

Reviews Society for Old Testament Studies Booklist 2010

LAUREL LANNER, *“Who Will Lament Her?”: The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum* (LHBOTS, 434; New York, T & T Clark, 2006), pp. X + 270. £80.00. ISBN 10: 0-567-02602-7.

This book presents the background, setting and problems embedded in Nahum, emphasising gender and attitudes towards the feminine. It uses the concept of extra-text to describe other ancient texts that might have a bearing on meaning. It offers a new translation in which gender references are made clear, following it with exegetical issues and problems. This builds into three innovative chapters. Chapter 4 explores feminine references. It builds a case for the presence of the goddess Ishtar behind the text, but obscured by levels of interpretation, producing a “polyvalent” text (p.164). Chapter 5 examines literary theories of “the fantastic” and applies this to Biblical Studies. The fantastic overturns reality, producing “fantastic projections of religious hope” which “must disturb and promote change” (p.182, after Zipes and Bloch). The author surveys earlier works that apply the fantastic to the Bible, with reference to visions and theophanies, occasions where the marvellous breaks into reality. She draws particularly on Todorov’s hesitation between the uncanny and the marvellous (p.184). Fantasy subverts reality with an image of an alternative – political despair for example being replaced with messianic expectation and the sovereignty of God. Chapter 6 applies the concept of “fantastic” to Nahum. The author applies specific theories (notably Todorov, Rabkin, and Jackson, chosen for personal reasons) to Nahum. This reviewer welcomes this fresh approach, whilst recognizing that much remains to be done. Imagining a religiously supernatural world populated by mythological figures provides a fantasy landscape where salvation seems simpler than in the real world.

S. BIGGER.

AVAREN IPSEN, *Sex Working and the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2009), pp.x + 237. £60.00/£16.99. ISBN 13:978-1-84553-33-5.

This book brings together three traditions: biblical exegesis, critical studies and liberation theology. Starting with an interest in sex workers, the author exegetes selected passages from the Bible (Rahab, Solomon’s ‘wisdom’ relating to two prostitutes, the anointing woman in the Gospels, and the whore Babylon) *with* prostitutes and their supporters. Comments from group readings of biblical texts are quoted at length, drawing on the author’s work with the Sex Worker Outreach Project. This is a significant methodological innovation that democratises biblical hermeneutics. The work is located in cultural critical studies, relating to liberation and decolonization. Prostitutes are treated as a subset of the poor, requiring support and sympathy without condemnation. Beneath this prosaic summary, the author is angry with the injustice done to prostitutes in condemning them on religious and moral grounds, angry with the double standards involved, angry over legal marginalisation, and empathetic to the many circumstances that lead women to raise money in this way. Primarily this is a work of critical liberation theology. As an exegetical study of prostitutes in the Bible it is incomplete, with insufficient space given to the sacred/cultic prostitute such as in Genesis 38, and needs broader and deeper examination of Hebrew terms for prostitute. The book added greatly to my understanding of the marginalised sex worker today, but not to my understanding of the biblical writers context. It is nevertheless a thought-provoking book, but a maturer, expanded second edition in a few years time, with typographical errors corrected, would be welcome.

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