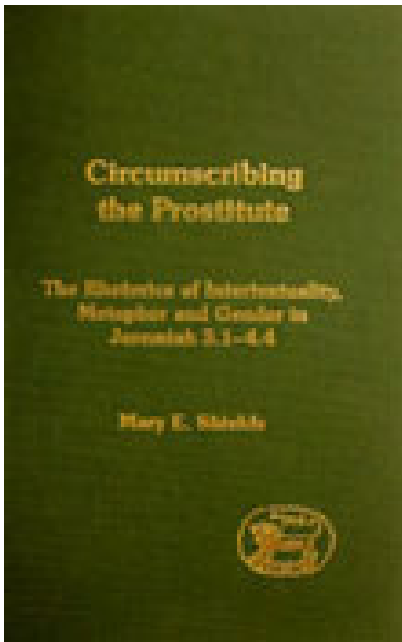


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Shields, Mary E.

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

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This revision of Shields's 1996 dissertation (with Carol A. Newsom, Emory) examines intertextuality, metaphor, and gender as they function to define readers of Jer 3:1–4:4 negatively in such a way as to motivate change. The governing rhetoric shifts from intertextualities evoking divorce law, marital metaphor, and patriarchal construals of gender to intertextualities evoking patriarchal promise and eschatological hope, father-son metaphors, and the return to “normalcy” in gender relations. Shields also calls attention to the danger inherent in rhetoric such as Jeremiah's, which depends for its power on a negative construal of the feminine, that it may give tacit permission, if not encouragement, to map this construal onto the real world.

After noting the context of Jer 3:1–4:4, especially the way Jer 2 introduces the major images and devices that will be developed (dispute, guilt and pollution of the land, marriage, etc.), and sketching the structure of the passage signaled by shifts in addressee corresponding to shifts in metaphor and intertextuality, Shields turns to close readings of each of the units identified. As the foundation of the dialogue, Jer 3:1–5 merits two intertextual readings, the first “focused on Deut 24:1–4 as an intertext, and the second having cultural discourse of gender as its intertext” (21). Shields notes that Jeremiah's rhetorical question not only invites readers into the dialogue between text (Jer 3:1–5) and

intertext (Deut 24:1–4) but “specifies a particular audience, one which will answer these questions in a particular way” (23). Shields suggests that Deut 24 takes pains to prevent confusion regarding patriarchal structures of hierarchy, lineage, property, and paternity. These themes constitute, then, the point at which Jer 3:1–5 enters into the dialogue. In a disputation, the writer cites the presumably known intertext in the form of rhetorical questions, inviting audience assent and acceptance. Much more than simple parallels, such intertextualities transform or “transgress” their intertexts. Thus, Jer 3:1–5 assert their vision by inferring *kal vechomer* that the behavior of the wife in question has far exceeded the situation envisioned in the legal case, by leaving unclear whether the divorce has indeed taken place, and by voicing the wife’s audacious hope to “return” to her husband. This highly provocative expression of the wife’s hope to return calls on God to violate Deuteronomic law, alludes to, but does not report, an act of repentance, may be either a statement or a rhetorical question, and may be either sincere or facetious. Altogether, these ambiguities invite the readers’ active deliberation.

A second reading of Jer 3:1–5 focuses on gender conventions. “By invoking the law dealing with *sexuality*, the prophet invokes powerful cultural ideals and stereotypes. By invoking a *law* which to an extent defines gendered relationships, the prophet insists on a specific reading of gender with which he assumes his audience will agree” (53). The metaphor reinforces the notions that women occupy a well-defined position and that sexual transgression—erratic eroticism—represents the danger of chaos, the “unnatural.” Shields argues (extrapolating Carol Delaney’s *The Seed and the Soil*) that the rhetoric of Jer 3:1–5 may also derive power from an underlying “seed and soil” metaphor that likens the woman to soil: adultery/prostitution results in the mixture of seed that defines pollution. For effect, this rhetoric hinges on the use of direct address. The male audience will no doubt agree with both the author’s legal interpretation and his reading of gender conventions. The rhetoric convicts the audience by addressing it as the feminine figure in the metaphor, shaming it into changing its behavior. While effective, this use of gender conventions unfortunately confirms rigid structures and marginalizes women, “erotically charged chaos agents” who must inhabit the assigned roles or risk personal and societal catastrophe.

Jeremiah 3:6–11, an extended narrative metaphor, continues and extrapolates verses 1–5 in a reading of the history of the northern kingdom as a case study for the southern kingdom. Through “temporal displacement” (collocating events separated by centuries) and “cloaking radical speech” (an indirect attack on belief in Judah’s election and thus its inviolability), “the metaphor makes the point so obvious that the meaning cannot be missed.” While metaphor provides the rhetorical form for Jer 3:6–11, intertextuality (Deut 24), intratextuality (Jer 3:5–11), and cultural intertextuality (gender) provide the contents. The result is rhetoric that “plays on male fear of losing control over their own

wives” and that suggests the threat that “one woman’s behavior [may be] a snare for another woman” (90).

Given the outcome implied heretofore, the climax of the metaphorical narrative in 3:12–13, which conveys YHWH’s offer of restoration to the north, represents a startling development. Owing to God’s *hesed* (v. 12; cf. 2:1), God is willing to accept Israel’s repentance. Jeremiah 3:14–18 describes the future potentiated in God’s offer, a future so novel that its description requires new intertextual dynamics (Zion tradition), a new governing metaphor (father-son), and new forms of address/gender construction (masculine). The shift in metaphor and gender bears the message: “whereas harlotry led to chaos, proper sonship leads to order” (114).

Jeremiah 3:19–4:4 turn attention to how the ideal of 3:14–18 can become a reality. The first subunit, 3:19–20, continues the interplay between the marital and the father-son metaphors. Intertextually, Jer 3:19 relates to the issue of inheritance found in Deut 32:7–9, although Jeremiah “transgresses” its intertext by depicting YHWH as the father of an inheriting *daughter* and by placing secondary focus on the land as YHWH’s gift. Verse 20 contrasts YHWH’s (v. 19) with Israel’s actual behavior by rephrasing verses 1–5 and alluding to verses 6–11 (*bgd*). The juxtaposition of verses 19 and 20 results in some “slippage” of the father-daughter metaphor as it borders on the marital metaphor; the shift to masculine address at the end of verse 20, however, identifies the audience as those who have acted out the metaphor.

This change of address also ushers in the new metaphor that drives the subsequent material, that of YHWH as father and Judah as repentant son. Rhetorically, the voice heard at the outset distances the reader, now not addressee, but observer. That is, as 4:1–4 indicate, verses 21–25 do not relate the words of those called upon to repent but model repentance. Two issues govern Jeremiah’s liturgy: *bws*–shame as a central saying and the shift to the father-son metaphor that becomes operative in Jer 4:1–4. Shame incorporates a number of the “ideals” treated earlier in Jer 3: the religious, the covenantal, the creation/fertility, the ethical, and the familial ideals.

The final unit, Jer 4:1–4, “round[s] out the picture of what true turning must entail” (136) by gathering up all the strands of rhetoric employed in Jer 3:1–25. Through interaction with Hos 14:6–9, Gen 22:18 and 26:4, Hos 10:11–13, and the circumcision symbol generally, and as treated in Deut 10:16 and 30:6, in particular, Jeremiah reshapes allusions to the patriarchal promise and the invocation of the Abrahamic covenant by placing conditions on the audience of Jer 4:1–4: “A radical change of conduct is necessary” (145). Metaphor and gender in Jer 4:1–4 reveal a central concern for order: setting the boundaries for repentance, calling for covenantal order, urging proper

relations between humans and their God, modeling social order in gender relations. In this *mélange*, Shields argues, circumcision encompasses “issues of identity, inheritance, paternity, and maintaining uniqueness and separateness,” that is, “the necessity of a pure line of descent” (151). Jeremiah 4:1–4 calls upon its audience to reidentify itself, not as adulterous idolaters, but as new Abrahams, as patriarchs. The way this extended text virtually equates female with chaos and male with order, female with pollution and male with fertility, however, can only “circumscribe” women. Within the rhetorical world of Jer 3:1–4:4, “while there is a way out for men . . . , there is no redeeming escape for women” (159).

Shields’s study makes a number of contributions to Jeremiah scholarship and to the hermeneutical problem of treating difficult texts. By expanding the notion of intertextuality to include cultural conventions, Shields calls attention to the several dimensions of texture in persuasive language such as Jeremiah’s, for example. Similarly, by demonstrating the potential of metaphor to define, even in ways likely beyond an author’s intention, Shields calls for and models an exegesis true to the text and ethically responsible at the same time.

Nonetheless, Shields’s contribution has been diminished, most notably, by the unfortunate delay in publication, to a lesser degree by a few issues relating to her definition and use of intertextuality, and, finally, by an overlooked theological opportunity. Generally Shields eschews diachronic questions, although she defines an intertext as one “alluded to or quoted by” its host text (2), a definition that seems to require the establishment of a clear chronological relationship. Yet throughout the study the existence of such host text-intertext relationships is asserted, not demonstrated. For example, Shields treats Isa 2, but not Mic 4, as an intertext for Jer 3:14–18 despite the fact that the Jeremiah tradition demonstrates particular affinities with the Micah tradition and that, at any rate, the tradition history of the Isa 2/Mic 4 doublet requires careful attention. Similarly, Shields regards a few “in that day/the days are coming” texts found later in the book of Jeremiah as intertexts for Jer 3:14–18; yet there are scores of such texts distributed across virtually the whole of the Latter Prophets. Most of them involve the Zion tradition in some way. Does the failure to situate Jer 3:14–18 more precisely in the broader stream of this tradition limit one’s ability to hear nuance? Shields’s observations concerning the function and limitations of the shift in Jer 3 from the marital to the father-son metaphor are salutary: Jeremiah should not be used to endorse and sustain the denigration of a gender created in God’s image. It may also be in order, however, to reassert what may be theologically more central to the shift—evident also at the end of the book of Hosea—namely, that while marital relationships may be dissolved, parent-child relationships may not.