Apart from the sources indicated, there are scattered references of interest from Anatolia and Mesopotamia. However, these references are omitted here as of marginal importance.

In a basic sense, the relevant literature is much more extensive. The Near Eastern materials offer a wealth of information about the setting and role of the persons who appear as prophets or oracle speakers and thus make it possible to interweave the texts with the life situations in a way that cannot often be done with the Biblical material. The Near Eastern texts cannot be studied apart from the extensive information that is available about the context of the activities reported. In that sense the scope of the sources is immense.

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THE UNDERSTANDING OF "SITZ IM LEBEN" IN FORM CRITICISM
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I. INTRODUCTION

With the extensive attention given in recent years to the method and application of Old Testament form criticism, it is somewhat surprising that the concept of Sitz im Leben has not been submitted to a similar amount of scrutiny. Indeed, as has been recently observed, 2 it holds an enviable, almost unsailable position among all contemporary exegetical tools, its success being certainly due to the results which can be obtained if one will only avail himself of this aspect. Actually, when one considers the extensive developments in Old Testament research since Hermann Gunkel secured a legitimate place for form criticism among the exegetical methods, 3 it is not so difficult to realize why scholars have been reluctant to tamper with the foundation of this method. Some, in fact, do not even hesitate to make this sociological dimension into a hermeneutical condicio sine qua non, at least for texts that went through a preliterary stage. 4 As important as the Sitz im Leben may be for an adequate understanding of the text, there is no doubt about its centrality to the form-critical method. It can in fact be appropriately regarded as the Achilles' heel of form criticism 5 -- which is not to say that it is an inherently vulnerable spot, but rather that it is so crucial that a successful attack on it could be sufficient to bring the entire structure down. Because this sociological orientation is so central to form criticism as a whole and to individual text analyses as well, it is incumbent upon us to reexamine this principle and to consider ways in which other scholarly disciplines may be able to give additional clarification and strength.

A. Definition

There are two "classical" statements that have had wide influence as virtual definitions of Sitz im Leben, and it may be helpful to reproduce them in their entirety here. The first is from Gunkel:

Jede alte literarische Gattung hat ursprünglich ihren Sitz im Volksleben Israels an ganz bestimmter Stelle. Wie noch heute die Predigt auf die Kanzel gehört, das Märchen aber den Kindern erzählt wird, so singen im alten Israel die Mädchen das Siegeslied dem einzehenden Heere entgegen; das Leichenlied stimmt das Klageweib an der Bahre des Toten an; der Priester verkündet die Tora dem Laien am Heiligtum; der Rechts- und Kriegsmythos (Mīkāt) führt der Richter vor Gericht zur Begründung seiner Entscheidung an; der Prophet erhält seinen Spruch etwa im Vorhof des Tempels; am Weihe- und Spruch erfreuen sich die Alten im Tore; usw. Wer die Gattung verstehen will, muss sich jedesmal die ganze Situation deutlich machen und fragen: wer ist es, der redet? wer sind die Zuhörer? welche Stimmung herrscht in der Situation? welche Wirkung wird erwartet? Oft wird die Gattung je durch einen Stand
The second, from Albrecht Alt, is actually a statement about the form/content relationship, but it expresses clearly that this, and thus also the form-critical method, is dependent wholly on the *Sitz im Leben*. According to him, Gattungen- or Formgeschichte depends on the observation that in each individual literary form, as long as it remains in use in its own context, the ideas it contains are always connected with certain fixed forms of expression. This characteristic connection is not imposed arbitrarily on the material by the literary redactors of a later period. The inseparable connection between form and content goes back behind the written records to the period of popular oral composition and tradition, where each form of expression was appropriate to some particular circumstance amongst the regularly recurring events and necessities of life.

One thing that becomes especially clear from both of these statements is that the element Leben in the phrase *Sitz im Leben* is being emphasized, i.e. that the primary setting with which early form critics were concerned was a social or communal setting, one which consists of real people coping with real life, and that this setting is all important for theGattungsgeschichte. It follows from this that the *Sitz im Leben* for ancient Israel was conceived to be exclusively at the oral plane; at least Gunkel and his followers tended to reserve the term for the oldest, simple genres prior to the stage of literary fixation. Furthermore, the *Sitz im Leben* was considered to cohere, by definition, to form and content of the genre; in Mowinckel's words: 'each situation creates its own formal language around a definite subject-content' and can therefore be reached by induction. Von Rad's insistence upon analysing the form and determining the *Sitz im Leben* of much more complex entities (viz. the Sinai-tradition and even the Gospels) is accordingly echoed, which especially in light of the work of an author could not so easily be derived genetically from its *Sitz*, amounting to a rebuke of this previous restrictive view and underscored the need to consider the effect of the environment on any genre, also literary ones.

In recent years there has been an increasing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the traditional understanding of *Sitz im Leben*. Before we attempt to deal with the terminological problem, it might be best to specify in general terms the total phenomenon of which *Sitz im Leben* is part, albeit a very significant one. Every piece of literary expression, whether in oral or written form, emerges out of a configuration of social and/or intellectual influences which affect to a greater or lesser extent and which combine to produce the meanings that constitute this literary entity. This configuration of influences is characterized, as a rule, by locus (both spatial and temporal) and intent, and the given literary expression respects these through its conjuncture of form and content. This package of influences, however, is what has been generally understood as the *Sitz im Leben*, though its actual scope and applicability to genres have varied among form critics. For example, does a *Sitz im Leben* describe only a situation or relationship that is typical, or can it also apply to an unusual, particular occasion which may give rise to a literary piece? Or again, is *Sitz im Leben* restricted only to actual occurrences (e.g., a historical) and is thus not to be identified with institutional groups (e.g., the mourners)?

For all of the disputes over which specific *Sitz im Leben* may be most appropriate in individual cases (and problems of definition may in a few cases account for some of these disagreements), one thing is clear: Appeal is made to this external reference, with its socio-cultural and intellectual data, under the assumption that the given literary unit (which in the case of the Old Testament is culturally foreign to us) can thereby be better understood. This is the postulate emphasized by Gunkel, and its significance has in no way diminished in the intervening period. In fact its importance has increased with the present linguistic thesis that meanings are pre-given and transmitted through the linguistic structure of the language. Yet given an agreement on this assumption, can we remain satisfied with the traditional term employed so widely since Gunkel's time?

B. Terminology

A terminological battle is being waged on two fronts. First, although *Sitz im Leben* has long been a termus technicus among German, English, French and other biblical scholars, there has been some effort to employ in non-Germanic languages alternative expressions -- whether the motive be linguistic, stylistic, or some other consideration -- or whatever. Thus in French one finds often in tandem with "*Sitz im Leben*", such terms as "milieu vital", "milieu d'origine", "situation concrète". And in English the substitutes tend to be "life-situation", "setting in life", or just "setting". These are considered equivalents of the term "*Sitz im Leben*"; no discernible attempt is made to define them any differently than what the German expression means at present. It could in fact be argued that "*Sitz im Leben*" seems to imply more -- sociologically, linguistically, dynamically -- than does, e.g., "setting". Stylistic variety is a commendable enough aim, but the desire to preserve language purity is hardly in order: A language can and does adopt foreign terms directly, especially to designate a technical subject; thus "*Sitz im Leben*" deserves as warm a reception in English as that given the word "genre".

The second terminological dissatisfaction is, however, much more substantive and crucial. The question is raised whether "*Sitz im Leben*", "milieu vital", "setting", or any of the other current terms are sufficient to describe the total, general phenomenon defined above: the environment from which any literary entity might derive its meaning and which might be designed to fulfill some purpose. To complement "*Sitz im Leben*" other categories have been suggested: Lapointe, seeking to avoid the confusion of the literal *Sitz* with its
concretizations (both of origin and of usage), distinguishes between the "milieu d'origine", which he equates with the Sitz im Leben and which considers both the formal origin and the material or historical setting in which a literary entity arises; the "milieu usager", which is the context in which the entity (e.g., a prayer of thanksgiving for recovery from illness) is used; and the "milieu culturel", which designates the general environment -- with its customs, traditions, and literary products -- in which a given work takes place. This latter milieu is identified with Alonzo Schökel's "Sitz in der Literatur", which refers to the setting (e.g., historical "epochs" or "schools") in which older pieces received their final redactional form. Lapointe's categories are somewhat similar to those suggested by Richter, though there are differences as well. Richter distinguishes between institutions and the literature in itself (here he is more tentative) the style of an epoch. The institutions (e.g., kingship, the prophets, the priests, state officers, tribes, the elders) would seem to constitute both the milieu d'origine and the milieu usager. The style of an epoch would be relevant in both the milieu d'origine and the milieu culturel, while the Sitz in der Literatur has a more specific horizon than does Lapointe's milieu culturel. In addition to these categories, one also meets the expression "Sitz in der Rede", which is to designate the function that a genre can have in other than its original setting (e.g., the use of the lament as a prophetic warning or taunt). It is obviously most significant that what was once a simple category (Sitz in den Leben) has now become differentiated and expanded into several distinct levels, but the plethora of existing designations and the inadequacy of Sitz in den Leben or the like for the duty for all present us with a new sociological problem which must be resolved. We should exercise real restraint, however, in introducing new terms that would only add to the confusion. Nonetheless, it may be hoped that a nomenclature can be developed which can with clarity and precision designate the diverse aspects of the external environment from which the literary entity is given birth.

One term that has received limited application already may be ideally suited for this purpose: "matrix". A derivative of the Latin "matris" (= mother), the word originally meant "the womb" or "parent stem" and later came to refer generally to any "place or enclosing element within which something originates, takes form, or develops" (Webster's). Causality can be implied (e.g., in its anatomical use for a formative part) but is not intrinsic to it (e.g., it can designate any natural material in which crystals, gems, metal, etc., are embedded). Thus as a general term for any kind of environment in which a literary entity may originate, develop, and be maintained, "matrix" is much more appropriate than are "Sitz im Leben" or "setting". And to this general term can be added a variety of adjectives that will allow for precision in the specific environment most applicable: e.g., institutional matrix; societal matrix ("Sitz im Leben" traditionally refers to either of these two, especially in respect to a "historical" or "cultural" or "epic" or historical matrix [Richter's "style of an epoch"]; an example is von Rad's postulated "Solomonic enlightenment" as the matrix for J, the succession narrative, and early wisdom sayings); intellectual or ideological or theological matrix (referring to a specific here, which influence one stands on in the matrix [equivalent to Alonzo Schökel's and Richter's Sitz in der Literatur]; linguistic or mental matrix (the preconceptual mental structures that may alone be responsible for the formation of something); and the list can be expanded as the exegete finds different levels at which a genre, formula, tradition, or text received new impulses of meaning. It remains only to point out that this terminology we can consider one of the methods of phenomenologists' emphasis on the "life-world" and the "multiple realities" of human experience, i.e., the complex of meanings to which the human being (and thus also his verbal expressions) is oriented.26

II. LINGUISTICS AND THE COMMUNICATION OF MEANINGS

One would expect that other disciplines within the humanities would be concerned to determine the contextual matrices within which all thinking and communicating occurs. To be sure, sciences dealing with ancient or primitive societies do address these questions; notable here are folkloristic, mythology, and anthropology.21 Similarly, it is a concern also of phenomenologists, as just mentioned. On the other hand, it is surprising that contemporary literary sciences and sociology devote only negligible attention to these matters. The former engages in exegesis, criticism, but to the extent it (or its field of folk literature which is the domain of the folklorists) is primarily concerned with the individuality and intensity of the given author or post, sociology, from which we might especially expect help, has largely turned its attention over to anthropology. There is a well-developed field of sociology of literature, but the point of inquiry is the phenomenon of literature in modern mass society: the role and status of the author, his influence on society, institutional intermediaries (critics, publishers, book stores, libraries), the sociology of the readership, mass media, society and social. Sociology, from which we might especially expect help, has largely turned its attention over to anthropology. Therefore, these can be subsumed to some degree under the generic of the cultural matrix, but this contributes only in a limited way to our concerns. There is, however, another field of study which promises to bring us more direct dividends.

It takes little astuteness to recognize the increased importance gained by the discipline of linguistics during this century -- or the impact that it can have (and many would say must have) on the biblical exegetical method. Linguists point to the basic link between society and language and foundational work on this was carried out by the structural linguist F. de Saussure, the comparative linguist A. Meillet, and the neo-linguists B. Crone and K. Vossler. The basic concepts of doing justice to their work, we might summarize a few relevant theses: Language is seen to be not a living organism but a social phenomenon understood only in terms of its functions in the life of the society, and the language is the bearer and medium of understanding and thus intimately connected with and dependent upon...
the social and cultural structure of the community. Language is created by man in order to carry out the function of maintaining contact and communication among people. As basic as language thus is to the human consciousness and to human enterprise (Gadamer), there still remain non-linguistic or extra-linguistic (de Saussure: ‘external linguistic’) factors and properties (e.g., physical, historical, geographical; note de Saussure’s comparison with the game of chess, distinguishing accidental from essential elements of the game). And not to be forgotten is de Saussure’s celebrated distinction between the two aspects of the phenomenon of human speech (language), which is a social and juridical fact (langue), and language (parole), which is an individual momentary act executed not by the mass but by the individual, in accordance with the rules and structure of his language (langue). It is the first aspect; language = langue, that is the object of linguistic studies.

Lapointe has made a significant attempt to reformulate the category of the Sitz im Leben in terms of contemporary linguistics. Just as we have noted above in Section I, the reason that such a restructuring of this category is necessary is that Sitz im Leben has traditionally been associated with only oral literature, whereas linguists assert that actually no human discourse can avoid the necessity of being related to a “milieu vital”. Lapointe suggests three linguistic concepts that make up this category — reference, context, and signification. We will want to determine to what extent these coincide with the matrices we have delimited.

Reference, at least within the Saussurean tradition, is first of all to be understood as a counterpart of “signification”. The latter is the psychological association of a concept (= signifié, signified; e.g., the word “tree”). If this association signifié/signifiant is applied to its surrounding reality (e.g., where the tree is located, whether the wind is blowing it), we uncover concrete data that can add to the sense of what otherwise is a general, abstract signification. These referential data are extralinguistic, exterior to the domain of language as studied by signification. For example, it makes a difference whether the sound /p/ is pronounced by a masculine or feminine voice, whether “tælna” in a given text refers to the Solomonic or Zerubbabel construction, whether “disciples” are those of Isaiah or of Jesus. Such specificity is often lacking in the linguistic structure (perhaps especially of a folk-literature?), yet is highly significant in capturing the designed concrete, individual experience. In Lapointe’s words, “le message linguistique a essentiellement besoin d’un commentaire extralinguistique pour mourir sur l’expérience concrète et individuelle. La langue réfère à l’individuel sans l’individualiser.” In his understanding of the Sitz im Leben in biblical studies, essentially an extralinguistic commentary on the given text in that it seeks to provide contextualization (e.g., on the actual liturgical use of a psalm, or the referents of the “tu” and “vous” in Deut.) not directly signified by the language of the text. We may add at this point that this concept of “reference” is in effect

embraced by our general term “matrix” and could be applicable for any of the specific matrices (e.g., institutional, societal, historical/cultural, literary).

In addition to the concrete referential, the Sitz im Leben comprises the situation, which is best described as “l’ensemble des faits connus par le récepteur au moment de l’acte sémiétique indépendamment de celui-ci.” It thus embraces the concrete circumstances surrounding the communicative act as well as the language itself that is employed; only the discourse (i.e., the verbalized content of the communication) is excluded, for which it provides the situational locus. In words as to Evans the referent completes understanding the language of the discourse, the situation includes the language as the prerequisite for the interpretation of the discourse.

The question is: whether or not a given statement needs to be related to its situation in order for the meaning to be understood; i.e., must one be aware of some situational action if he is to understand a statement? For the vast majority of biblical discourse, Lapointe postulates that we are faced with communication situations (rather than in situation) (“hors situation plutôt qu’en situation”). and this has a significant implication for exegesis. We must avoid the common temptation to hasten to match a given text with some situation for this will then automatically limit the text to this specific meaning; a good example of this is the tendency to consider the psalms “devotional” and to interpret them as such only (e.g., psalms; psalms for the New Year festival). The problem becomes especially obvious when one considers that the situation of oral delivery can include a rich assortment of gestures, changes of voice-tone, and attitudes — whereas it is impossible for these to be present in written communication except perhaps through verbal description. Narratives tend to include more details about the contextual situation than do lyrical pieces, which in general lack the characteristic of a passionate subjectivity; drama, on the other hand, does not verbalize the situation. In the cases where we are provided with “statements in situation”, we must remember that these are often variable and can be accommodated to different situations and thus take on varying meanings; this is, of course, a common form-critical principle. The sum of this linguistic analysis of situation is that the sitz im Leben is for the correct interpretation of discourse, biblical statements now tend to lack this information and should only with great caution be inserted into situation.

But while the recovery of the situation is often frustrated, new vistas of meaning are opened when we consider the context. Whereas exegetes tend to understand context only as a literary framework, the linguist T. Sliuzas-Cazacu defines it much more broadly as embracing everything that can contribute to the production of meaning — thus including extralinguistic factors (referents), the linguistic system itself (the situation), and the discourse itself and the interrelationship of its parts. A discourse, removed from its situation and its referent, in fact “lives” on a new series of relations and its later literary development. While its postulated individual parts (e.g., the Jahwist, the Abrahamic cycle, the succession narrative) are no longer identified as such in our text, when one considers all aspects of the context the discourse of the possible earlier situations emerge. “Ce qui en effet est hors situation n’est pas hors contextes.” This, however, is not to
say that the Sitz im Leben thus uncovered in the text becomes anything more than hypothetical. The biblical text does not affirm explicitly the presence of the Sitz im Leben, but it does indicate it; it can be "divined" from the text.45

What is to be learned from the application of linguistic sciences to the concept of the Sitz im Leben? It is fairly obvious that meaning-communication is complex, that forces from many matrices impinge upon the communication and that not all of these can be classified as "linguistic." As much as we need to determine these forces, they are not always recoverable; and where they are accessible, it is only through the indicative power of language. In Lapointe's words: "Je Sitz visse les choses en tant qu'elles constituent pour leur part le sens du langage; ces choses ne sortent elles-mêmes accessibles qu'à travers le fonctionnement indiciel du langage."46 It is another question, however, whether for our form-critical purposes the "linguistic matrix" ought to have a meaning more restrictive than this all-embracing sense.

III. PROBLEMS FACING THE CRITICISM OF MATRICES

The purpose of the discussions that follow is to direct attention to a number of problematic areas touching on the analysis of matrices. Their significance is not restricted to the task of constructing and analyzing the text of the Gospels; rather, these problems also have direct implications for form criticism as a whole. Our treatment of each question makes no attempt to be exhaustive, but rather to pinpoint the dilemmas and to make some suggestions about their resolution.

A. What Actually Do We Know?

Let us not deceive ourselves: The recovery of an ancient matrix, now hidden from view because of the centuries-long development experienced by the literature, is a highly complex and, in its results, uncertain enterprise. It is only stating the obvious to admit that we cannot move here beyond the realm of hypotheses to the sphere of hard data or bruta facta. This, however, is not to say that the matrices did not actually exist, that there were no more than modern constructs projected back into the biblical period and forced upon the texts. On the contrary, ancient Israel, like any society, had a structured life-world, a configuration of meaning-spheres which affected the communication act and contributed to the production of the meaning of such communication. Thus while we can be sure that matrices existed, we cannot be so certain of accurately describing them.

Our only access to these matrices is through the linguistic structure of our received texts. Indications of the levels of meaning can often be evaluated through linguistic analysis, but the recovery of extralinguistic referential data which also contributed to the sense of a discourse is more problematical.

Such data comprise what since Gunkel has come to be known as the "Sitz in Leben" but which we prefer to consider as the societal and institutional matrices. And as important as such information is for our understanding of the text, we can never be entirely certain, e.g., what expressive conventions accompanied the narrator's oral delivery of a saga, or to whom the personal pronoun in the psalm refers.

We can hope to determine something about the matrices only through a combination of extrapolation and synthesis; the objects of the immediate analysis are form, genre, content, linguistic structure, and rhetorical and stylistic characteristics. As important as content is in this analysis,47 one is advised against using this to construct an hypothesis which then functions as a schema for further interpretations. A classic example of this is Nowackel's thesis of a New Year's festival and its cult drama of the enthronement of Jahweh; as has been aptly stated,48 this amounted to building a pyramid upside down, with the tip bearing the (potential) weight of the whole structure which would come crashing down if its small support crumbled. A reconstructed matrix increases in likelihood, the wider the synthesis of data ranges. Yet it is still difficult to get beyond tentative results, even though the exigentes admit generally qu'il n'y a pas exercice vicieux à rechercher le Sitz à partir du texte, même s'il Sitz est destiné à compléter le sens du texte.49

According to Lapointe, this is possible only insomuch as we treat the biblical text as an "indice."50

Another aspect of the problem can be stated in this way: Is the matrix an actual historical entity to be recovered, or is it an idealized typification and heuristic tool? Richter's position is clear, though his reasons are not: "Der 'Sitz im Leben' ist bei der historischen Gegenwart immer nur eine traditionelle und symbolische Veranschaulichung..."51 This is in contrast to the view that it has become more likely that the matrix, as the existential parameters of the text to be interpreted, can become the object of research because of the sign-power of language.52

For the critic functions basically as a matrix fixation and heuristic tool, but its impact and actuality in the original situation cannot be doubted.

B. The Applicability of Matrix Criticism

As has been pointed out above, Gunkel conceived of Sitz im Leben as being applicable only for genres during their oral phase, but it is now widely accepted that "there is no 'neutral' speech or writing, which does not fall into literary types, and this is because each person, as soon as he begins to use language, automatically and unconsciously, to a particular situation."53 This means that any unit of communicative expression can be associated with some matrix, or several matrices. It is thus possible to speak of the matrix of a formula, a fixed expression (Richter: "geprägte Wendung"), a structural scheme, a genre, a tradition, an individual textual pericope, a larger text complex (e.g., the Jahwist, the Deuteronomistic History), redactional pieces and actual literary compositions (cf. the concept "Sitz in der Literatur," which we call the literary matrix),54 matters of content, and perhaps even individual figures (e.g., the things said or done by their intellectual or cultural matrix)55).

Obviously, not all types of matrices will be relevant to each of these.

C. The Multiplicity and Interrelationship of Matrices

As can be seen in Schütz' phenomenological structuring of the "life-world," human beings are faced with a complex of mean-
tings to which they orient themselves and which in turn affect them. These multiple structures, which we are calling matrices, were present also in Israel; but it would surely be an impos-
sible task to catalogue and describe them all as one lists
genres. However, with respect to their effect on the above-
mentioned objects that develop within their matrix it may be
helpful to distinguish functionally between formative matrices and
textual matrices. The former are directly responsible for the
creation of the entity in question, be it a myth, a
tradition, text, genre, etc.; the institutional and societal
matrix lies primarily this category, in that it was within
these settings that laws, legends, rituals, wisdom sayings, and
similar communicative substances were formed and sustained.

Also the linguistic matrix, in our narrow sense of the
concept, is the formative agent of myths and certain other genres.
There is thus a genetic relationship in these co-aspects between
the matrix and the entity. It is highly beneficial, though also
problematical, to specify each formative matrix as explicitly
as possible; e.g., "cult" is nearly meaningless unless the
specific cultic activity, or festival is given, though this in
turn is often tenuous. And finally, it is a moot point
whether or not cultural or ideological matrices can also function
formatively on individual figures (e.g., Wolff's description
of Amos), but it is probably best to consider this within
the next category.

With contextual matrices the element of causality is one
step removed. Here we are understanding "context" in nearly
the sense specified by Lepointe, as described above. Such
matrices contribute quantities of meaning to texts and
content without controlling the totality of meanings and lin-
guistic structures that constitute this entity. They explain
"the function of types of texts or other units of meaning in
terms of their general intelligibility". The specific matrices that fall in this
category are the cultural (or historical), ideological/intellec-
tual, and literary matrices.

A final point needs to be emphasized: These multiple
matrices are not mutually exclusive but often overlap
and continuously exercise an effect on each other. This is true
among institutions (e.g., prophetic impact on the kings, priestly
influence on the later prophets), between cultural and
societal spheres (e.g., the effect of the Davidic-Solomonic
period on social structures), etc. In similar fashion formu-
la, tradition, genre, or other unit of communication can be
affected, concurrently or successively, by two or more different
matrices contributing meanings to it. This can easily be seen
with respect to the next problem.

D. The Relation of Genre to Matrix

We have now to address a problem which has recently been receiving
an increasing amount of attention. As can be seen in the
extended quotation from Gunkel above, he considered the
Sitz im Leben to be integrally related. This
notion, however, is now under fire because of insights gained from the study of myth and the
history of genres. Especially Knaerich has argued persuasively
that, contrary to the traditional view, "a genre is no longer to
be constituted by its societal setting." The reason given is
that myths are no longer regarded, especially not by structural-
lists, as the creation of their societal setting, but rather as
the expressions of prerational structures of the human mind. It would not be accurate to say that this "conceptual genre"
creates the setting, rather than that the setting creates this
genre of myth. A similar point about a mental, non-societal
matrix is made by the linguists (e.g., de Saussure) as well as
by A.A. Jasper, who attributed all elementary genres to a Geistes-
beschäftigung as it expresses itself in language. It becomes
fairly obvious here that Knaerich is objecting to the notion of
coherence between genre and society. If we refer to the
examples of myth and certain folk genres demonstrate that another
matrix was at work, viz. a mental or linguistic one. From
this we may conclude that genres, as individual texts, emerge from and reflect some matrix, albeit not necessarily societal or institutional matrices. Thus in this broader sense, the
matrix is constitutive for any genre, and genre analysis
should include reference to a matrix. It is not necessary to
force a societal or institutional matrix on every genre (or
text), for a mental or linguistic matrix can account equally
well for the configuration of meanings that go into some genres.

A genre, like a text, can transfer matrices and thereby be
affected by its new context. This transfer can be necessitated
by an alteration or disappearance of the matrix itself; e.g.,
the Davidic-Solomonic historical matrix broke down
with the fall of Jerusalem prophetic traditions came under new influences (e.g.,
Deuteronomistic and priestly). But a genre can also
be transferred to another societal matrix or even, without historical
impetus; e.g., the prophetic adoption of the royal messenger-
formula and of the mourner's lament. Not all of the former
classifications of the transferred genre remain and this
permits us to determine the original matrix as well. The
question of genre imitation is also pertinent because of the insuf-
sicient stock of genres developed by some matrices.

At this point we might call attention also to possible
tensions occurring when a genre or tradition moves from the
oral to the written sphere. As determined empirically by
A.B. Lord and later applied to biblical studies by Götgem-
anns, there is not only a basic difference between these
two modes of communication, but more importantly the genres
are altered when it is moved from the oral to the written
level. A sociological break occurs at this point, so signifi-
cant that the new (literary) locus of the genre must be form-
critically reevaluated. This is what we are calling the
literary matrix. As a consequence of this shift in essence, it
becomes considerably more difficult for us to reconstruct
the genre and its matrices during its preliterary existence. This
requirement of the form critic for a first
contours of the genre in its literary matrix before steps to
move behind this can be ventured.

E. The Linguistic or Mental Matrix

Since it has been advocated by Götgemanns and others
form criticism should yield to a method based on modern linguis-
tic sciences, it seems advisable that we clarify the term "linguistic matrix" and how it can be considered within
form criticism. Götgemann objects to the common understanding
of the sitz im leben as a sociological, non-linguistic solution
that precedes language (parole) and, he redefine it as the
cultural-context situation which includes language (langue) and
in which the actual act of speaking (parole) occurs. The sitz
is thus not the prelinguistic, social phenomenon which it is itself
a linguistic phenomenon. "Linguistic" here is understood in the
sense of Saussurean significations, incorporating the world of
meanings into the structure of the language. Thus the sociolog-
ical level is not foundational to the linguistic; rather, the two are
identical. It might be noted that Götgemann's new definition of
sitze im leben is quite similar to Lépont's notion of the
context.

One gets the impression that, while Götgemann's broadening
of the scope of sitze im leben to include the total configuration
of a culture's meanings respects the thesis of linguistic sciences,
he has at the same time dealt himself out of the specificity and
differentiation which are needed in the criticism of an ancien
literature like the Bible. These are not precluded in his con-
struction, but they are also not included in any form similar to
the matrices which we have delineated. Furthermore, he seems to
rule out the existence of extralinguistic data, which Lépont
terms the "renee" and which contribute significant meanings
to the communication.

Rather than in this broad sense, it may be best to define
"linguistic matrix" more narrowly so that it can take its place
alongside all the other matrices. Thus it might refer to the
preconceptual, prelinguistic, mental structures that exist apart
from (and prior to?) actual societal, institutional, or histori-
cal matrices. Such mental structures can be seen classically in
Levi-Strauss' analysis of myth. This linguistic matrix, then,
does not comprise the sociological dimension nor is it identi-
cal to it. It is an activity of the human mind that, without
direct control from external matrices, creates and structures a
reality that finds its expression in language and in certain
genres. "Linguistic", in this sense of preconceptual and men-
tal, is thus to be distinguished methodologically from socio-
cultural matrices.

F. Concepts of Function and Intent

These matters are significant not only for analysis of
genres and text units, but also for the critique of criticism. We follow
the distinction between the intent or intention as the desired
effect and the function as the actual effect. While the in-
ent is contributed to the communication by either the forma-
tive matrices or the individual communicator (whether speaker or
writer), the function is an external, not inherent aspect of the
event and is realized only to the extent that what is communicated
has been understood in form and
content the prophet's intent, but whether the people actually
felt threatened (and then returned to Jahwe) is another ques-
tion entirely.

We have already asserted that the intent is often derived
from the matrices; the enigma, however, lies in the precise
relationship between the matrices and the function. The prob-
lem might be indicated best by reference to a suggestive study
by I. Soisalon-Soininen. He advances the thesis that for
many of the narratives, especially the narrative that the soci-
etal function is more important than their sitze im leben. Con-
sequently, in describing the genre or the individual tradition,
not only the sitze im leben but especially the function
must be considered. As difficult as it may be to determine
this function, we can be sure that the absence or cessation
of function, whether in its initial or in a later matrix, would
have meant the death of the tradition. This is especially
true for folk literature which thrives on its effect on the
public. Examples of functions, which can be exercised by dif-
ferent literary types, can be taken from the field of folklore
studies: amusements or entertainment, jokes, validating collec-
tive beliefs, controlling human activities, giving norms and
expressing social approval of behavior, teaching, frightening.

The problem takes on a new dimension when we consider
the task of translating the ancient text into a modern language.
Are we primarily to be concerned with the surface-level conver-
gence of content with form, or with the deep-level meaning-
structures and intent? Stated differently: Is a translation to
be judged for accuracy according to its formal linguistic cor-
respondence (words, syntax, etc.) or according to its ability to
invoke a response similar to that elicited by the original com-
munication act? To the extent that one desires the latter,
the function of the original text must be determined, and this
requires an analysis of its matrices.

We cannot help but conclude that the issue of function is not a
true one from criticism. On the contrary, the problem is in some cases even more important than the intent. The intended
purpose precedes and accompanies the act of communication,
whereas it is the actual function or audience response which
will affect the subsequent retention of that discourse. The
matrices not only contribute the meanings and intent to the
communication, but they also constitute the context in which
the discourse functions and evokes responses.

IV. Conclusion

In the preceding pages we have called attention to the
limitations of the traditional view of sitze im leben and have
suggested a way in which it can be expanded and restructured.
It is assumed, in accord with the phenomenologists, that a
society, whether ancient or modern, is comprised of multiple
worlds of meaning and that individuals can be engaged or pri-
marily to such meaning-complexes, not to objects. This plural-
ity of "realities" can be broken down into a number of matrices,
each of which is an assemblage of meanings and is located tem-
porally, spatially, individually, though not necessarily socio-
culturally. Any communication event occurs within the context of one or
more such matrices, from which the communication derives mean-
ings and functions. Some of the predominant matrices
are societal, institutional, mental, cultural, ideological,
literary. Certain of these have a more direct effect on com-
munication than do others. Meanings are rarely created but are
derived from the conditions of life. It is the task of the form critic thus to relate the biblical literature, in its smaller and larger parts, to the matrices from which it emerged and which it still reflects. The text, especially in its linguistic structure, still retains indications of these matrices, and the recovery of them will enable us better to understand each literary unit.

1. Aside from the third chapter of K. Koch's The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method (Truns. S. M. Cupitt, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), the only study devoted specifically to Sitz im Leben is that by R. Lapointe, "La valeur linguistique du Sitz im Leben", Biblica 52 (1971), pp. 469-487. Of course, the subject is treated in greater or less depth in the numerous methodological studies that have appeared, but in all of these cases it is the larger form-critical method that is under discussion. The question, primarily as it pertains to the Gospels, receives extensive analysis by R. Gittsmann, Offene Fragen zur Formgeschichte des Evangeliums, BEWTH 54, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1970.


3. The origin of the present sensitivity for the sociological aspect of ancient literary genres is related to, but not identical with, the rise of genre criticism. This is made especially clear in Martin J. Buss' chapter, "The Study of Forms," in Old Testament Form Criticism, ed. J. H. Hayes, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974, pp. 1ff. From classical times many literary critics have been aware of the significance of purpose or aim (intention) for each genre, and this implies the social dimension of the use, if not also the origin, of the genres. Despite the common conception that it was Gunkel's "genialer Einfall" (so K. Koch, Was ist Formgeschicht? 2nd ed., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967, p. 47; supported also by W. Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, Felland 100, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969, pp. 104ff., 144ff.) to incorporate the Sitz im Leben into genre analysis, Buss (op. cit., pp. 51ff.) has showed that the idea was current -- though not predominant -- during the 19th century before Gunkel. The extent to which Gunkel was actually dependent on his predecessors, however, is difficult to establish -- even more so for Sitz im Leben than for genre analysis. In light of the attention given this question in the above mentioned publications as well as in another paper to be read at this meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, we will make no effort here to deal with the origin of the research into the Sitz im Leben.


8. Cf., e.g., Gunkel's statement that the oldest genres had originally "eine ganz bestimmte Stelle im israelitischen Volksleben besessen, von dem sie einen wichtigen Teil darstellten, und eben deshalb, weil sie nicht auf dem Papier, sondern im Leben bestanden haben, sind auch ihre ältesten Einheiten so kurz gewesen, entsprechend der geringen Aufnahmefähigkeit der alten Hörer"; "Literaturgeschichte, Biblische", in RGZ, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, Tübingen 1929, col. 1679. On this whole question of the limiting of the Sitz im Leben to the oral sphere, cf. also Düttigmanns, Offene Fragen, pp. 159ff.


12. E.g., Koch, Growth, p. 29.


14. Cf., e.g., the articles by Lapointe and van der Ploeg, mentioned above in footnotes 1 and 5.


18. This appears to be the situation of the narrator's oral delivery, as described by A. B. Lord, The Singer of Tales, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969; cf. also Knierim, Interp 27 (1973), pp. 443ff.


21. Sellin-Fohrer, Einleitung, p. 27; "rhetorical setting" in English.

22. Cf., e.g., J. Barr, Old and New in Interpretation, London: SCM Press, 1966, p. 158; and Knierim, Interp 27 (1973), pp. 464ff. I am thus suggesting that we go a step further than Knierim, who uses matrix but still holds to "setting" as the technical term, despite his recognition (p. 464) of its inadequacy.


27. These are reviewed briefly by Knierim, Interp 27 (1973), pp. 437ff.


34. Lapointe, Bibliothèque 52 (1971), pp. 469-487.

35. Ibid., p. 473; cf. also Koch, Growth, p. 27.

36. Lapointe, Bibliothèque 52 (1971), pp. 474-487, from which the details in the following discussion are drawn.


40. Lapointe, Bibliothèque 52 (1971), p. 481. There are some isolated exceptions, such as Josh. 7:26—"they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day".

41. Lapointe discusses these three literary categories in more detail in his article in Église et théologie 1 (1970), pp. 29-38.


45. Ibid., p. 485.

46. Ibid., p. 487.


48. This analogy has been attributed to my former teacher, Prof. Einer Molland of the University of Oslo, though I cannot verify it.


50. Ibid., pp. 484ff., 487.

51. Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft, p. 147.


53. Koch, Growth, p. 27.

54. Redactional and literary creations can only with great difficulty be related to a “setting in life” if one follows Koch’s understanding of it as a “social occurrence”; cf. Growth, p. 28. The concept of literary matrix, on the other hand, includes also consideration of literary activity that can be associated with no social occurrences.


59. The problem is not that the influence on Amos was goetang, as Knieper (Interprete 27, 1973, p. 464) maintains, but rather that human individuality and choice in orienting oneself to his “life-world” put the formative influence in a
different light.


65. For a detailed description of the ways these two modes of transmission have been treated by past researchers, cf. the writer's Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel. SBL Dissertation Series 9, Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973.


67. Göttermann, Offene Fragen, p. 169: "Während die Seinsweise einer mündlichen Gattung in esse in potentia, esse in actu, esse in functione ist, das aktualisiert wird, wenn die Zeit des 'Sitzes im Leben' gekommen ist (wenn die soziologische Verwendungs situation eintritt), ist die Seinsweise einer schriftlichen Gattung in esse in obdicatione, scripturae und damit grundsätzlich nicht unabdingbar von einer bestimmten Verwendungszeit abhängig" (italics his).

68. Ibid., pp. 170, 174ff., 255f.


72. "Begrepet funktion i gammaltestamentlig traditionsforskning", SEH 33 (1968), pp. 55-67; cf. also this writer's Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel, pp. 320ff., 327.

73. Cf. SEH 33 (1968), especially pp. 56-60.

74. Tucker, Form Criticism of the Old Testament, p. 17.