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***Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives.*** By J. Cheryl Exum. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993. ISBN 1-56338-018-8. Pp. 223.

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J. Cheryl Exum distinguishes her work in *Fragmented Women* from previous feminist biblical study in three ways. Unlike earlier feminist approaches, Exum is not interested in criticism which attacks the bible as a sexist document. Further, she does not wish to recover affirmations of woman in the bible, nor does she investigate female authorial responsibility for biblical stories. Instead, she attempts to reconstruct the stories of women from the sparsely detailed presentation of their lives and experiences in the biblical text.

Exum asserts that women in the bible are male constructs, creations of an androcentric community which reflect its own ideas about women in order to serve its patriarchal interests (11). She describes the "central organizing question" of the book as "what androcentric agenda do these narratives promote?" (12). At the same time, the author is interested in the problematic of maintaining the patriarchy that biblical texts reveal. She sums up her work as follows: "Each chapter of the book is an experiment in counter-reading these stories in ways both that expose the difficulties patriarchy has in justifying its subjugation of women and that uncover traces of women's experience and women's resistance to patriarchal constraints" (11).

Exum's description of each chapter as an experiment is appropriate. The author is neither bound by the conventions of earlier feminist criticism, nor is she limited to pursuing one particular "method" in each part of her study. Rather, she treats a number of diverse stories in innovative ways, employing psychoanalytical, deconstructive, and even some anthropological techniques in order to pursue her topic. In addition, she rejects the canonical order of the stories, arguing that the very idea of canon is phallocentric in its insistence that we read material in a specified order and privilege some texts over others (13).

Exum's treatment of Samson ("Samson's Women") is an excellent example of her intentions in *Fragmented Women*. She exposes the patriarchal agenda behind the Samson narrative by discussing the use of binary opposition in the story (e.g., foreigner versus Israelite, mother versus whore, etc.). In this text, Exum shows that patriarchy also relies on typical biblical presentations of women in order to achieve its ends, such as women's motivation to act because of their fear of male physical aggression and their interest in reward (bribery). Presented as either "good" or "bad," women are thus regulated by the story, and the threat of their sexuality (which Samson finds so alluring) can be controlled.

Exum observes that on a psychosexual level, the story is about the danger of one (man) becoming one with the "other" (woman) (83). Samson becomes one with woman sexually, then symbolically he is "emasculated," weakened (his hair is cut off), and made to assume a typically female role in the story. Patriarchy triumphs, however, as Samson (with the male deity's help) is able to defeat his enemies. He breaks the pillars of the temple which represent, Exum suggests, the thighs of a woman (the real "enemy?") and her latent power to give birth.

The first and last chapters of the book are perhaps the most compelling. *Fragmented Women* is framed by two studies of two women: Jeptah's daughter and Michal (chapter 1: "Murder they Wrote"), and Bathsheba and *Bath-sheber*, the woman who is raped repeatedly and then brutally dismembered in Judges 19 (chapter 6: "Raped by the Pen"). Exum brings the two women together in each chapter-experiment in order to investigate their similarity: in chapter one, murder *in* the story and murder *by means* of the story, and in chapter 6, rape *by means* of the narrative and rape *in* the narrative. Exum explains that she wanted to "experiment with reading a text that relies on a particular strategy for controlling women on the level of the plot against a text that uses the same type of strategy at the narratorial level" (12).

The results are interesting. In the murder stories, it is the speech of the women (speech represents autonomy) which brings a deleterious end for the victims (on two counts: virginity/childlessness and actual physical death). In the rape stories, Exum exposes how the text makes the woman responsible through her actions (Bathsheba bathing and *Bath-sheber* exerting her own sexual independence) for male sexual activity and, in these cases, sexual aggression. In all four cases (chapters 1 and 6), the women are punished for their autonomous behaviour.

In another chapter, Exum discusses the theme of the "Endangered Ancestress" (Gen 12, 20, 26; "Who's Afraid of the Endangered Ancestress?"). This is the clearest example of her use of psychoanalytical criticism in the book. She employs this approach to reveal the text's patriarchal interest in female sexuality. This interest is represented both by a fear of female sexuality and a need to have it approved and experienced (with reference to the patriarchs' own wives) by other men. The conflict is resolved by the bible's three-time repetition of the story. At the third telling, the super-ego develops to the point that it no longer needs approval of the wife by her peers. This is seen in the story as the wife's rejection by the patriarch's rival, "Abimelech."

Exum also treats the subject of Michal in greater detail and the role of the matriarchs in Israel's stories of its origins. The author's experiments in *Fragmented Women* are successful and enlightening. She argues cogently and effectively for her reconstructions of the stories of biblical women. She provides readings which expose both the biblical text's patriarchal agenda and its problems in maintaining the patriarchal point of view, giving new insights into the presence and personality of some of the bible's women.

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From textual polemics to just war theories, this collection of essays, generated by meetings between Jewish and Christian academics from Tel Aviv and Bochum