set the standards by which Biblical literary criticism is judged. The Bible comes alive under his translations and his insights into the text make this old book new and exciting.

I took on the task of teaching the book of Job in my adult church class. I would have been completely lost without this book. It opened for me, and for my students, the complex and rich world of Hebrew poetry. It was clear, illuminating, inspiring, and insightful. The students gave the class rave reviews, and I openly promoted this book as the reason!

This is an excellent tome, fully complementary to the earlier THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE by the same author. It begins with an excellent three chapter introduction to biblical poetics and proceeds to work out the basics in the following chapters. For those who regularly incorporate the Psalter in worship, this is a very helpful theoretical and practical text. It enhances the appreciation of the poetic techniques employed with a good discussion of the underlying Hebrew for those reading in translations. It also gives a good, succinct overview of the dominant understandings of these matters over a large expanse of time. Areas of agreement and disagreement with prior understandings of biblical poetics are well stated and concise, authoritatively addressed, and relevant works cited for further study. As a student in the Anglican School of Ministry, Little Rock, Arkansas, I have utilized both THE ART OF BIBLICAL POETRY and THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE as assigned texts for course work. They will remain on my bookshelf for future reference in my ministry as Deacon and, God willing, the Presbyterate. As an Anglican, I find that the regular use of the Psalter in daily Morning and Evening Prayer, in the Holy Eucharist, in Baptism

and Ordinations, and in other services occasionally utilized is genuinely enhanced by this material. I give it my unqualified highest recommendation. Enjoy!

Outstanding review of the poetic literature in the Bible. Alter has done much to remind us that the biblical authors were people of great rhetorical skill who chose their language and forms carefully for artistic reasons as well as theological reasons

A fine book for revealing the beauty of poetry in the Bible, Alter's writing is precise by way of examples chosen from the Bible and his comments regarding them. It opened my heart and mind to contemplation of the Bible in new ways. While Alter goes deeply into poetical structure (something I've lost over the years), I found that this was no deterrent to understanding ;indeed it was a refresher course of sorts to poetry itself.

Alter is a good scholar. He disseminates hebrew poetry and shows you how it works. He looks at Hebrew poetry as if he is a scientist and the text is a test tube. This book will allow the bible student to think about the text in light of how it is composed (such as the use of parallelism). The only thing lacking here is the sense that this is how God communicates to us. As a Bible student in my early twenties, I learned a lot from this book about biblical poetry. But it didn't help me grow in understanding the theology in behind the poetry, which is the most important part.

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