

RBL 05/2019

**Vincenzo Anselmo**

***Fece ciò che è male agli occhi di Yhwh: La figura  
narrativa di Acab in 1 Re***

Analecta Biblica Dissertationes 220

Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2018. Pp. 323. Cloth.  
\$35.00. ISBN 9788876537042.

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In this book Vincenzo Anselmo publishes his PhD dissertation defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University in 2017. Anselmo asks why Ahab, presented as worse than previous kings, receives so much attention in the biblical narrative. He further wonders why the Bible places so much emphasis on villains and suggests a poetics of the representation of the bad as well as the peculiar narrative theology inherent in the biblical narrative. The book is divided into an introduction, four chapters and conclusions.

In the introduction, after a summary of relevant archeological and textual data, such as the differences between MT and LXX, Anselmo provides a methodological presentation of his narrative analysis. He follows the rhetorical-functional model of the Tel Aviv school, whose cornerstone, according to Eyal Segal, “is the conception of the narrative first and foremost as a communicative act, taking account of the reader, for whom the text is constructed, as well as the (implied) author, who fashions the text in order to achieve his/her communicative goals” (26). Thus Anselmo points out aspects of this model such as suspense, close reading, and telling and showing as parts of the biblical narrative. In particular, the representation of psychological and emotional aspects of the villain is of great interest to him.

The first chapter, “La caratterizzazione del personaggio di Acab in 1Re 15,25–19,21” (41–77), deals with the analysis of 1 Kgs 15–19, where the focus is on the prophet Elijah. Here the absence of Elijah’s word and presence generates drought and famine. King Ahab

stands in the background, obeys the prophet, and goes up Mount Carmel to be reconciled with God. The king appears ambiguous, first pursuing the prophet, then obeying him. He accepts Yahweh as the God of Israel but then follows his wife Jezebel and pursues the prophets. Ahab represents the people, always poised between Elijah and Jezebel, between Yahweh and Baal.

Chapter 2, “La figura di Acab in primo piano nel racconto (1Re 20–22)” (79–152), points out the centrality of Ahab in 1 Kgs 20–22. The figure of Ahab is developed through his interaction with other figures: the prophets, Jezebel, the king of Aram, and the king of Judah. The introduction of Ahab in 1 Kgs 16:29–34 gives readers an overall impression of him, but it does not capture or restrict the complex, rich, and unpredictable figure of Ahab. If in 1 Kgs 17–19 the protagonists are Yahweh and Elijah, in chapters 20–22 the protagonist is Ahab, who seems to be humble and wise during the Aramean wars, but disobeys God and the commandments. God offers Ahab his salvation many times and in many ways, but the king is obstinate and stubborn and “does evil” despite the stability of God and his offer of salvation.

Chapter 3, “Affetti e discorsi dei personaggi in 1Re 16,29–22,40” (153–96), points out the psychological and emotional involvement of biblical figures. The inwardness of biblical figures is depicted by the narrator through a narrative mode (inside views) or a stage mode (behaviors that reveal interiority). Dialogues are important in this regard because they reveal speech acts. Anselmo analyzes the figures of Yahweh, Obadiah (1 Kgs 18), Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel, all figures for whom the representation of their emotions is important for their literary development.

In chapter 4, “La tipologia dei cattivi nella Bibbia” (197–258), Anselmo poses the question whether a narrative poetic of the bad person does exist in the Bible. He uses the term “opponente” (opponent) to indicate this type: the figure who shows the oscillation and the unpredictability of human nature. Anselmo analyzes several figures of the story from Genesis to 2 Kings: Adam, Cain, Esau, Saul, Amnon, Absalom, and Jeroboam. This dense and thorough chapter can be summarized as follows. The characterization of villains in the Bible is articulated and complex. There is a “typological progression” of the figures, because from Genesis to 2 Kings the figure of the villain is more complex. There are links among the various figures, such as Adam and Saul, Absalom-Amnon and Cain, Adam and Jeroboam, and mostly Adam and Ahab.

Anselmo points out the propagation of evil from one figure to other. The couple Ahab-Jezebel corresponds to the couple Adam-Eve, he argues, because of the influence of the wife on her husband. In any case, the royal figures have more responsibility because they

came after the revelation of the law. Anselmo also notes that a biblical villain can change direction and convert, as Esau before Jacob, or move on to a greater evil.

The conclusions (259–70) deal with the figure of Ahab. Among other considerations, I find interesting Anselmo's suggestions about the tension between the insistence of God on salvation and the obstinacy of Ahab, who "does evil." God shows his omnipotence through atmospheric phenomena or the resurrection of a dead (1 Kgs 17:22), but Ahab disobeys and withstands God. This contrast with God is a typical characterization of villains from Genesis to 2 Kings. The Bible devotes attention to the villain, but the attention is unpredictable and permits readers to recognize the dynamics and to identify themselves with him in order to invite readers to conversion by avoiding Ahab's sin.

The book is interesting and rich. The narrative analysis leads readers along a way that the author carefully enhances. My only critical remark on Anselmo's work is the general absence of critical analysis, since he follows the MT and only rarely mentions the problems of the LXX. However, this aspect is clarified in the introduction.

Anselmo offers several opportunities for further study, such as reading Genesis through 2 Kings as a unit, the idea of a typology of evil, the analysis of speeches of characters, and in general the approach via the rhetorical-functional model. Chapter 3 in particular analyzes the psychological and emotional involvement of the figures, and this is, in my opinion, the most interesting part of the book because of the importance of language acts in the speeches. The oral word expressed in the direct speeches can change characters' moods and actions. Anselmo analyzes carefully this aspect. Biblical scholars will find here a contribution to the study not only of the figure of Ahab but also to biblical narrative generally and the literary approach.