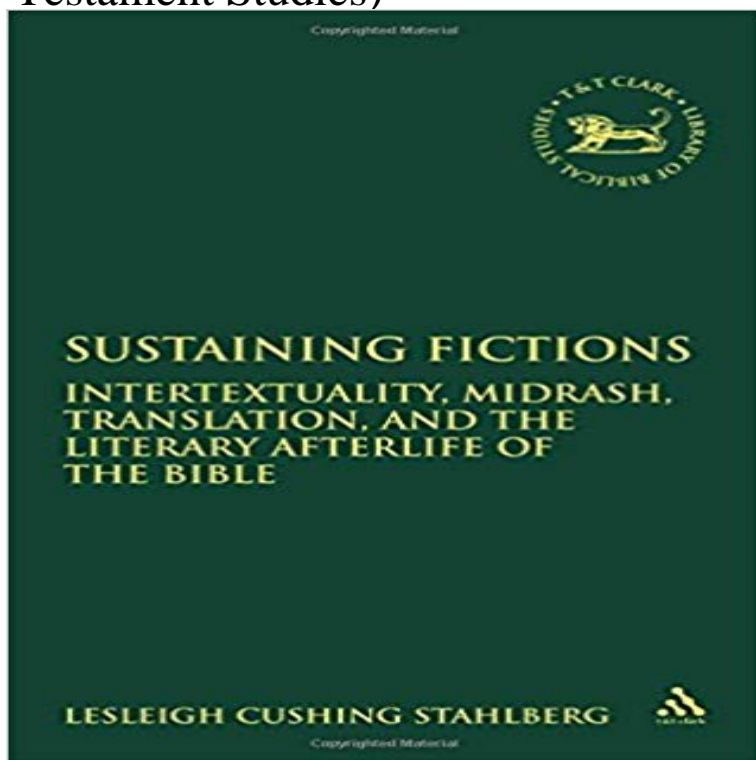


Sustaining Fictions: Intertextuality, Midrash, Translation, and the Literary Afterlife of the Bible (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies)



Even before the biblical canon became fixed, writers have revisited and reworked its stories. The author of Joshua takes the haphazard settlement of Israel recorded in the Book of Judges and retells it as an orderly military conquest. The writer of Chronicles expurgates the David cycle in Samuel I and II, offering an upright and virtuous king devoid of baser instincts. This literary phenomenon is not contained to inner-biblical exegesis. Once the telling becomes known, the retellings begin: through the New Testament, rabbinic midrash, medieval mystery plays, medieval and Renaissance poetry, nineteenth century novels, and contemporary literature, writers of the Western world have continued to occupy themselves with the biblical canon. However, there exists no adequate vocabulary?academic or popular, religious or secular, literary or theological?to describe the recurring appearances of canonical figures and motifs in later literature. Literary critics, bible scholars and book reviewers alike seek recourse in words like adaptation, allusion, echo, imitation and influence to describe what the author, for lack of better terms, has come to call retellings or recastings. Although none of these designations rings false, none approaches precision. They do not tell us what the author of a novel or poem has done with a biblical figure, do not signal how this newly recast figure is different from other recastings of it, and do not offer any indication of why these transformations have occurred. Sustaining Fictions sets out to redress this problem, considering the viability of the vocabularies of literary, midrashic, and translation theory for speaking about retelling.

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