In an insightful and influential essay originally published in 1978, Peter Ackroyd asked, “Why is there so substantial a book associated with the prophet Isaiah?” Ackroyd was, of course, not the first person to ask this question, and he was not the last. The composition and formation of the book of Isaiah continues to attract research and hypotheses because of the issue’s complexity and significance. The modern critical discussion about the formation of the book of Isaiah has its apparent beginning in the late eighteenth century when J. C. Döderlein and J. G. Eichhorn both argued on historical grounds that Isaiah 40–66 must have originated later than the time of the eighth century prophet for whom the book is named, during the exilic period (sixth century). A little over a century later, B. Duhm’s classic commentary on the book formulated the now familiar division of the book into three parts: Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah (or, First, Second, and Third Isaiah).
Third Isaiah). His primary contribution with respect to the book’s formation was to argue, minimally, that the last eleven chapters of the book should be viewed as compositionally and structurally separate from the sixteen chapters that precede it because they reflect a later religious and historical context. His argument was based primarily on historical grounds. The influence of Duhm’s position on subsequent critical Isaiah studies has been substantial to say the least, but it leaves several questions unresolved and raises others. For example: How did these three sections of Isaiah come to be associated with one another? What is the relationship between Isaiah 1–39 and 40–66? Between 40–55 and 56–66? What was the shape of Isaiah 1–39 when Isaiah 40–55(66) was written or attached to the book? Did chapters 40–55 exist independently at any point? What is the meaning, if any, of the “final form” of the book? Who was responsible for the final redaction of the book? These questions and others continue to require exploration and clarification as scholars seek to understand the formation of the book of Isaiah. Attempts to address these questions still rely heavily on historical- and redaction-critical approaches. At the same time, other scholars have sought to explain the growth of the book through a tradition-historical or thematic approach that accepts the main outlines of the tripartite structure of the book, but which explores certain unifying or at least broadly represented themes. These approaches often examine exegetical trajectories within the book as clues to its development. Robert Carroll, for example, has argued that the theme of “the blind” constitutes a recurring motif in the book and J. J. M. Roberts has argued that the “Holy One of Israel” is a unifying title throughout the book. Others have argued that Zion/Jerusalem is a unifying theme in the book as a whole. While all of these suggestions in this highly selective survey have merit to one degree or another, it

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5 For one survey of Duhm’s legacy in Isaiah studies, see Seitz, Zion’s Final Destiny, 1–32.