Karin Schmit Book Review 1 Hon 395

*Reading the Bible as Literature.* Jeanie C. Crain. Malden, Maryland: Polity Press, 2010. [vi-213] 216 pages.

This book review is over *Reading the Bible as Literature* by Jeanie C. Crain. The book was a literary element written to inform and advise those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable of the Bible, or those who are just starting off and need guidance. Dr. Crain wrote the book with seven chapters, each to tie in a literary element that could be focused and identified in the Bible. Dr. Crain’s goal with organizing this way was, “to demonstrate how authors use language in particular ways to represent and create meaning.” The chapters covered included: reading the Bible as literature; style, tone, and rhetorical strategy; image, metaphor, symbol, and archetype; major genres, sub-genres, character, and themes and motifs. Focusing on every chapter to identify it’s literary element, while giving examples every chapter for those that need to reassess their knowledge or for those that lack knowledge, Dr. Crain very much succeeded in this book. To be completely honest, this book gave me the knowledge to look beneath the surface of the Bible and identify reoccurring ideas and elements that occur throughout that I never understand before. Jeanie C. Crain did a great job by not just giving definitions, but by providing multiple examples of every literary element she devoted a chapter to throughout the book that helped me to truly grasp what this book as a unified element had to offer.

To help readers understand how to read the Bible as literature, Jeanie C. Crain authored a book that affected the common reader audience to understand how to identify and understand the Bible has to offer. This book was written so that the reader can understand how each literary element covered in every chapter, plays a significant role in being able to read and understand the Bible. Jeanie C. Crain explains repeatedly throughout this book how to identify, examine, and interpret each literary element, so when they occur throughout, as an audience you can interpret them.

Briefly in the introduction above were the seven chapters that Dr. Crain identified as the most important to be used to help the audience identify the Bible as literature. The seven chapters were: reading the Bible as literature; style, tone, and rhetorical strategy; image, metaphor, symbol, and archetype; major genres, sub-genres, character, and themes and motifs. Each chapter was then subdivided into sections that would give more unity to the whole idea the chapter was portraying to the audience. After the seven chapters were covered, in the back of *Reading the Bible as Literature,* Dr. Crain reveals as extensive conclusion, glossary, references, and an index. Each component helped to unify this book again as being a useful tool for deciphering the literary elements in the Bible, but as far as what to expect when one picked up this book, the Preface nailed it on the head.

The Preface for *Reading the Bible as Literature,* greatly prepared the reader for what is to come in the book. What Dr. Crain states prepares the audience directly for what’s covered, no confusion involved. Dr. Crain is referring to the chapters covered in the book on the last page of the Preface when she states, “These literary activities – using languageparticular ways, discovering meaning through language, and the acts of seeing, classifying, identifying, and unifying – suggest an active rather than passive interaction with the material and point to the requirement of literature that readers engage with the primary text. That nailed the whole book; it prepared the audience for the idea that each unifying element, when used together, unified the Bible as a whole!

The first chapter covered was, “Reading the Bible as Literature: A Way of Understanding”. The chapter involved a brief overview for what to expect from each chapter, how each component ties into one another, definitions, and approaches. Chapter one really wanted to tie the audience in to understanding how this book has been divided into a specific literary focus, examples are provided, and at the end there are questions for reflection to be emphasized on. Without reading the first chapter, it wouldn’t be known throughout the rest of the book how it’s necessary as a reader to look deep into the text to interpret it!

The second chapter was titled: “Style, Tone, and Rhetorical Strategy: A Way of Using Language”. This chapter’s outline involved: preliminary considerations for style, tone, and strategy; comparison, association, and arrangement of words; a sampling of rhetorical devices; close reading; and questions for reflection. Crain explains that rhetorical devices occur so frequently in the Bible that ignoring them means not using the literary tools available to understand it. Chapter two gave the audience the tools to use, that rhetorical devices can be recognized and defined and that doing so helps to understand the literature. Crain did explain that the Bible is rich in rhetorical devices, it was known to the audience throughout the chapter how important to understand the Bible, and you need to understand what can help you to decipher the devices used. Every single section in this chapter covered a rhetorical device in depth, with a definition of the device, along with one or more examples of where this device can be found in the Bible.

Next was chapter three titled: “Image, Metaphor, Symbol, and Archetype: A Way of Meaning”. Again Dr. Crain prepared us for what to expect from the chapter with an outline at the beginning for the chapter of: : preliminary considerations, two unifying images (light, darkness, and fire; and water), five metaphors of divine-human relationship, archetypal encounters of the divine and human, close reading, and questions for reflection. Crain did explain that reading the Bible means understanding how it uses language, both literally and figuratively, to present human experience in a connected pattern of images, metaphors, motifs, symbols, and archetypes. Every single section in this chapter covered a symbol, metaphor, image, and archetype, with a definition of the device, along with one or more examples of where this device can be found in the Bible, making this chapter effective to the audience!

Chapter four followed titled: “Major Genres: A Way of Seeing”. The outline included: preliminary considerations, major genres and related definitions, genre criticism, narrative, drama and poetry, close reading, and questions for reflection. The whole idea of this chapter was to expose the audience to how a literary Genre (such as those found in the Bible), once recognized, contributes a set of expectations that shapes a reader’s interpretation of a text. It was beneficial to the audience that this chapter was broken down to understand genres, parts of genres, and where they can be found in the Bible The chapter truly achieved its goal at providing the reader with the basic definitions and devices the Bible uses to promote each genre. It gives the audience the understanding of how each book or multiple verses in the Bible may follow a specific genre.

Chapter five was next, and it was titled, “Sub-Genres: A Way of Clarifying and Mapping”. The main idea for chapter five involved as the outline states: preliminary considerations, definitions, and the four main sub-genres that Dr. Crain believed to be the most important in the Bible to be emphasized. In chapter five Dr. Crain explains why she chose only four to be emphasized because, “they are all readily accessible as short units of text and because they are familiar and easily recognizable as genres”. Each sub-genre in the chapter was covered in depth with not only definitions and how often it appears throughout the Bible, but where it appears each time in the Bible! Without this chapter it wouldn’t be understood how to take into effect the human experience verse what the author wants you to experience when reading the Bible as literature!

Chapter six followed, and it was titled, “Character: A Way of Identifying”. Dr. Crain at the beginning of the chapter leads into with her statement of, “The easiest way to begin appreciating a piece of literature is through its characters” and “As we learn about characters, we learn about ourselves – coming to understand our own motives, attitudes, and moral natures.” The outline then guided the audience to understand what to expect such as: : preliminary considerations, identifying characters in: context, actions, other characters’ responses, words, symbolic actions, requests, impact, description, and structure; close reading, and questions for reflection. This chapter provided direct examples from the Bible, along with in each section giving direct verses to use the character identifying tool covered. The chapter gave the audience the understanding of how each book or multiple verses in the Bible contain a character that can be identified, and should be identified!

Finally, the book ended with chapter seven’s emphasis on: “Themes and Motifs: A Way of Unifying”. Each section in the chapter was broken down by Dr. Crain introducing the themes and motifs that the audience can identify and the extended framework in which they are found. The outline prepared the audience for more of what to come with: preliminary considerations, major themes in the Bible, the various covenants promised, close reading, and questions for reflection. Dr. Crain did explain in this chapter, that she chose the major/important themes and motifs to go into describing. This helped the audience to understand the importance by appreciating a piece of literature is through its themes, which reoccur throughout the Bible. The numerous ways to identify the themes/motifs covered in this chapter, along with direct examples, and thorough explanations were beneficial for the audience to truly grasp the theme/motif!

The back of the book also gave addition help to the audience by reiterating the conclusions Dr. Crain felt the reader should have grasped, along with a glossary to help define difficulties that could arise with the reading. Without restating the conclusions in the back of the book, who knows if a reader truly took away what they needed to from the book. It’s also necessary for a book that throws new terms, examples, and definitions at you that providing a glossary in the back to decipher it all is of out-most importance!

*Reading the Bible as Literature* is a great tool for identifying the literary elements throughout the Bible and being able to interpret what they mean! The book as a whole achieved its goal by providing direct examples from the Bible, along with in every chapter giving direct examples of where the literary element occurred. It gives the audience the understanding of how each book or multiple verses in the Bible may contain several elements at one time. Dr. Crain truly chose what was best to be focused on for a beginner reader, or what may need to be reassessed. Overall, Dr. Crain was effective at including, describing, and giving examples of what needed to be covered and leaving out what didn’t need to be covered. I can see how a beginner Bible or a reader who needs to reassess what they’ve gained from reading the Bible, would definitely need to read this book to truly understand how to read the Bible like literature!