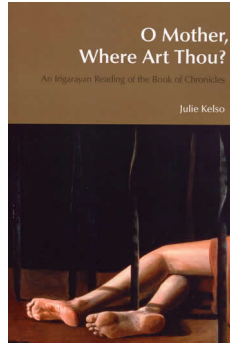


○ REVIEW OF JULIE KELSO. *O MOTHER, WHERE ART THOU? AN IRIGARAYAN READING OF THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES.* (BIBLEWORLD)

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It is fitting to review Kelso's two-part work in *The Bible and Critical Theory*. In the first half of her book Kelso presents, as Critical Theory, an in-depth reading of Luce Irigaray's feminist, psychoanalytical critique of the work and theories of Lacan and Freud. She is fascinated with Irigaray's work in itself and as the basis for a feminist approach to the Hebrew Bible as represented in the book of Chronicles, The Bible section of her book. Her reading of Chronicles occupies the second half of the book. Her interpretation of Irigaray is, in turn, strongly influenced by Michelle Boulous Walker, particularly her *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence* (London: Routledge, 1998). Kelso's is not an easy book to read but both its theoretical and biblical parts are rewarding and well worth the time and effort necessary to work through them. But both parts approach her chosen subjects in depth and in detail and in this review I can only touch on some of the high points of the work.

Chronicles presents an ideal Israel of the past, present and future, an Israel dedicated to God, king and cult. A leitmotif for Kelso in reading this ideal portrait is that it effectively silences women by disavowing them, by excluding them from the main narrative action and from the genealogies in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles. A main strategy of this exclusion is the association of women with maternity and thereby with the maternal body that is absent from Chronicles. Plenty of children, virtually all sons, are born but there is no mention of the necessary initial sex, the time of pregnancy or the corporeal process of birthing. Chronicles fantasises an all male society based on a mono-sexual mode of reproduction that proceeds from father to son with little hint of the role of the mother. Such fantasies and dreams can exist only with the suppression of women and the maternal body. In psychoanalytic terms 'the idea of the maternal body as origin belongs to, and constitutes, the masculine unconscious' (p. 168).

Through her close reading of Irigaray, a reading that I can only note here, she proposes a psychoanalytical mode of reading a written text that can effectively deal with an ancient,

foundational text such as Chronicles, that can make the latter's silences and repressions audible. This is a solid parallel between reading and critiquing Chronicles (part 2) and Lacan and Freud (part 1). (Boulos Walker's impact is most noticeable in this idea of making silence audible.) Kelso notes the 'stylistic irony' of her book: a traditional 'masculine' exposition of Irigaray's work followed by a 'feminine' mode of reading and writing that employs both psychoanalytic and poetic discourses. She punctuates her analysis of Chronicles with her own poems based on Lamentations 1–2 that present widow Jerusalem and daughter Zion. The poetic fragments are a challenging part of Kelso's reading of Chronicles and a consistent reminder of what can happen to those so thoroughly excluded from the narrative and genealogies of Chronicles.

Kelso analyses selections from the genealogies in 1 Chronicles with close attention to certain words and to syntax. She pays especial attention to the use of the verb **לָדָה** (to bear, give birth to) noting its subject, usually male and occasionally female, and to the syntax. The first 31 verses of Chronicles are unrelentingly male ('a motherless-daughterless world' [p. 117]) in the listing of names of fathers and sons and assertions that a man begets his sons, for example, 'Canaan begot Zidon his first-born' (v. 13). The genealogy and the generations flow smoothly until verse 32 when a woman, Abraham's *pilegish*, Keturah, 'his not-quite-wife' (p. 118), steps onto stage: And the sons of Keturah, Abraham's *pilegish* (she) bore (**לָדָהָּ**) Zimran and Yoqshan ... Kelso notes the syntactical difficulties in which 'sons of Keturah' appears to be the subject but then the verb is 3rd feminine singular that would make Keturah the subject. The continuation in verses 33–34, after the list of the sons, confirms this and has father Abraham bearing his sons: 'All of these were the sons of Keturah. And Abraham bore (**וַיֵּלֶד**) Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel' (p. 121).

I offer two other examples of where a woman in the text upsets 'the production of meaningful, genealogical sense' (p. 155) and challenges the fantasy of male birthing. 1 Chr 2:48: 'The *pilegish* of Caleb, Maacah, (he) begot/bore [*yalad*] Sheber and Tirhanah' (see pp 117-38). And 2:49: 'And Shaaph, father of Madmannah, bore ['and she bore' in Hebrew] Sheva ...'.

Kelso reads these syntactical struggles as symptoms of the text's/narrator's repression of woman and the maternal body, a repression that resurfacing in an oblique manner. Kelso addresses the text/narrator as 'you,' as a troubled analysand on her literary couch, and does not attempt to resolve the issue of this 'you': author, narrator, textual voice or such. Her point is that some sort of syntactical or literary difficulty and struggle in the text accompanies the infrequent appearance of a woman in this male genealogy. 'You' cannot mention a woman, whether mother, sister or daughter, without twitching or stammering, as it were, and thereby revealing 'your' repressed bad faith in 'your' male fantasy.

In the analysis of the passages in 1 Chronicles 1–9 that include a woman she offers many insights into the working or lack of some of the texts, in Hebrew and in a literal English translation, beyond just syntactical difficulties. In 2:19 'Calev took for himself Ephrath, and she bore for him Chur' but in 2:50 we read of 'Calev, the son of Chur.' Kelso notes this as a symptomatic confusion and does not try to resolve it by appeal to some theory of sources and redaction. In addition her use of non-traditional spellings for many familiar names is another small way to highlight her non-traditional mode of reading. For me Kelso's book would be worth the reading

effort if only for these detailed and questioning readings; she won't let her analysis and 'you' get by with the slightest slip or stumble. She gives speech to silence.

She entitles her reading of 1 Chronicles 10–2 Chronicles 36 'The Debt-Free Masculine Subject' in line with the continuing fantasy of male mono-sexual production. Men, here kings, have no debt to mothers, to maternal bodies or to natural processes of pregnancy and birth. Kelso again works to give voice to this silence of woman and of nature. The lengthy story of David, Solomon and the Temple dominates this part of Chronicles but, strikingly, opens with a 'disconcerting, gruesome *corporeal* beginning: the suicide/murder of Saul and his sons' (p. 171; her italics). The Philistines behead Saul and desecrate his body. Kelso is drawn to the tale because of the focus on his physical body and she sees, in the gory details, a symptom of the repressed maternal body. Whether her reading accounts or not for this story, Kelso does raise the issue why this violent and corporeal tale opens the story of David, Solomon and their successors.

In her concern with curious parts of the text Kelso first deals with the temple that combines the phallus and the womb. The phallus appears in the porch that fronts the temple: it is 20 cubits long matching the width of the temple and 120 cubits tall, twice the entire length of the temple (2 Chr 3:4). The main body of the temple, like a womb, has only one entrance, probably no windows and the holy of holies is set apart by a slight curtain, not a door or wall (3:14). Kelso comments that this describes 'a doubly-sexed body: a male (phallic) body with a womb' (p. 180) and the thin curtain marks this as a virginal body. Men can give birth to men without sex.

Kelso also singles out the three kings who are struck by severe physical ailments: Asa (16:12), Jehoram (21:14-15) and Uzziah (26:23). Their afflicted bodies broadcast their physical bodies and their debts to nature and indirectly to the maternal body. Jehoram, indeed, appears to give 'birth' to his innards: 'And you will have a very great sickness in your bowels [the word also refers to the maternal womb] until your bowels come out' (21:15).

Kelso engages other scholarly work on Irigaray and on Chronicles including feminist readings; she notes areas of both agreement and disagreement. However in regard to Chronicles her approach is so much her own that she does not need to engage other interpretations of Chronicles in depth and at every point. Her decisive move away from the standard historical-critical questions of authorship, date, sources and text is refreshing and a welcome reminder that we can gain insight into the Bible in depth and in detail with radically different modes of reading.