



Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible

Robert Alter

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The simple yet grand language of the King James Bible has pervaded American culture from the beginning--and its powerful eloquence continues to be felt even today. In this book, acclaimed biblical translator and literary critic Robert Alter traces some of the fascinating ways that American novelists--from Melville, Hemingway, and Faulkner to Bellow, Marilynne Robinson, and Cormac McCarthy--have drawn on the rich stylistic resources of the canonical English Bible to fashion their own strongly resonant styles and distinctive visions of reality. Showing the radically different manners in which the words, idioms, syntax, and cadences of this Bible are woven into *Moby-Dick*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Seize the Day*, *Gilead*, and *The Road*, Alter reveals the wide variety of stylistic and imaginative possibilities that American novelists have found in Scripture. At the same time, Alter demonstrates the importance of looking closely at the style of literary works, making the case that style is not merely an aesthetic phenomenon but is the very medium through which writers conceive their worlds.

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