Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible. By David Rutledge. Biblical Interpretation Series 21. Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1996. ISBN 90 04 10564 6. Pp. x+234.

Anyone familiar with the prickly, often contentious exchanges between feminist and deconstructive critics in the literary journals might well wonder why biblical scholars would venture out into the crossfire of this "no-man's-land" (to pick up Frank Kermode's martial image adopted by Rutledge). Biblical scholars would do well to keep their heads down. In literary studies the situation is a shooting war; in biblical studies the fighting is more like guerrilla skirmishing and occasional sniping. Biblical studies' engagement with feminism is after all fairly recent and circumscribed; and the encounter with deconstruction even more recent and restricted. The caricatures and misunderstandings of both abound. What then is to be gained by yoking together these marginal discourses for reading the Bible?

This is the question to which Rutledge's book is proposed as an answer. The ambitious goal of *Reading Marginally* is to forge a link between the fields of feminism, deconstruction, and biblical interpretation by demonstrating their shared interests and intelligibilities. As instances of marginal discourse, feminism and deconstruction have much in common and therefore much to gain from conversation and collaboration with each other. Each is fundamentally oppositional to patriarchal practices (for political and philosophical reasons). Each operates with a certain kind of moral authority. For political, ethical, and ultimately religious reasons, then, feminism and deconstruction should sustain each other. Feminism and deconstruction matter to biblical interpretation because they identify with a prophetic tradition that is key to a "creative and holistic interpretation of the Bible" (21).

The book contains five major chapters: "Feminism, Religion and the Biblical Text"; "The Concept of 'Woman' in Interpretation"; "Deconstruction and Feminism"; "Displacement and Faithful Reading"; and "Genesis 2:4b–3:24: Yahweh and the Sexuality of Rhetoric," plus a brief conclusion, scaled-down bibliography, and index of Biblical references and names. Rutledge moves rapidly from major topic to major topic in broad strokes, favoring "generalizations, condensations and omissions" (8) over concreteness and detail: breadth instead of depth at many places he says. This strategy weakens Rutledge's overall effort. For the sake of providing an introduction, the "similarities" are not interrogated rigorously enough and too many crucial differences get short shrift. For instance in his introductory discussion of "feminism" Rutledge restricts himself to certain forms of "literary/religious" feminism to the exclusion of forms of "cultural/secular" feminism represented by critics like Catharine MacKinnon, Susan Faludi, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. Feminism for Rutledge really means "Christian and Jewish feminist hermeneutics" (10).

Rutledge's narrow choice of feminist critics determines how the forging of ties with deconstruction will take place, and this is a second weakness. He gives (admittedly) passing mention to Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigary, and Julian Kristeva,

important "cultural/philosophical" feminists who would enrich by complicating a discussion of Genesis 2 and who have the nearest theoretical ties, especially differences, with Derrida and deconstruction. The cost to his argument is that the "forging" of links with deconstruction is far too uncomplicated. Similarities are significant only when yoked to linguistic, textual, ontological, phenomenological, cultural, and moral differences (for example, that feminist criticism is critique in the Kantian sense while Derridian deconstruction is not). To his credit Rutledge's introduction to deconstruction is lucid and a corrective for readers who may only be familiar with Alter's willful misstatements (which Rutledge happily interrogates). But oddly Rutledge does not take up Derrida's most recent political writings (*The Other Heading* [1992]) and the abundant secondary literature, or Derrida's engagement with feminist concerns in his critique of Levinas. The result is an unfortunate constriction of both feminism and deconstruction that minimizes crucial tactical and strategic differences. Because they are marginal discourses for very different reasons they cannot be paired together so simply, and this vitiates the book's expository force.

Rutledge tries to walk a fine line between amplifying the radical energies and interests of both feminism and deconstruction and holding out for the redemptive potential of biblical interpretation and the Bible even as both continue to participate in violence against women and others. It is a difficult but necessary task for readers of the Bible committed as Rutledge is as a feminist to "undermining ... patriarchal assumptions, power structures and truth claims" (213). To his credit this is one of the few serious book-length efforts by a biblical scholar to examine feminist and deconstructive interests together. (David Jobling's contribution in *Semeia* 51 and Danna Nolan Fewell's in G. Yee, ed., *Judges and Method* [1995] are two notable essay-length exceptions; *The Postmodern Bible* [1995] Rutledge curiously ignores). The book's main weakness is not its goal, which is right and important, but that it does not deliver on the particulars needed to justify fully why feminism and deconstruction are crucial for understanding the complicated, contradictory, ambiguous, violent, and liberatory character of Genesis 2 and the Bible more broadly. Serious students of the Bible can start with Rutledge but they will need to step out into the "no-man's-land" to read more.

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