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**Bauer, Angela.**  
***Gender in the Book of Jeremiah: A Feminist-Literary Reading***

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This slim volume addresses important questions usually treated only glancingly by Jeremiah scholars, with the notable exception of Robert Carroll. Bauer employs literary and rhetorical-critical methodologies from a feminist perspective to discern how gender (mainly the female) is "inscribed" through metaphors and images of the feminine in Jeremiah.

Chapter 1 describes the metaphorization of Israel as faithful bride and the "pornographic representation" of Israel as promiscuous woman in Jer 1-2. Bauer faults "male commentators" for not acknowledging that the image of Israel's blood-stained skirts in 2:34 resonates with undertones of Israel as sexually violated female (p. 41), a reading she offers without argumentation. In ch. 2, Bauer discusses tropes "from divorce to labor pain" in Jer 3-6, proposing that the prophet "impersonates" a woman in labor (4:19a) as a means of identification with doomed Jerusalem; that this might be Zion's voice (cf. 4:31) is not given adequate consideration. Chapter 3 highlights women's roles in "ritual and requiem" as leaders in worship of the Queen of Heaven (7:18) and as mourners (9:16-20), setting wise women's mourning in a rather strained contrast with "male wisdom, power, and wealth" in 9:22-23: "the wisdom of the men is worthless. . . . the only wisdom left in the land is ascribed to the women who know the music of mourning" (pp. 95-97). In ch. 4 Bauer reviews more metaphors of the sexually violated woman and other negative images (e.g., mother bereaved in 15:8-9, birth cursed in 20:14-18), including the unsettling portrayal of Jeremiah as having suffered metaphorical rape himself (20:7). In ch. 5, Bauer studies eschatological motifs in Jer 30-31, seizing particularly on the enigmatic נְקִיבָה תְּסֻבֵּב גִּבּוֹר ("female surrounds warrior-male") of 31:22b, wherein she finds "the promise of a new creation" that "embodies the functions of female imagery in the book of Jeremiah as a whole" (p.145).

Bauer is an intelligent and attentive reader, but she supplies too little argumentation for her more innovative readings, and there are significant flaws in the theoretical underpinnings of her exegesis. Debatable assumptions are in evidence regarding how a text's surface structure might architectonically convey a deeper semantic sense; for

instance, she writes of 1:5, "the sentence structure around 'the womb' symbolizes the content of the call: separation, protection, and challenge . . . . The three lines shrink in length visually symbolizing a focusing on the birth of the prophet" (pp. 13-14). In fact, 1:5 is precisely *not* about the birth of the prophet. More attention to complex questions of how metaphor and voice function in literature would have helped situate Bauer's own approach, which presumes that the implied reader is to "identify" with figures. For example, in 3:4-5 she discerns a "rhetorical strategy" pressing "male Israel" to identify with metaphorical wife, daughter, and husband/father, thus requiring the hapless ancient reader "both to try on identification with female Israel and to resist that role at the same time" (p.55). That all of this might be part of a rhetorical strategy in 3:4-5 seems implausible.

Bauer's exegesis is least compelling when determined by an imposed agenda. Of 3:19 she writes, "the male audience here is to identify with Israel as a positive, even special recipient of divine benevolence. The move also resonates with the promises and gifts given in broken, even abusive relationships, when the more powerful partner urges the less powerful one to return" (pp. 60-61). This eisegesis blurs the motivation of the passage and sets up for deconstruction a straw ideology considerably more toxic than the paternal trope actually presented by the verse. Or again, where "male" Israel is imaged as a metaphorical female sexually violated by the deity, can one reasonably speak of a "threat of homoeroticism surrounding the possibility of intense relations between the audience and the deity" (p.161)?

Bauer asks (pp. 52, 163) how the contemporary reader might "resist" misogynistic Biblical texts. But to this and other difficult questions (e.g., of 13:26, "What are the theological implications of such a portrayal of 'God, the rapist'?" [p.109]) she does not offer even preliminary answers. Bauer here misses an important chance to offer constructive suggestions that might counter potential "reinscriptions of sexualized violence in the present" (p. 109) by uncritical readers of Jeremiah. Finally, a minor stylistic irritant is Bauer's presentation of detailed information on the Hebrew grammar of words and phrases in the service of no particular interpretive point.

Bauer's monograph raises provocative hermeneutical questions about literary functions of the feminine in Jeremiah. There remain opportunities for integration of feminist concerns with broader-ranging critical issues in the book. Bauer seems not to know what to make of Jer 44, inexplicably soft-pedaling the impact of the chapter's brutal diatribe against the Judean diaspora in Egypt: "the oracle sinks into silence. . . . The threat seems to have lost its edge" (p.156). Jer 44 is properly read with chs. 24, 29, 42, and 43 as privileging the post-597 Babylonian exiles over those Judeans who remained in Judah and those who fled to Egypt. If patriarchy justifies itself through legitimation of imbalanced power relationships that deny validity and agency to the "Other" (however that Other be conceived), surely a feminist interpreter could say more about the aggressive disenfranchising of the Judean diaspora in Egypt by texts promoting the

theopolitical hegemony of the Babylonian *gōlāh*. The pro-*gōlāh* material reaches its rhetorical zenith in the condemnation of defiant apostate women in chap. 44, a highly charged instance of polemicization of the feminine that intersects a more complicated question regarding the construction of theological authority in Jeremiah. Feminist literary analysis will need to take broader account of the multiple levels on which tropes enact ideological agendas if it is to provide its most trenchant and searching critique of patriarchal Biblical texts.