

Genre

I remember giving you an analogy, at some point in the past, between the experience of reading the Scripture and that of reading a modern newspaper.

A newspaper is an example of what might appear to be a single document, but is in fact a multitude of different documents, in which correct understanding (if you still believe anything emanating from the Press can lead to such) depends on the grasp of what kind of document (still within the overall envelope of the newspaper) you're dealing with. The way in which you read the paper is unconsciously guided by your almost complete facility with the genres (technical term for different modes of literature) represented in the newspaper.

The same is obviously not true of your reading of the Holy Scriptures. They are from a different time, place, cultural world. If you insist on reading these documents uninstructed, you will inevitably distort to the point of disaster.

For An Example

Let us take the recent incident of interlopers entering the chamber of the House of Commons during the debate of the proposed ban on fox-hunting with dogs. The attitude of the country to this matter is probably fairly equally divided, and a newspaper of record will try to some extent to reflect this in its coverage. On the other hand, interested individuals have very sharply-defined views, so the paper's choice of writers will reflect the strong emotions of people with axes to grind.

The Facts: Impartially Reported?

The very way in which the facts are covered displays bias. Journalists who are *anti-hunters* will become deeply concerned for democracy. Piously upraised hands over the sanctity of the Mother of Parliaments may be appropriate in theory; but in the circumstances such journalistic piety lends itself as a ready weapon against the half-dozen hunters, who have dared to commit this horrid violation: by a daring bound of unjustified judgment, *all* hunters and their advocates are self-condemned in the minds of all who believe in the sovereignty of the elected National Assembly. There will be much descanting about people who forsake the democratic option of the ballot-box in favour of direct action: such an argument is mendacious, in that it suggests that anyone who wants to preserve fox-hunting could ever unseat the Government over it, which isn't the case.

Meanwhile, *pro-hunting* editors will concentrate our attention on the tendency of politicians to hide behind Parliamentary privilege in order to protect their violation of traditional Old English Civil Rights, like frosty gallops across the Downs, scarlet coats and stirrup-cups. They will venture further into mendaciousness, suggesting that any British patriot must stand by his forefathers' right to leap to the saddle and go to war with Master Reynard, when the vast majority of the population would hardly know how to mount a horse, much less respond to a hunting-horn. They will point to the venality of the Government, in devoting time to this marginal debate, when our soldiers are dying in Baghdad and tens of thousands are starving each day in the Sudan. Police brutality in Parliament square will be closely reported, alongside the pathetic photographs of messengers in tail coats restraining the plucky protesters in the Chamber.

Thus even what appears to be historical reportage comes tainted by bias; indeed, it is hard to imagine the impartiality of pure reportage ever existing. We cannot relay facts divorced from our response to them. After all, our very choosing to report them suggests an interest, and therefore an opinion; even *indifference* to the whole issue would be a comment on it; either way we would inevitably tend to camber our picture of the passions actually engaged in the issue.

The Editorial: Impartial Comment?

When the Editor weighs in, a further very sophisticated piece of literary convention comes into play. Editorials are couched in magisterial language, implying an Olympian viewpoint cutting to the chase (pardon the pun). But the personal opinions of the writer - the Editor - are even more central to the Editorial than those of the reporters as they compose the news for the front page. The implication - carried purely by the way the literary conventions work - is that the Editor sits in a high place, from

which he is uniquely qualified to offer an episcopal judgment on human affairs. Unspoken is the assumption that anyone is interested in the personal opinion of a particular editor: perhaps if you buy one paper rather than another, it may be that you are already subscribing to his range of opinions, and there is an agenda in place between you and a whole set of attitudes which you agree to share with the newspaper's governing interest. The dependence of the Editor on the views of the Proprietor, not to mention the Readership, is another game. To some degree we read what we want to read, and if we happen to own a newspaper, what we want to read may become a rather important factor in the Editor's frame of reference. Readers of the Bible, similarly, can always ask whether anyone is paying the particular author they are reading; signs are that Solomon certainly had irons in the fire. The clinical reporting of the murder of Uriah the Hittite argues strongly for its veracity, in that it does the King so little credit. On the other hand the shameless additions to the royal oracle of Nathan (2 Sam 7), where the voice of God forbidding David's proposed Temple does a complete volte-face in honour of Solomon's, must rank as one of the poorest shots at Invisible Mending the Bible has to offer.

Learned Commentary: the Columnist

Back to the newspaper. Next you may read signed commentary from our Country Affairs correspondent, from our Ecological expert, from our Veterinary Surgeon, from the RSPCA; all chosen because of an editorial attitude one way or the other. If all vets disagree with the Editor, no vet will contribute. Maybe we shall see the indulgence of a piece from a Hunt Saboteur, and occasionally even an anonymous entry from that most dubious person, an Animal Rights Activist. These may serve the editorial policy; if not, a careful editor is well able to carve such pieces until they serve more as Aunt Sallies than serious balancing material.

Private Individuals: Letters to the Editor

A good newspaper will publish letters from both sides of the argument. Despite being selected by the Editor, these come without editorial authority, and must be read as the contribution of individuals. Typically we read letters like this in order to confirm our own views, but sometimes to feel the strength of the feelings or ideas of those who oppose us. A moment's reflection will reveal to you a huge difference between such a published letter and those small ads in the columns submitted by paying members of the public, where the newspaper's policy is more or less unreflected.

Literary Contributions: Humour

There is also a form of writing which leaves behind the world of reality in order to pen a satire, or a fable, or an interview with a parodied Master of Fox Hounds, or a hunting dog, or a fox. The cartoonist will usually have a field-day (if you pardon the pun), and there may even be some artificially-captioned photos (as *Private Eye* publishes them). The provocation of laughter is also a serious comment on the truth. Western culture has a tradition whereby clowns are the only people allowed to insult kings, and perhaps one or two indulged cartoonists manage to slip a piece of free comment past a vigilant editor.

Adverts

Littering the whole publication, and fantastically, expensively, elaborately engineered and decorated, is the mighty presence of commercial advertising, which habitually makes claims and statements which can only claim the tiniest credit in terms of truth, but whose uttering is considered worthy of massive expenditure by the accountants and executives of wealthy companies. These lies are perfectly well-understood for what they are by everyone; they are held to have no duty of veracity. Yet their continued appearance in our lives is known to affect the outlay of precious funds, even by the poorest members of the community, who are most vulnerable to their blandishments. So although advertising is a sort of lying-game, its hard-nosed patrons know that it works, and pays for itself.

Genres

What I have been describing, perhaps too laboriously, is the reality in our daily press of literary *genre*: the presence of different forms of writing, whose correct apprehension rests on our recognising them for what they are. We can do this when we belong to the same cultural and literary world as the writers and publishers. We are, by and large, good at it when we read newspapers. We are bad at it when we read the Bible. Your job is to get good at it when you read the Bible. What if you don't succeed?

Despite nearly two centuries of critical Biblical scholarship, the vast majority of the British population today has an entirely pre-critical perception of Scriptural claims, and a corresponding contempt for all

who accept them. People who believe the Bible must be flat-earthers, fundamentalists, and probably end-of-the-world nutcases. To put it simply, the public believes that the Bible is a collection of simple-minded fables, and the Church is a collection of simple-minded half-wits.

The Church helps this situation to continue by its own ludicrous ignorance of scholarship. For instance, that there should be any debate in our time about whether Adam and Eve really existed is a good example of a misunderstanding of genre. No ancient Hebrew would have fallen into that particular mire, any more than learned Oxford professors would hold a serious debate over whether there were such a kingdom as Ruritania and whether the Sleeping Beauty snored, had false teeth, or even actually existed. It isn't that nobody cares about such questions. It is that such questions display a total misunderstanding about the function of historical fiction or children's fairy-stories. If we really got this wrong, you would end up with a stupid University and two spoiled storybooks. Equally, if you confused the statements in the newspaper advertisements with the statements in the news-reportage, you would receive a seriously distorted view of reality.

Our treatment of the Scriptures is much more important than any of these examples. Nourishing faith in God is a delicate business, which already has to cut across the way in which people form their view of the world and its reality. We are, in the realm of religious faith, going beyond earthly parameters of reality and truth. Those of us who preach the Gospel ask our hearers to accept an alternative view of their world and their lives, radically different from that of the world they live in. We serve them well when our proclamation of the Gospel honestly sets this before them.

Reading the Beatitudes in Mt 5 is such a case: this text contradicts comprehensively the way the world is set up to favour brute force, cruelty, and compromise. But we serve the Gospel only when our hard sayings reflect the hard sayings of Jesus. We can't do that by asking people to believe the incredible, and then saying *That is the price of salvation. Either you believe or you don't believe*. For instance, no-one who comes to the Bible in search of religious truth should be asked to believe that an historical figure called Jonah actually survived for three days in the belly of a whale, simply because his religious teacher hasn't understood that *Jonah* doesn't belong to the literary genre of factual narrative. In historical terms Jonah is exactly as real as Noddy and Big-Ears. But that doesn't mean the fictional book of Jonah can't convey God's truth in the way that is appropriate to fiction. Dickens and Zola aren't history, but for all that, *they convey truth*. Equally, we unnecessarily imperil the Gospel by treating the birth-narratives of Jesus as history. If we decide to "play safe" as a Church, and tell "the Christmas Story" as it was told to us, as if it were historical reporting, we will be asking people to believe as fact things whose details factually contradict each other, and in the process we shall lose the piercing beauty of the theologies of Matthew and Luke - so different from each other, and so eloquently Christian, and so unbased on history, as our hearers turn away from our unreality, relegating our proclamation to their childhood rejection of Santa Claus, Cinderella, and the Three Wise Bears.

Ambivalence

There is a further thought in this analysis, which is that certain of the newspaper columnists who purport to offer a true account of the world may at the same time be principle actors in the outcome of events. A full analysis of the state of Ulster may be penned by the Reverend Ian Paisley, for example. You may read it and find it to be, like its author, seriously cock-eyed, but you must still acknowledge that the views it expresses are of the first importance in understanding the impossibilities for Northern Ireland. George W Bush's article on "My Keeping Of The Peace In The Middle East" might not present a blueprint for the future of that unfortunate region, but if such a document could ever be composed, it would be of serious significance for thousands of lives. (You may feel that these two characters remind you more of Noddy than of genuine politicians. The point remains.)

The diagnosis of genre, therefore, is not always straightforward; what purports to be ice-cold truth-telling in the press may often be exposed as dangerous fantasy by those who read it. What is important in the Bible is that we should recognise the intentions of the author, and these can often be determined by the literary forms into which he has chosen to shape his work.

The Fears of the Faithful

Scholars who are engaged in ranking different literary forms within the Bible often feel that they're regarded as dangerous sappers of simple faith: people feel that we shouldn't admit that the Bible contains anything fictional, because this lessens people's faith in the Bible as a whole. My own firm

belief is that the recognition of fiction *as fiction* is the *only* proper way to treat it, and to open the Scripture up to do its work in the way the writer intended. In the same way our use of the word *myth* induces pure terror in conservative minds. The implication they hear is that we have all been *deceived* in our faith. But mythology, far from deceiving, tells truths (in its own way) that are massive and influential, and which cannot be conveyed except in mythological form. To pretend that myths are actually *history* robs them of their nature, and is truly an act of deception. I'd suggest that *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* does this in its treatment of sin, by implying that the story of Adam and Eve is a piece of historical narrative, and that the sinful condition of humanity was actually brought about by some individual historical act on the part of two individuals. Such distortion involves us in asking people to treat myth as fact - a nonsensical project, which will never serve the Gospel, or do the Church any credit.

We Need to Study Other Ancient Literature

It seems strange to me that, until very recently, our knowledge of general literature in Biblical times was limited precisely to the Bible itself. Still today, many people, authorised by all kinds of small churches, are quite happy to stand up and tell us what the Bible means, when they have not the slightest idea of any other literary work from twelve centuries BC, and when they would freely profess themselves ignorant and unqualified to pass any opinion about such writing. To judge the Bible *in vacuo* is obviously a very dangerous project, and this has been done precisely because it is treated as a supernatural product, not subject to the common limitations which afflict human literary efforts. Its being read, thirty centuries after composition, on a different continent, by literary ignoramuses, across the uncertain waters of multiple processes of translation (very few Bible-readers have any knowledge of Greek, let alone Hebrew) is regarded as perfectly proper, because the Church (which may mean anything from the Roman Magisterium to a tin tabernacle with twelve members in Port Talbot) somehow keeps us right. Simply being a Christian, people think, is enough to make them authorities on the meaning of the Bible. Beware of such confidence! Phrases like "the Word of God, the same yesterday and today and for ever" or "The Plain Meaning of the Gospel" seek to consecrate individual responses and conclusions to Biblical truths which may have few recommendations beyond the power of the prejudices they enshrine. Calvin, Luther, Pelagius, Torquemada, Arius, Giordano Bruno, all taught such certainties with huge confidence. They should be treated with the greatest caution.

Recall that even the Roman Catholic Church is a vast piece of commentary on the Scripture, claiming itself until very recently to be the one, true Church, the one Jesus ordered and designed. This must not survive our critical examination. What used, in the febrile atmosphere of conflict stemming from the Reformation, to be called "Catholic Claims" involved us in furiously defending every single deed of the Catholic Church over its whole history. I am quite sure that this can't be done. I find the notion of a mediaeval Jesus leading the Crusades, or a Renaissance Jesus chairing a meeting of the Spanish Inquisition, or being a house-guest with the Borgia Popes, not only absurd, but highly offensive. We must accept that we have become what we are by historical processes all too human; thank heavens, the Gospel does not stand or fall by the quality of our churchmanship!

Our Confidence in Enshrined Formulae

Modern thinking about language itself has alerted us to one of the dangers for the Church. Most of us were brought up to believe that the formularies of the Creeds and certain favourite catchwords forged within Church circles were the unchanging repositories of all truth. Some of them became shibboleths in the troubled waters of the Reformation: the word "transubstantiation" springs involuntarily to mind. As a contestant in the Reformation, once you had absorbed such Church statements, you were free to leave the Scriptures behind. The Scriptures themselves were given single interpretations, mostly in the form of buttressing Church dogma.

But now you privileged gentlemen have opened up the fascinating world of study, and meditated a little on the nature of language, culture, historical conditioning, and the other variables which make our Church so complex and various a phenomenon. I hope you are much more aware by now that truth - especially religious truth - is above any of its expressions, and that words are determined in their meanings by the understanding of the one who utters them and the one who hears them - already two different things - and that words themselves can be said to take on a life-history of their own, being affected and often transformed by each and every use that is made of them. You can't treat any words, even the most sacred, as *fixed* articles. They aren't. Words are not primarily written objects, but elements of speech. In this sense they are living things, and living things change and shift places.

When we say that someone iniquitous has given a new meaning to the word *iniquity* or that someone courageous has given a new meaning to the word *courage*, we are speaking no more than the literal truth.

Form-criticism: the Study of Genre

Our study of the surrounding literary *milieux* in which Biblical books and parts of books were written has transformed our understanding of the Bible itself, and nowhere more radically than in the field of the recognition of *genre*. In this way, the understanding of a man who believed that Job was an actual historical character can be helped forward by learning that there are such literary forms as *philosophical dialogues*, where some vital question - in Job's case, the question of innocent suffering - could be thoroughly explored by the characters in a fictional drama.

Other consequences of this realisation might follow. For instance, the drawing of conclusions about what God is like, based on the dialogue with Satan that begins the book of Job, may now appear as a bad idea. And if the book enshrines, *for its own sufficient reasons within the genre it uses*, a potentially misleading anthropomorphic image of God, we may note that it does the same for the Devil. The portrayal of Satan found there, where he is depicted not as a demon, but as the influential Prosecuting Counsel of the Heavenly Court, may alert us to a sliding scale in the depiction of all heavenly beings, who have themselves sometimes changed sides in Scriptural history; this may remind us of the way Abraham moves - in the middle of his part of the Bible - from being a simple shepherd out in the desert, to being a campaigning general defeating kings, and back to being a simple shepherd again.

The recognition that Jonah is *not* an historical character can open up our minds to understand the difference between the comic-strip vicissitudes of Jonah and his Mission Impossible, which he didn't want or understand or believe in - and which converted Nineveh to Judaism overnight - and the life-and-death realism of the story of a real historical prophet like Jeremiah.

The Differing Functions of Genres

We shouldn't imagine that the different genres of Biblical literature are flights of fancy, like the products of Victorian gentleman authors dreaming at their desks. In that sense, "literature" in ancient Israel can hardly be said to have existed. Victorian literature was often conceived as a decorative art, a diversion for idle people in a long afternoon, or an evening in the parlour. The Bible was not written in that way at all. In the Bible we are meeting up with the literature of a people, much of which has a *functional* purpose. The formation of such functioning texts into collections, which we now perceive as books, and the assemblage of these books into a collection which we now perceive as the Bible, are subsequent developments. We need to go back to the situations which brought these texts into being.

Sitz-im-Leben

The correct understanding of any part of this great collection rests critically on the correct recognition of the pericope as such - remember, the correct limit of a pericope may occur in the very middle of a single verse - and the correct understanding of what Gunkel, the influential form-critic, called its "sitz-im-leben", or "setting in life". Once we have formed a correct grasp of this ground level functioning, we shall find ourselves recognising other, parallel texts which share the same origins or usage. Just as the cartoon sits amidst other features of a newspaper, and enables us by its form and its nature to recognise it as such, so texts in the Bible will betray their intentionality by their form and structure¹. Let us examine some such settings.

The Cult

One example of a life-situation which yields recognisable genres is obviously the liturgy. Liturgies often consist of fixed parts, which remain unchanged at every performance of the ritual (such as the

¹ We recognise a cartoon as such mainly by its being *a drawing* rather than a photograph. But other drawings may appear in the newspaper: for example, sketches of scenes in courtrooms, where cameras are not permitted, or artists' impressions of yet unbuilt structures. We very sophisticatedly recognise other "cartoon" features, such as the addition of captions in inverted commas, or the very humour in the depiction, which give the game away. We read and react to all this without ever consciously adverting to the mental process. This may explain why the recognition of unfamiliar genres in the Bible is so laborious to us.

Eucharistic Prayer in the Mass), and variable parts, which can be changed according to the individual occasion. However, a first experience of the Catholic liturgy will recognise that various readings and responsorial psalms still follow a constant pattern.

We have no written compendium of a rubrical kind to the Old Testament liturgy; presumably the rules of the Temple were part of professional priestly knowledge handed down by word of mouth. Anyone who has taken any part in a liturgy in the Vatican Basilica will know how often what happens is dictated in the Sacristy by grey-headed Masters of Ceremony who have been in there since their youth and know how the Basilica works. However, we can recognise the genres of religious texts that will have belonged to the liturgy (eg psalms) and draw conclusions from them about the themes and forms of the liturgy itself.

Legal Life

The Law too requires a similar body of unchanging principle, into which the forensic and judgmental apparatus appropriate to individual cases has to be inserted according to due process. When we study legal texts in the Old Testament, therefore, we are able to gain insight into legal procedure which in turn enables us to assign legal texts to various genres; then we can look back, and gain new insights into the theory and practice of Israelite law.

The Court

The Royal Court generated a great deal of educative, ceremonial, and cultic literature: regularly occurring occasions like coronations, and their anniversaries, public proclamations of the birth of an heir; then military and political affairs also generate cultic and secular literature: victory festivals, lamentations after defeat, the bureaucracy of permanent listings in the army and government, the annals of military and public events, treaties and agreements with other states, narrative or historical accounts of particular events and situations. The cultural life of the court produced its own crop of genres, the education of princes and the training of successors of court officials called for fixed, traditional forms.

Prophecy

We may be surprised to reflect on the fact that the emergence of prophets also called for fixed forms of writing. But a short examination of the prophetic books immediately compels us to recognise a massive stereotyping of oracular style. Individual prophets have their individual embroideries on this ground bass: the variety of prophetic descants is a study of its own.

Ordinary Life

Everyday life in Israel also gives rise to genres.

- Stereotyped forms of speech and script always arise around marriage, birth, and death; these take different generic form in family, clan, tribe, and local community.
- The legal and economic relationships in society need regulating by contracts, agreements, covenants, accounts and invoices; cases of dispute generate further layers of legal formality.
- Shared work generates songs and sayings which pass into the shared usage of the community;
- memories are fixed between generations by faithfully-repeated tales which assume constantly-recurring forms; and
- social celebrations require songs, proverbs, riddles and stories.

The Bible can show abundant examples of all of these; and they are not confined to the Old Testament. Jesus himself quotes sayings like *Physician heal thyself*, or the children's song about *We played the pipes and you wouldn't dance; we sang a dirge and you wouldn't mourn*. Paul's letters quote liturgical texts - hymns like those of Colossians and Philippians, which give us such insight into the earliest formulations of Christology, and an early Eucharistic Prayer in 1 Cor which gives us the text of the anamnesis in all the Eucharistic Prayers contained in the Roman Liturgy today.

How Does Oral Tradition Fit In?

There is a complex relationship between the study of the written documents as we now have them, which are obviously literature, and our increasing readiness to perceive signs of oral tradition lying behind them. Is "genre" a category which only exists in written sources?

Although there is, in the Middle East even today, powerful evidence of effective oral tradition effortlessly surviving across centuries of transmission, we have plenty of evidence from the Old

Testament itself of things being written down: laws and commandments in Exodus, legal documents in Deuteronomy, cultic texts in Exodus and Numbers, letters in Samuel and Kings. We have reference to lost books like “The Book of the Wars of YHWH” in Num 21:14, “The Book of the Just” (Josh 10:13), “The Chronicles of Solomon” in I K 11:41, and the “Chronicles of the Kings of Israel” (I K 14:19). In modern times we have come to understand how much the contemporary Middle East enjoyed a flourishing written culture, so that we should never assume that Israel was set amid a culture that was essentially illiterate.

So we have to accept a study of the process whereby oral texts became written ones, with all the complexity which such a process implies - readership, editorship, maybe even altered perspectives in the men who carried out such semi-authorial work.

A Work-sheet for Genre in the Old Testament

The rationale is that you go through this sheet and understand the different background in which the quotations make sense. You will obviously find it easier if you can do this work together, so arrange to meet up with other students if you can. Three people sharing the work with three bibles is a good idea. You should discuss each category separately.

1 Communities

Family is an extended community that can look after itself: Gen 12ff (Abraham and Lot) gives us a good idea of family traditions.

Clan (mispahah) is the grouping of blood relatives. It has legal standing in eg land, redemption (Leviticus 25:24f) and certain cultic functions.

Tribe is a collection of clans. We hear of these principally as gathering-points in time of war (see the calls to war in the book of Judges). See Josh 7:14-18. How far the tribes were aware of themselves before the taking of the Promised Land, and before the fixing of “tribal” territories, is unsure. In primitive times the smaller social units would probably be the dominant ones.

Local Community primarily means *City*. From the settlement of the Promised Land life was predominantly agricultural, but most people lived in cities fortified against foreigners and wild animals (Ps 121:8 - note the order). In the city Israelites learned of law, politics, and social life. City doesn't mean anything grand: there were narrow spaces between the houses, no streets or squares. People met in front of the gates (Ruth 4:1f, Ps 126:5).

The OT is littered with greetings, formulae to open conversations, requests, thanks, wishes, oaths, blessings. All of these obey the rules of their genres.

Marriage was the occasion for family blessings for fertility (Gen 24:60, Ruth 4:11). Love songs have been collected in the Song of Songs. These might have figured in week-long wedding celebrations. Jer 7:34, 33:11 probably refer to such singing.

Birth The greeting of the birth of a son (Gen 35: 17, 1 Sam 4:20) was probably spoken to a mother by a midwife. The naming of a child by mother or father is also a recognisable form (Gen 29:31ff, 1 Sam 4:20, Gen 16:15, 17:19, Ex 2:22).

Death we know of stereotyped forms of mourning, like tearing garments, mourning-ropes, weeping, fasting, lamenting (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 1:20, 3:31) and, in literary terms, the dirge (Amos 5:16, Jer 9:16, 2 Sam 2:27, 3:33).

Work songs Num 21:17f (well-digging), Neh 4:4, Is 9:2, Pss 66, 126 (harvest) Jg 9:27, 21:21, Is 16:10 (vintage). A watchman sings on the wall at night (Is 21:11).

Proverbs and sayings Jer 23:28, 1 Sam 24:14, Eccles 9:4. Also Wisdom literature, passim.

1 K 20:11 shows the king using a mocking proverb as a message, and Ezek 18:1ff uses a saying from the Exile.

Riddles Jg 14:12ff, 1 K 10:1, Prov 30:15f, 18f, 21ff, 24ff, 29ff.

Fable 2 K 14:9; Jg 9:8-15

Note on Wisdom The Wisdom literature contains not only the courtly wisdom which sets the tone of the genre, but also much homelier folk wisdom which has been handed down with it.

Training and Education of the young Prov 10:1, 15:15, 20; 17:21-5; note the frequent address *My son...*

Teaching manners - prohibitions Lev 18; Ex 22:20f; 23:1-3, 6-9.

Sayings

This wide-reaching genre encapsulates the experiences of individuals in their social life, but also the relationships between wider human communities, especially the tribes

Tribal sayings the main collections are in Gen 49; Dt 33; Jg 5 (note in Jg 5 Deborah's reflection on the tribes according to their presence in, or absence from, the fight).

Folk tales 1 K 17:16 the box of grain and 2 K 4:1ff the cruse of oil which do not empty: talking animals (Balaam's ass, Num 22:28ff) and creatures which bring food (1K 17:1-6)

Sagas The aim of the saga is to identify in the life of great heroes of the past qualities and virtues which the present-day living may emulate. The stories of the patriarchs and heroes who inhabit these story-cycles help the reader to feel part of their history, inheritor of their virtue and experience. The saga is one way in which a "modern" person can identify with the ancestor, and embody in a new life the wisdom of the past. If you think about this intentionality, it puts the question of historical truth into a proper context. The saga doesn't set out to be a chronicle of the people it describes - although that doesn't mean they're fictional. The intention is rather to describe the real human crises and experiences they endured and faced down, so that the universal realities that unites us with them can be illuminated by their lives. In sagas real problems as experienced by the tribes are presented and not hidden.