Stuart Macwilliam


Stuart Macwilliam sets out to provide a queer perspective on the marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible by challenging heteronormative interpretations. To undergird his own analysis of prophetic texts with marriage metaphor, he draws upon queer theory. However, given the limitation of queer theory as a hermeneutical tool because of its “elusiveness” (22), Macwilliam relies on a linguistic/literary approach, constantly developing, refining, and/or correcting earlier feminist interpretations. Therefore, his own contributions are not so much theoretical as they are analytical, offering unique readings in his efforts to discover the queer in the marriage metaphor. Also, Macwilliam tries to find, though he never fully elaborates them but hints at them throughout the book, the socio-political implications of the ideologically charged queer readings of the marriage metaphor.

The book is divided into three distinct sections: (1) Methodological Foundations, which lays out his discussion of queer theory and feminist/queer interpretations of the prophetic marriage metaphor; (2) Queer and Metaphor, which provides his analysis of the marriage metaphor in Jeremiah 2-3, Hosea 1-3, and Ezekiel 16 and 23; and (3) Queer and Camp, which presents his camp reading of Ezek. 23:11-21.

In the first section, Macwilliam outlines the theoretical framework for his book by focusing on two canonical works in queer theory and the contributions of feminist and queer biblical interpreters. Though he mentions and briefly discusses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s book, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, he concentrates on Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. The basis of Butler’s theory, the performativity of gender, informs his analysis of the marriage metaphor. Recognizing the “artificiality” of gender allows him “to subvert the idea of the naturalness of gender” (23). Therefore, he can discuss the fluidity, rather than focus on the strict binarism, of the gender of the actors in the marriage metaphor.

Though queer theory frames his line of inquiry, it does not inform his methodology, which is basically a “text-centered” reading (28). Since he depends heavily on feminist readings, he discusses their critiques of traditional male interpretations of the marriage metaphor. Whereas traditional interpretations have focused on the male audience (tenor) of the prophetic sayings and how male readers are forced to identify with and therefore reject their association with the unfaithful wife (vehicle) in the marriage metaphor, feminist reception critics have tried to expose the problem with the normalization of the meta-
phor which divinizes men and debases women as immoral and deserving of sexual violence. While both function within the confines of the binary gender system, queer theory questions heteronormativity so that the metaphor which allows the “mutual interaction between vehicle and tenor” (65-66) forces the male audience to identify as the bride of YHWH.

One would expect a discussion on marriage metaphor to begin with the book of Hosea, but Macwilliam starts with Jeremiah, because Macwilliam’s paradigm, the anti-schema, is most apparent in that book. Initially, he tackles scholarly efforts to schematize the marriage metaphor in Jeremiah 2-3 according to gender; these previous efforts argue that Israel was conceptualized as male (tenor) while Jerusalem was figured as female (vehicle). Based on his careful analysis of gender in these two chapters of Jeremiah, Macwilliam finds gender confusion, not consistency (hence his designation of the anti-schema). Not only is there gender inconsistency between the tenor and the vehicle, but also the ancient male audience is forced to “associate himself with the role of a woman” (95), especially with the three movements of the metaphorical process (loyal bride to adulterous wife to loyal wife). The audience identifies itself not only with the adulterous wife but also with the loyal wife.

Perhaps Macwilliam had originally expected to find the anti-schema in the books of Hosea and Ezekiel; this would explain why he has a chart of the anti-schema for all three books. Despite his intent, the anti-schema is not present in the other two books, which Macwilliam fully acknowledges. Consequently, he is left to find, sometimes force, gender-bending readings.

Since the marriage metaphor in the book of Hosea is “more complex” (98), the anti-schema developed for the book of Jeremiah is “inadequate” (99). Therefore, he discusses the feminine attributes of God and the “unmanning” of Hosea. Like Jeremiah who is unmanned because he is commanded not to marry, Hosea is unmanned because he has to marry a woman whose sexuality and therefore the paternity of her children are in question.

As for the book of Ezekiel, Macwilliam runs into the general problem of the “m[ale] for f[emale] forms” (Ezekiel 23), which has been explained traditionally as a late linguistic trait in the book of Ezekiel. This is not as apparent in Ezekiel 16, where the feminine form is consistently used. He traces the breakdown of gender in Ezekiel 23, arguing that it is the blurring of the line between the male audience (tenor) and the female bride (vehicle). Yet here he is on the defensive since his analysis of the “m for f forms” is more problematic than definitive.

Despite the problem of finding the anti-schema in the books of Hosea and Ezekiel, Macwilliam still finds the efficacy of the paradigm, in which the male