1. The History of Torah Interpretation as the Consideration of its Boundaries

The formation process of the Torah had a clear direction: from an early state of more or less structured oral and written traditions to a broad literary redaction that generated a text in which even one word must not be altered. This was a process of setting boundaries in a literary space. Its result was a shift from multiplicity to a fixed and unchangeable text, from the freedom to add, omit, and alter to the belief that every word and letter of the Torah is eternal and obligatory. This movement from openness to closure is not unique to the Torah. However, unlike other literary collections, the Torah has a sacred status – it was the divine Torah, and due to this divine status, readers and exegetes of the Torah throughout the ages supposed, and many continue to suppose, that the Torah is perfect and flawless. They expect the Torah to reflect superior and timeless standards of morality, as well as precise and eternal theological principles. They believe that everything written in the Torah is true, essential, and well thought out. The history of Torah scholarship from the end of the Second Temple period until our day can be conceived of as an uninterrupted continuum of challenges that this unique and, frankly, impossible level of expectations has imposed upon its readers and exegetes. These are glorious attempts to bring the Torah nearer the time and place of its devotees and to adapt its meaning to theirs, all without breaking its boundaries and without adding even one word or letter to it.

2. The Epic and Ultra-Epic Torah in Rashi's Commentary

“From one point of view, the Bible presents an epic structure of unsurpassed range, consistency, and completeness; from another, it presents a seamy side of bits and pieces” (Northrop Frye). Indeed, anyone reading the Torah as an expansive novel, with literary (not philological) eyes will immediately feel the tension between the epic plot and its details that often undermine the epic structure. Among the many attempts to deal with this detailed and challenging plot, Rashi's (Northern France, second half of the eleventh century) interpretive method stands out. Rashi is the most important and influential Jewish commentator in history. He chose to explain the Torah primarily with the help of a specific type of midrash that he collected from the extensive Jewish literature written in the first centuries of the Common Era. These midrashim fill gaps in the text and develop secondary plots that often are not mentioned in the Torah. At the same time, these midrashim blend into the main plot of the story and reinforce it. The result of this hermeneutical decision is that Rashi's commentary presents an ultra-epic Torah, expanded, full of details and secondary plots, but at the same time possessing a stable and continuous central plot line without any of Frye’s “bits and pieces.” It is not surprising that Rashi's commentary on the Torah has become an inseparable part of the Torah, and to a large extent, the ultra-epic Torah presented in his commentary has become more popular over the generations than the Torah without the midrashim that enrich it.

3. On the Back Cover of the Book

“Motti Kleinshtir was buried in haste, just a few centimeters below ground level” – thus begins a picaresque, sweeping novel, full of twists and turns and voices that part and meet incessantly.

In the Voxology clinic, Motti and Hila guide women to a quiet inner space, enabling them to gain control over their bodies and liberate their sexuality. Nissim, Motti's brother and Hila's husband, a quiet and introverted gardener, plants a garden of crosses in the dormitory of The Good God, and the charms of faith take over his life. Ziv, Hila and Nissim's dreamy and strange son, a kind of flawed Jesus, denies his messianic destiny and prefers to develop himself as a brilliant musician.

The characters’ world revolves gently on its axis: birds nest peacefully in the branches of an ancient oak tree in the courtyard of the dormitory, and holy spirits doze in the sunlight. One morning, Ofra, the wife of the terrible Turko, enters the Voxology clinic. She is tall and elegant, and the prophecies of inevitable destruction spark like torches, threatening to engulf the living and the dead in a storm.

In a writing full of momentum, Eran Viezel weaves a story that combines the grotesque, the theological, and the comical and offers in his *Introduction to Voxology* a novel that sharply addresses the encounter between New Age religion and sexuality, the danger inherent in the realization of beliefs about God, and the disruptive power of love.

4.

a. From a note attributed to Yehuda HeHasid, we learn that Moses added updates to the Torah in the fortieth year; Ralbag’s commentary on Deuteronomy 31:22 appears to claim that the Song of Haazinu was written at a later stage.

b. On Moses' updates in the fortieth year... on writing during the wandering in the desert... on the possibility that the Torah was written at one point in time...

c. Rabbi Yehuda Loew, known as Maharal (Poland and Prague, approx. 1512-1609) repeatedly states that the Torah predates the creation of the world: “The Torah that was created two thousand [years] before the world was created.” He claims that the Torah in heaven was “white fire engraved with black fire” and states in various places that it was given by God: “The Torah was given from His mouth, blessed be He”; “God, blessed be He, as if He was speaking with Himself, and the voice came by itself to Moses from Sinai.” He also repeatedly emphasizes that Moses wrote the Torah word by word from divine dictation: “Each and every word the Holy one, blessed be He said to him, write so... and it will become clear to you that God’s Torah is perfect (Psalms 19:8) in its giving and nothing was added to it, not a letter, nor a dot, as befits the words of the living God.”[[1]](#footnote-1) According to Maharal, the writing process took place over time, and the writing of the Torah was only completed in the fortieth year: “The Torah that Moses wrote, for it had not yet been written until the end of forty years.” He believed that the process of writing was in stages as is indirectly expressed in the fact that the judgment of the transgressors is always limited to what was written in the Torah beforehand: “When they were in the desert, and [the Torah] had not yet been completed, since the whole Torah had not yet been written, perhaps this matter would still be written in the Torah, therefore when they were in the desert they judged only by divine instruction regarding what had not yet been explicitly written.” An expression of this approach is found in his discussion of the story of the wood gatherer on the Sabbath and the verse: “And they placed him in custody because it was not specified what should be done to him” (Numbers 15:34). Rashi (following the Midrash) explains: “‘Because it was not specified what should be done to him,’ by what means he would be put to death; but they knew that one who desecrates the Shabbat is [punished] with death.” Maharal writes:

The Torah had not yet been written until the end of the forty years. Therefore we cannot infer [that the punishment for the woodgatherer] is by strangulation, lest it will be specified in the Torah that there will be a different method of putting him to death and it is not strangulation … for the Torah was not completed until the end of forty years.

There is no novelty in the suggestion that at this stage of the story, it was not yet known in what way the gatherer would be executed. However, explaining the issue in the context of the timing of the writing of the Torah is, as far as I know, original to Maharal. In this case, the actions of Israel serve as evidence for the staged writing process of the Torah.

1. It appears to be the case that Maharal, perhaps following Maimonides, distinguishes here... that only “something that has no allusion to it in Scripture and is not tied to it and cannot be derived by any way of reasoning” is included in the category of “a law to Moses from Sinai.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)