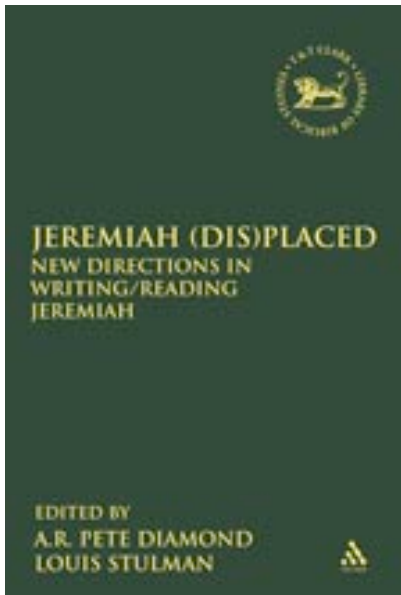


RBL 10/2011



Diamond, A. R. Pete, and Louis Stulman, eds.

Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah

Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 529

New York: T&T Clark, 2011. Pp. xii + 317. Hardcover.
\$140.00. ISBN 9780567641229.

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The book of Jeremiah was and still is a source for vivid debate. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most complex books in the whole prophetic literature. Three important commentaries on Jeremiah were published (composed by Holladay, McKane and Carroll) in 1986. Twenty-five years later, commentaries and monographs on Jeremiah are still being published in various languages. Typically the questions addressed in Jeremiah commentaries, monographs and articles include the composition and redaction of the book; the historical background of Jeremiah's oracles; the relation between the MT, LXX, and Qumran; the book's theological message; comparisons between Jeremiah and other prophets, and so on.

The present volume is a collection (or a selection) of twenty papers and three responses delivered at the SBL session of Jeremiah during 2007–2008. The list of participants is diverse and includes scholars from Europe, the United States, South Africa, and Australia. This session was established in early 1990s and is now on the road again. In contrast to other collections of articles focusing on Jeremiah, the present volume seeks to offer new avenues in the study of Jeremiah. The question is less the historical reconstruction of the events in the book but rather what relevance the book of Jeremiah has for its modern readers. The reader can discern this easily when going over the footnotes: rather than

references to commentaries or monographs on Jeremiah, one finds references for modern literature, philosophy, art, anthropology, music, and the like. Multiplicity of voices and methods is the name of the game in the present volume. Voices silenced in the past come now to the forefront.

At the beginning stands Diamond and Stulman's introduction, entitled "Analytical Introduction: Writing and Reading Jeremiah" (1–32). They summarize the various papers collected in this volume and call for "mature assessment" of the book of Jeremiah in which the old strategies of reading Jeremiah move to the margins and new ones take their place.

The first part of the book (35–111) is entitled "Theorizing the Ancient and Modern Reader in/of the Scroll of Jeremiah." It consists of five papers and one response. Carolyn J. Sharp ("Jeremiah in the Land of Aporia: Reconfiguring Redaction Criticism as Witness to Foreignness," 35–46) tries to restore the honor of redaction criticism, that is, reading strategies that take seriously the honoring of multiple voices in the book of Jeremiah as an authored text shaped by a complex compositional history. In contrast to the editors' preface to the present volume, Sharp points out that this methodology became peripheral within biblical scholarship due to its technical nature. She analyzes mainly Jer 36. Sharp seems to be unfamiliar with the works of the Israeli scholars Yair Hoffman and Alexander Rofé, who used redaction criticism extensively in their numerous studies on Jeremiah.

Mark Brummitt and Yvonne Sherwood likewise deal with Jer 36, in "The Fear of Loss Inherent in Writing: Jeremiah 36 as the Story of a Self-Conscious Scroll" (47–66). Their aim is to "attempt to set up a conversation between the book of Jeremiah ... and several twentieth-century thinkers" (47). Rather than analyzing Jer 36 as part of the composition process of the book of Jeremiah, Brummitt and Sherwood entitle this chapter "The Assured Passage from Breath to Ink," since the content of the written scroll is unimportant but rather the anxiety that the word of God will pass directly to the scroll without losing even a word. They have a nice comparison between Jer 36 and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: in both the attempt to destroy the written word leads to more and more words rather than their disappearance.

Kathleen M. O'Connor ("Terror All Around: Confusion as Meaning-Making," 67–79) writes about the chaos inherent in the book of Jeremiah: "the literary parts of Jeremiah do not fit together. ... dates are not sequential ... and ... it has no certain ending" (69). She uses trauma and disaster studies in order to understand why the book is so disordered. According to her, the book does not have a happy ending (such as the book of consolation in Jer 30–33) because the disasters did not really end and each generation

experiences them time and again. The chaos in the book of Jeremiah makes readers become active interpreters of the prophet's oracles.

Ehud Ben Zvi asks, "Would Ancient Readers of the Books of Hosea or Micah Be 'Competent' to Read the Book of Jeremiah?" (80–98). His simple answer is yes. These books were read and reread by an elite circle, the Yehudite literati, living in the Persian period, "who shared in the main a common integrative discourse" (96). Ben Zvi raises many issues yet to be explored by further research: What does it do to the literati as a group that they express themselves and shape their ideological world and social memory (of a past and of a utopian future) in this manner? What does it do to their idea of what a prophetic book/YHWH's word should be?

Stulman responses to the preceding four papers ("Here Comes the Reader," 99–103) adds reflections of his own and further questions, such as: Who is today the intended audience of Jeremiah, and what does such an audience need in order to fully understand Jeremiah's oracles. Can Americans, citizens of the "empire," really understand or identify with subject people in Babylon, Judah, and Egypt?

John Hill ("The Dynamics of Written Discourse and Book of Jeremiah MT," 104–11) searches for the context of the book of Jeremiah and its compositional history. Previous approaches to the book situated it against the backdrop of the events either leading up to 587 BCE or those immediately following. The emphasis has often been on the prophetic message as an oral performance. Hill writes of two shifts in focus in recent research of Jeremiah: The first is from the preexilic to the postexilic (i.e., Persian period) as a backdrop for the book's composition. The second is the shift (inspired by Paul Ricoeur) from an understanding of the prophetic message as oral performance to a process of rereading.

The second part of this volume consists of five papers and is entitled "Diaspora and Resistance in Jeremiah" (115–71). Daniel Smith-Christopher opens with "Jeremiah as Frantz Fanon" (115–24). Franz Fanon (1925–1962) was a psychiatrist and postcolonial theorist who argued for the use of violence in anticolonial struggle, namely, of Algeria against France. Smith-Christopher explores Jeremiah's direct and indirect influence on biblical historiography, especially regarding the self-blame motif. Parallels are drawn between Jeremiah's influence and the influence of Fanon, whose texts inspired contemporary postcolonialist and cultural studies.

Else Holt's paper "Narrative Normativity in Diasporic Jeremiah—and Today" (125–35) stands in direct continuation with Smith-Christopher's paper, since Holt builds her paper on the former's book. Using interdisciplinary approaches, she suggests reading Jeremiah

“as a part of a strategy for survival—or revival—of the returning exilic society” (126). She argues that Jeremiah the prophet is presented as a role model for the people in distress, partly as a metaphor for God. Holt examines the interaction between God, prophet, and people in Jer 1–6 and 37–44, showing that here we find “a matrix of conjunction and disjunction” between the three parts. Thus the book of Jeremiah is not a mishmash but rather a complex book that opens many possible theologies.

William Domeris, in “The Land Claim of Jeremiah—Was Max Weber Right?” (136–49), analyzes Jer 32:6–15. Is it a purchase, and why is there mention of a relative? Since the process of selling property is well-attested only from the Greco-Roman period, and since Jeremiah is certainly not from this period, a different interpretation is to be preferred. According to Domeris, Max Weber’s understanding of ancient systems of land allocations is the correct interpretation of this story. Jeremiah is only claiming his familial right to possess the land of Anathoth.

Steed Vernyl Davidson (“Chosen Marginality as Resistance in Jeremiah 40:1–6,” 150–61) focuses on Jer 40:1–6, a narrative that portrays Jeremiah’s release from the line of imprisoned captives on their way to Babylon. Davidson analyzes this through an exploration of Afro-American feminist bell hooks’s (= Gloria Jean Watkins) notion of marginality as a form of resistance to dominant power. Hooks’s ideas help situate the reading of Jeremiah in the narrative as adopting marginality, a resistant position, through the choice to remain in the land and the denial of Babylonian preferential treatment. This portrayal is contrasted with that of Gedaliah, who serves as the imperial governor during the period of home rule on whom marginality is imposed.

Following is another contribution of Davidson: “Ambivalence and Temple Destruction: Reading the Book of Jeremiah with Homi Bhabha” (162–71). Davidson uses Homi Bhabha’s (one of the founders of the postcolonial theory) notion of ambivalence as a way to understand the puzzling idea of a deity destroying its own cultic site. Bhabha’s use, in the context of imperial discourse, of the psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence as wanting one thing but desiring its opposite serves as a useful reading strategy for chapters 7 and 26 of Jeremiah.

The third part (“Hope, Utopia and the Fantasy of Violence in Jeremiah,” 175–249) consists of four papers and one response. Mark Brummitt (“Troubling Utopias: Possible Worlds and Possible Voices in the Book of Jeremiah,” 175–89) makes use of the insights of the German philosopher Ernst Bloch (*The Principle of Hope*) and the American critic Frederic Jameson, who wrote on utopias. Brummitt explores the image of the past and present in Jer 2, where the past is referred to as a nostalgia for the golden age.

Amy Kalmanofsky's "The Monstrous-Feminine in the Book of Jeremiah" (190–208) analyzes Jer 13:18–27 (a pornographic and a horror text, in her view) with the help of the horror theorist Barbara Creed. Throughout his prophecy, Jeremiah conjures images of monstrous women to justify God's condemnation of Israel, to provoke disgust from his audience, and to impel them to reform. According to Creed, female monsters horrify differently than male monsters. For Creed, female monstrousness relates primarily to a woman's mothering or reproductive functions. Applying horror theory on the monstrous-feminine to the book of Jeremiah, Kalmanofsky looks at Jeremiah's representation of woman as monster. This woman "is as lustful animal that must be exposed in order to be removed" (207).

Else K. Holt, in "King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, My Servant, and the Cup of Wrath: Jeremiah's Fantasies and the Hope of Violence" (209–18) deals with MT Jer 25. At first glance, the oracle against the nations in this chapter seems to be a scarce vestige of hope for Judah. However, hope disappears when the reader moves to the rest of the chapter. Holt accepts Kalmanofsky's theory of viewing the book of Jeremiah as a text of horror and considers Jer 25 as a horrific text or "apocalyptic horror."

Alice Ogden Bellis ("Assaulting the Empire: A Refugee Community's Language of Hope," 219–34) compares the language of Jer 50–51 concerning Babylon with the lyrics of some modern American and Arab protest songs. The protest against the empire, filled with violence and revenge, brings relief to the oppressed. Readers are advised to follow the links to YouTube that Bellis added to her paper in order to get into the right mood. As she herself admits, "This is admittedly a creative, rather than a scientific, comparison" (221).

Next comes Erin Runions's response to the preceding four papers: "Prophetic Affect and the Promise of Change: A Response" (235–42). She hopes that the anger prevalent in the protest songs that Bellis has discussed and in the violent oracles of Jeremiah will be channeled in positive ways such as alliances and solidarity.

Barrie Bowman ("Future Imagination: Utopianism in the Book of Jeremiah," 243–49) reexamines the book of Jeremiah using utopian literary theory. He disagrees with scholars who view Jer 1–20 as dystopia and labels Jer 27, 32–33, and 51 as utopia. These passages offer hope for a positive future. The use of the creative power of Yahweh, in spite of the despair of the contemporary situation regarding the exile, is a utopian motif.

The fourth part is entitled "Intertextuality, Reception and History of Interpretation." Hannes Bezzel, in "'Man of Constant Sorrow'—Rereading Jeremiah in Lamentations 3" (253–65), exposes direct intertextual relationship between the book of Jeremiah (especially

Jer 11–20, the “confessions”) and the book of Lamentations. The result of this comparison is that Lamentations becomes “Lamentationes Hieremiae Prophetae”: Jeremiah and Lady Zion merge into one entity.

Mary Chilton Callaway’s “Reading Jeremiah with Some Help from Gadamer” (266–78) uses Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* in her analysis of Jer 4:27 and 5:10, 18. Callaway has contributed another paper coming right after her previous paper, entitled “Peering Inside Jeremiah: How Early Modern English Culture Still Influences Our Reading of the Prophet” (279–89). According to the postmodern paradigm, there is no such a thing as “the true interpretation.” Each interpretation is the product of the era in which the interpreter lives. This can be shown in the way in which early modern England translations of certain expressions from Jeremiah have been incorporated into dictionaries and modern translations such as BDB and NRSV.

Mary E. Shields (“Impasse or Opportunity or...? Women Reading Jeremiah Reading Women,” 290–302) deals with the depiction of women and use of female metaphors in the book of Jeremiah, mainly his use of women’s bodies to depict the past behavior and upcoming destruction of Israel. According to her, prophetic texts in general, Jeremiah included, legitimize male hegemony. Shields surveys studies written on Jeremiah from a feministic approach in the last decades. As for future Jeremiah studies, she suggests that feminist scholars should not focus on literary methods alone but should also use historical methods. She explore female embodiment in Jeremiah, both from the perspectives of those who have written on the gendered language of the book and in terms of some suggestions.

Ending this volume is Athalya Brenner’s response to Mary Shields (“About ‘Jeremiah’ as Reflected in Feminist Eyes,” 303–6). Brenner deals with the questions that Shields posed and claims that feminist scholars should continue problematizing prophetic texts further: they should not accept the pornographic views of the prophets “as is” but criticize the prophets and their god for using them.

Indexes of references and authors follow. Perhaps a cumulative bibliography, collecting all the bibliography mentioned throughout the book, could have been considered as well.

In my opinion, readers could have benefited even more had the editors chosen to add a written report of the responses and discussions of both the speakers and the respondents. Such a format was adopted in a volume called *Studies in the Book of Jeremiah*, published thirty years ago in Israel, collecting papers delivered by leading Israeli scholars at the house of the Israeli president. A further example of my suggestion is the *Journal of*

Hebrew Scriptures' fantastic habit to dedicate from time to time an issue entitled "In Conversation with..." where authors and respondents interact.

The book is well-edited and well-proofed. No doubt this collection will affect future research made on the book of Jeremiah in many ways. Carolyn Sharp writes in a footnote (37 n. 4) that "Not all current Jeremiah scholarship reflects an awareness" of the former volume edited by Diamond and Stulman (*Troubling Jeremiah*, Sheffield, 1999). It is hoped that the present volume will gain such an awareness and will not be displaced.