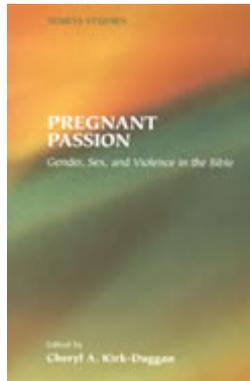


○ REVIEW OF CHERYL A. KIRK-DUGGAN'S *PREGNANT PASSION: GENDER, SEX, AND VIOLENCE IN THE BIBLE*

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Kristi Upson-Saia reviews *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, edited by Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan. (Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series; 44. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; 2003. ISBN 1589830741.)



With a title like *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, one might expect to find a collection of essays related to birth and pregnancy narratives in Christian scripture. However, the editor of this volume chose the phrase 'pregnant passion' for two conceptual purposes. First, each essay in the volume underscores the strong interrelation between sex and violence in various biblical narratives, a connection best illustrated by both the passion and trauma of pregnancy/childbirth. Second, the essays also stress the multi-dimensionality of biblical narratives, which are 'pregnant' or ripe with interpretive possibilities. The volume, published by the Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series, is divided into three sections (Part I: Passion, Power, and Relational Conflict; Part II: Legal and Regulatory Matters; and Part III: Types, Stereotypes, and Archetypes), each with three essays and a response.

Mignon Jacob's essay, 'Love, Honor, and Violence: Socioconceptual matrix in Genesis 34' opens the volume by surveying the concepts of love, honour, and violence found in the 'rape of Dinah' narrative. In this ranging essay, Jacobs reviews a vast array of secondary literature on Genesis 34 and although there is no overriding thesis, she presents some interesting insights along the way. Her comments on the narrative's inter- and intra-group politics and violence are especially intriguing. Jacobs considers Dinah to be the victim of physical violence (the rape of Shechem) prompting inter-group conflict as well as social violence resulting from her brothers' vengeance (which rendered Dinah a socially-marginalised widow) causing intra-group fractures.

In her essay 'Slingshots, Ships, and Personal Psychosis: Murder, Sexual Intrigue, and Power in the Lives of David and Othello', Cheryl Kirk-Duggan uses a Womanist lens as well as theorist

René Girard to compare the characters of David and Othello. Like Jacobs, Kirk-Duggan reviews the secondary scholarship on both literary figures with a smattering of her own observations. She connects the passions of public military life with the passionate private sexual encounters of both characters (e.g. David strategically marries certain women to fortify political alliances and conversely becomes vulnerable to political collapse because of his private passion for Bathsheba) and discusses how power enables both characters to violently realise their passions.

In the final essay of this section, 'Who Wants to Marry a Persian King? Gender Games and Wars and the Book of Esther', Nicole Duran pairs the book of Esther with the American television program *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* Duran's link between Esther and other Hebrew bible women who hide their identity and marry a foreign king (e.g. Sarai and Rebekah), however, is a much more compelling comparison. These female characters use their sexuality (and are used) in order to save their people (men?) from the threats of powerful kings. She juxtaposes the lack of concern for these vulnerable women as well as the unsettling silence surrounding the outcome of Vashti and the virgins discarded by the king with the prominent attention given to the threat to Mordecai and his 'fellow' Jews, demonstrating whose bodies matter the most.

Part II, which focuses on legal matters, opens with 'Murder S/He wrote? A Cultural and Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 11-12' by Hyun Chul Paul Kim and M. Fulgence Nyengele. In this essay, Kim and Nyengele put Bathsheba on trial to determine her culpability. Reading the narratives from both a 'prosecutor's' and 'defendant's' perspective, the authors employ psychological theory (including grief theory) to aid their understanding of Bathsheba's actions (or inactivity). Ultimately, Bathsheba's grief and the lack of an indictment by the prophet Nathan convince the authors of her innocence.

In her highly readable essay, 'Cry Witch! The Embers Still Burn', Madeline McClenney-Sadler argues for an enduring legacy of witch-hunts in the United States. Using Mary Douglas' analysis of witch trials, McClenney-Sadler claims that modern Christians continue to condemn already-despised individuals through a recognisable four-phase process. She outlines modern-day 'purity trials' against the homeless, non-conformist women (particularly unwed, pregnant women), and homosexuals. Furthermore, she reveals the important connection between non-conformist behavior and appearance (filthy dress, seductive dress, the pregnant body, and earrings worn by men) with relation to traditional interpretations of Deuteronomy 22:5 and 1 Timothy 2:9.

Barbara Holmes and Hon. Susan Holmes Winfield round out Part II with their essay, 'Sex, Stones, and Power Games: A Woman Caught at the Intersection of Law and Religion (John 7:58-8:11)'. Holmes and Holmes Winfield wonder if interpretations of the famous narrative about the woman caught in adultery have been overly concerned with issues of gender and sexuality. Rather they claim that the story is primarily concerned with the power struggle between the Mosaic Law and Roman Law, and Jesus' mitigation of both. In their attempt to focus solely on power relations, however, the authors overlook how power (and particularly powerlessness) is conditioned and marked by gender and sexuality.

Valerie Cooper's 'Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America' opens the third section of the volume. Cooper begins with an excellent summary of feminist scholarship on the Jephthah narrative, bringing issues of gender, sexuality, power(lessness), and violence to the fore. Next, she compares Bath-Jephthah's situation with the status of contemporary African-American women in America. Both are doubly marginalised by virtue of gender and race and barter silence (and even death) for the prestige and well-being of

men with whom they are in relationship (fathers, husbands, etc.). Her comparison illuminates both the social underpinnings of the biblical narrative and the present-day situation of many African-American women.

Mary Donovan Turner commences her essay, 'Daughter Zion: Giving Birth to Redemption' with an impressive catalogue of biblical passages that figure Jerusalem as Daughter Zion. The female metaphor who gives voice to the Hebrew people's suffering in Lamentations proceeds to claim redemption in Second Isaiah. Donovan Turner reads both expressions positively. With Dorothee Soelle's explication of 'voiceless suffering' (suffering that reduces one to silence) in mind, Donovan Turner finds liberating solace in Daughter Zion's ability to 'voice' her distress in Lamentations as the first step to the redemption achieved in Second Isaiah.

Susan Hylan's essay, 'The Power and Problem of Revelation 18: The Rhetorical Function of Gender' closes the volume with a look at the rhetorical function of the 'whore' metaphor in Revelation. The destruction of the 'whore of Babylon' (a commonly-accepted stand-in for Roman power) is described in violent and highly sexualised terms. Hylan brings together opposing evaluations of the metaphor and simultaneously reads the whore as perpetuating sexist ideology and enabling a space for liberation. Hylan claims that ultimately the power of interpretation lies primarily with readers who infuse the biblical texts with meaning.

Many of the contributors to this volume employ methods of intertextuality. They place the biblical narratives next to other texts, which shifts the readings of both. This methodology allows the authors to disrupt traditional (and stable) interpretations of biblical stories and to constitute new readings for clearly political purposes. Most of the authors assume the authority of the biblical narratives (an assumption not all readers might share), but want to find liberating ways to read them. Intertextuality allows them an avenue to simultaneously hold on to the narratives, while redirecting the meaning extracted from them.

Other contributors to the volume utilise anthropological, psychological, and gender theory in their essays. Although many contributors draw from general concepts from these fields, the most valuable essays maintain a sustained connection between a particular theorist or theory and the biblical narrative; McClenney-Sadler's use of Mary Douglas, Donovan Turner's use of Dorothee Soelle, and Gina Hens-Piazza's use of Mary Joe Frug in her response to section two stand out.

Regardless of methodology, however, many contributors failed to distinguish between the interpretation of sacred narratives, the construction of narrative, and the events described in narrative. Rather, they conflated the three and assumed access to the 'real events' of the biblical narratives. For example, Kim and Nyengele performed a psychological analysis on a *literary character* and not the 'real' Bathsheba. Does an acquittal of a male-constructed character yield the same results as an acquittal of the real-life victim? Many contributors failed to identify the layer of narration and in turn neglected a fruitful level of analysis.

The methodologies employed in this volume work to unsettle traditional interpretations of biblical narratives and also the ideologies attached to such interpretations. The authors are primarily focused on how interpretations of biblical narratives continue to perpetuate certain ideologies of sexuality and gender, which in turn continue to enact serious violence against marginalised people. This makes sense since many contributors to the volume work with non-profit organisations serving the underrepresented. With this aim in mind, essays in this volume are useful contributions to biblical interpretation or ethics research and curricula.