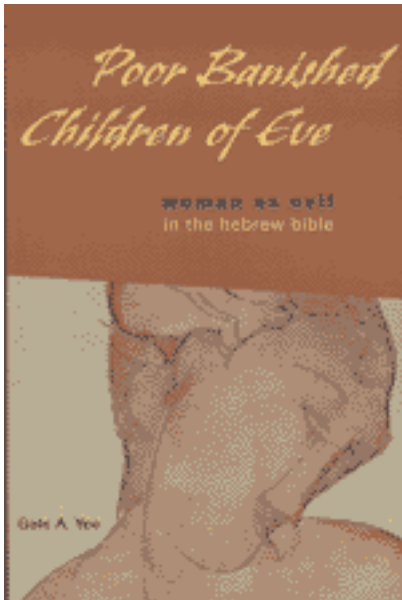


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**Yee, Gale**

***Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible***

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Gale Yee has written a ground-breaking book. She relocates feminist criticism of the Bible within general ideological criticism, in which analysis of gender must be forged into a single method with analysis of class, race, and colonialism. She draws impressively on the social sciences to understand women's roles, and particularly their social power, in societies resembling ancient Israel. She demonstrates her proposed method by readings of four sections of the Jewish Bible.

Yee deals with advanced work in both ideological criticism and the social sciences, and her book will probably have its initial impact mostly with colleagues and with graduate students. But she opens it to a wider readership by clear writing and excellent use of summaries. Notes and bibliography are full and helpful.

After a programmatic introduction comes a chapter (2) on ideological criticism, based very heavily on Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), with use also of Michèle Barrett and Fredric Jameson. The treatment here, of the dialectical relation between structures of governing ideas, their material grounds, and their cultural products (such as texts), is generally excellent. Yee offers a particularly detailed "materialist theory of literary production" (20–23).

There follows an even better chapter on the social sciences. Its first section, on historical “modes of production” in Israel, lays out a scheme that has become widely accepted: a “familial” mode before the monarchy, “native-tributary” during times of independence under monarchy, “foreign-tributary” under the great empires, and “slave-based” (late and of marginal importance). The remaining sections of chapter 3, on Israelite kinship systems, “honor and shame,” “women’s informal power,” and “women’s separate world,” I found the most enlightening part of the book. Yee draws heavily here on field studies, especially from the Arab world.

Each of the remaining four chapters (4–7) submits a biblical text first to an “extrinsic” analysis—including analysis of mode of production and of society and family—followed by an “intrinsic” analysis of specific textual issues. Yee chooses texts from widely different periods. She relates Gen 2–3 to the transition from a familial to a monarchic (native-tributary) mode of production. She sees Hos 1–2 as coming, substantially, from Hosea’s own time during the independent monarchies. Her other two texts belong to the foreign-tributary mode: Ezek 23 comes from Babylon at the time of the exile, Prov 1–9 from postexilic Yehud under Persian colonial domination.

The extrinsic analyses in these chapters offer a wealth of excellent insight, such as: the regulation of sexuality and the privileging of nuclear family over larger kin-group in emerging states (64–67); the relation between “agribusiness” in Hosea’s time and the “Yahweh-alone” movement that he spearheaded (84–85, 92–95); the application of recent trauma studies to Ezekiel and his exiled community (112–17; this I particularly recommend); and the complexity of the definition of “foreign” by the returned exiles (the *golah* community) and the economic implications of “foreign” marriages (140–46). Yee uses current research to identify the specific impact on women of each of these social processes.

The intrinsic analyses seem to me to constitute the only weakness in a strong book. This is due to Yee’s reading method, a method based on a true and vital insight but employed here one-sidedly. She believes that the gender dynamics in each of her texts function as a “symbolic alibi” for quite different dynamics, mostly political and economic but also psychological, in the male creators of the texts. In Gen 2–3, for example, gender struggle symbolizes and displaces the class struggle behind the establishment of monarchy, while the women in Ezek 23 function to ease the experience of “emasculatation” in defeated and deported leaders.

I do not doubt the existence or importance of such extratextual and textual processes. Creators of texts use all manner of symbolization, translation, distortion, and the like between different areas of experience, in order minimize discredit to themselves. At

levels more or less conscious, they “pass the buck” to others as plausibly as possible. When men create the texts, women mostly become the scapegoats. Yee’s basic thesis is sound, that images of woman as evil, throughout the Bible, are generated largely by male compensatory mechanisms. So despite my strictures, I applaud her demand that full weight be given to such processes in any future reading of these and other texts.

Yet I was rarely persuaded by her particular readings. The “message” of each text turned out to be more or less an allegory of the mode of production out of which it emerged. Most convincing was the Ezekiel reading, since the trauma literature makes the psychological processes there rather clear. Least convincing was the Proverbs reading, where the “other woman” was found to symbolize various categories of woman disadvantageous for males of the *golah* community to marry. I grant much of Yee’s argument—that control of male sexuality is vital for a society needing to narrow and protect its boundaries; that casting doubt on the virtue of its women is a stock way of separating another group from one’s own—but I do not see how I (or anyone in the *golah* community) am supposed to *know* that avoiding compromising oneself with someone else’s wife (in the text) “symbolizes” choosing the most advantageous wife (outside the text).

Though Yee presents accurately the theory of Eagleton and the others, her reading method does not truly reflect theirs. The conceptual apparatus outlined in chapter 2, particularly the “materialist theory of literary production,” scarcely reappears at all in the textual chapters. The first paragraph on page 25 outlines a reading program that well encapsulates the work of these theorists (e.g., “read the text backwards . . . by examining the nature of its pretextual ‘problems’ in the light of their textual ‘solutions’”), but I cannot find this program at work in her biblical readings. In the end, Yee integrates social sciences much better into her work than she does ideological criticism.

Though she insists on Marxian dialectic, she is not dialectical enough. The problem lies in always putting the extrinsic analysis first. This results in the reading being shaped not by the text but by categories emerging from the extrinsic analysis—particularly perilous when the extrinsic analysis is itself so dependent on textual readings! I believe that processes of symbolization and the like invariably leave their traces in the text itself and that ideological critics have evolved methods powerful enough to “read” these traces prior to any extrinsic analysis. But (unlike many literary critics of the Bible) I do not argue that intrinsic analysis should always precede extrinsic—this would be equally undialectic. One needs to find a style of doing both together. A start might have been made by putting the intrinsic analysis first in two of Yee’s chapters.

For me, Jameson provides the best model for the sort of reading that Yee attempts (*The Political Unconscious* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981], 74–102). Like her, he links any text with its historical mode of production. But he employs a third “horizon” to mediate these two: the horizon of all the recoverable products, including other texts, sharing the historical circumstances of the given text. I believe there would have been great gain if Yee had chosen not four disparate texts but multiple texts from the same Israelite social formation (e.g., the postexilic reconstitution of Judaism).

Finally, a complaint—not against Yee but on behalf of the consumer. Why must we have full citation in notes of information contained in the bibliography? If presses are demanding this, they should stop. Page 177 (only the most extreme of very many examples) contains *nothing but* such redundant information. Books are dear, and price depends critically on length. A sensible citation system would shorten this one by twenty-five pages.