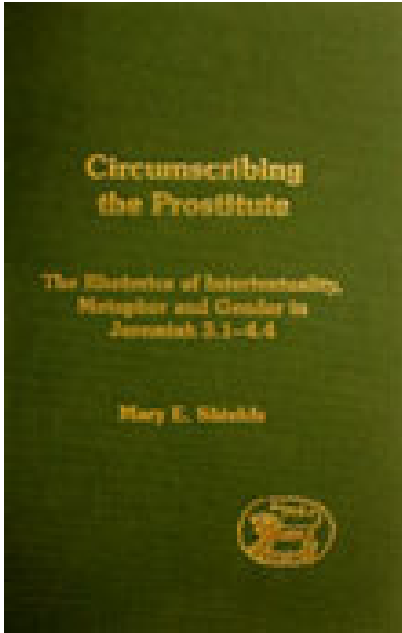


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**Shields, Mary E.**

***Circumscribing the Prostitute: The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jeremiah 3.1-4.4***

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*Circumscribing the Prostitute* is Mary Shields's revised dissertation, written under the guidance of Carol A. Newsom at Emory University. It is a fine analysis of Jer 3:1-4:4, with particular attention to the unit's intertextual relationships, metaphorical language, and gender construction. The monograph is informed by sophisticated theoretical assumptions that are deployed in ways that produce a plausible and at times artful reading of the text in its present form.

Shields argues that the prophet weaves "a rich and complex rhetorical tapestry" from three primary threads: intertextuality, metaphor, and gender. This tapestry is designed to convince the audience that "their political and religious actions have been wrong and that they must change their ways before it is too late" (1).

Before examining rhetorical strategies, Shields establishes the boundaries and literary environment of the text under examination. She follows the vast of majority of scholars, who divide Jer 2-6 into two parts (2:1-4:4 and 4:5-6:30), although she treats 3:1-4:4 as a subunit of the former based on textual and thematic considerations. Jeremiah 2 sets the stage for 3:1-4:4 by introducing the central images, rhetorical strategies, and metaphors, and specifically a juridical backdrop that employs intertextual links to establish legal

precedent. These indices are designed to persuade the audience that a change in behavior is crucial to its future.

After providing a functional overview of the book, including a structural examination of the polyphonic text, Shields develops her thesis in nine chapters. Chapter 1 is a theoretical grammar of sorts; Shields draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva in her analysis of the interplay between Jer 3:1–5 and Deut 24:1–4. These two texts are particularly disposed to such study, as they form a rather natural web of textual (and cultural) voices that converge in engaged dialogue. While the prophetic literature is replete with intertextual and cultural echoes and allusions, here we encounter an undisputed citation with its own distinctive values and meanings. First Shields examines the intertext, Deut 24:1–4, a legal text that addresses the blurring of well-defined social and symbolic categories, specifically the “confusing of hierarchy, lineage, property lines and paternity” (35). Next she explores the textual workings of Jer 3:1–5, especially the play on the Deuteronomic text in Jeremiah. Among other points of interest Shields notes that Jer 3:1–5 functions as a dialogic performance in which a community of readers—both past and present—participates in the developing conversation between Yahweh and the people. The interpretive move from legal citation to disputation ultimately serves to shatter the community’s systems of security.

In chapter 2 Shields extends the notion of dialogue “to the cultural conventions with which a text plays” (51). That is to say, Shields broadens the intertextual web beyond literary texts to cultural networks of meaning and conventions of gender. Once again Jer 3:1–5 is well suited for such an exploration. It is laden with legal allusions and textual citations, sexual images and innuendos, as well as defining gender categories. The text exploits an array of evocative metaphors and cultural assumptions to bring to light Israel’s religious and political infidelities. When Israel, Yahweh’s wife, forsakes her divine husband to play the harlot, she transgresses the most fundamental of cultural boundaries—sexual boundaries that are clearly delineated and enforced by an arsenal of social and symbolic restraints. Indeed, such behavior threatens not only the process of power distribution and proper societal boundaries but, more important, the very order of creation. Furthermore, by addressing the male audience with the feminine form and by identifying the readers/hearers as whores, the prophet employs powerful rhetorical tools aimed at shaming the community into submission.

While this gendered language may be an efficient metaphorical technique to pressure men to change their behavior, especially their infidelity to Yahweh, its effect on women is quite otherwise. The rhetoric functions symbolically and literally: it not only cautions women about forsaking Yahweh but also reinforces certain cultural boundaries that marginalize them; it accentuates the dire consequences of overstepping mores that

reinforce male interests. Moreover, when the text symbolically identifies the deity with men and not women, depicting God as husband and Israel as an adulterous wife, it reinforces a “patriarchal prescription of proper female roles” (70) and caricatures female sexuality. Such imagery is dangerous for women *and* for men.

In chapter 3 Shields outlines the theoretical underpinnings of metaphor as employed in the study (highlighting the works of Donald Davidson, David E. Cooper, and Wayne Booth). Following this brief but valuable discussion she hones in on Jer 3:6–11 and its use of (extended) metaphor, intertextuality and intratextuality, and conventions of gender. When one compares Jer 3:6–11 with the previous text, 3:1–5, it is obvious, as commentators have long noted, that the two represent different forms, styles, and (likely) provenances. Jeremiah 3:6–11 is a prose piece written in third person and in the form of an “extended metaphor” that develops the language and symbolic implications of sexual promiscuity. Against the background of certain cultural assumptions of gender, the metaphor of marital promiscuity and the web of intertextual and intratextual relationships create a powerful rhetorical catalyst. For example, the text plays on an underlying anxiety associated with the “lack of male control over female sexuality” (90) and as such “allows a male audience to identify with the husband’s plight” (90), which in turn exerts pressure to change (unacceptable) behavior.

In chapter 4–8 Shields continues her close reading of the text, with special attention given to intertextuality, metaphor, and gender. In the company of other scholars, Shields sees Jer 3:12–13 as a strange “climax and turning point” in the larger literary unit; it forms an intertextual web of meanings around the law of Deut 24:1–4 and plays on social understandings of gender as a way to subvert conventional expectations. While all textual and cultural indices thus far lead to the conclusion that the divine–human relationship is broken beyond repair, the text unexpectedly invites those precluded by law the opportunity to return to God.

Subsequent sections of the text map out facets of the new relationship between Yahweh and the people; that is to say, Jer 3:14–4:4 marks out the contours of Yahweh’s unexpected reordering of life. Jeremiah 3:14–18 draws upon a new set of intertexts (including Isa 2:2–4) and metaphoric constructions to speak of Judah’s unexpected future (Yahweh as father or lord and Judah as sons). In this new vignette, female imagery fades as the vision of the ideal world takes shape. This is no accident. Women are no longer present to threaten the proper workings of the symbolic universe or to blur existing social categories! Alert to transitions in gender and relational metaphors in the construction of this new order, Shields notes that “in vv. 1–18 the male gender is constructed as central to society and to its proper maintenance, while the female gender, the ‘other’, is the vehicle for portraying evil, disruption and chaos” (114). This is clearly a significant observation.

Notwithstanding the force of this insight, female imagery reappears in Jer 3:19, momentarily and, it would seem, in a positive light. Perhaps to emphasize Israel's uniqueness among the nations and the great debt of gratitude due, the prophet depicts the nation as a daughter who is given the best inheritance from her father. This distinctive father–daughter metaphor, however, is promptly undermined by the daughter's lack of gratitude and obedience; it is further eroded by the subsequent image of the woman/wife overstepping sexual boundaries to play the harlot. At this point, the text returns to direct address in order to strengthen the case that the men of Judah have been disloyal to Yahweh.

In the remainder of the literary unit (3:21–4:4)—while entertaining most directly the prospect of repentance and restoration—male imagery governs the discourse: Israel is depicted as son(s) rather than wife/daughter, and God remains in the role of father. First a liturgy of repentance is placed in the mouth of the wayward sons of Israel (3:21–25): after a long time in a faraway land, God's rebellious sons return home acknowledging their wrongdoing and reestablishing their position in the patriarchal line. The closing rhetorical arguments clarify expectations for returning to Yahweh (4:1–4). Once again masculine imagery and address dominate. While this shift is obvious in the image of circumcision, it is less so in the agricultural metaphors of breaking up fallow ground and not sowing among the thorns (4:3). In the final chapter Shields summarizes her findings and encourages further study of intertextuality, metaphor, and gender in the prophetic literature. I think her rich exegetical work makes the case quite eloquently.

One aspect of this book that I found somewhat puzzling was its treatment of audience or implied reader and the related matters of oral and written prophecy. Shields is attentive to these complex areas and by and large adopts a synchronic approach to the biblical material. Not unlike other recent approaches to Jeremiah, she is more concerned with the dialogical character of the text than with diachronic questions such as dating various voices/strata (e.g., 7). Notwithstanding this commitment to the final form of Jeremiah, Shields at times accepts certain historical-critical assumptions. For example, she notes that “the *exilic* voice in 3:14–18 engages the *earlier* verses” (7, emphasis added). Moreover, her governing claim that “*the prophet* weaves a rich and complex rhetorical tapestry designed to convince the people that their political and religious actions have been wrong and that they must change their ways before it is too late” (1, emphasis added) seems to suggest a preexilic setting. That is to say, Shields suggests that Jer 3:1–4:4 largely addresses a preexilic Judean audience that could still change its behavior and avert disaster. In this regard Shields draws on the nineteenth-century work of Rudolf Smend (*Lehrbuch der Alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* [Freiburg; Mohr, 1899]) and a recent monograph by J. G. McConville (*Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993]). Both ask historical questions, and

both present plausible cases for their position. However, consistent with a synchronic approach, Shields might have done well to refrain from historical queries in order to explore the rhetorical strategies involved in presenting the fate of Judah as conditional and forward-looking (6). Rather than attempting to pressure a preexilic audience to change—perhaps the intent of the oral word—the written word in its larger *Sitz im Buch* may serve an altogether different set of objectives; for instance, the written text may function as a theodicy that establishes the culpability of the listening community, exonerates Yahweh of blame and mismanagement, and demonstrates that the end of Judah’s world (developed further in subsequent chapters of Jeremiah) is fully just and justified.

In all, Shields’s *Circumscribing the Prostitute* represents a serious attempt to apply the rhetorics of intertextuality, metaphor, and gender construction to Jer 3:1–4:4. Her use of Bakhtin and Cooper makes such a reading compelling. Shields’s chosen text, Jer 3:1–4:4, is suited well for the analysis; it is fluid, interactive, dialogic, and replete with textual echoes, voices, and counter voices. While one may not find all of Shields’s observations equally convincing, her exegetical work and theoretical underpinnings are lucid and generative. Indeed, such an interpretive approach might prove fruitful not only for other prophetic texts in the Bible but also for their *nachleben*.