This very fine collection of essays is not for the faint-hearted. It sounds a strong challenge to those scholars who remain entrenched within the historical-critical method and who have not yet perceived the limitations and ethical implications when one method comes to dominate academic discourse and new approaches are looked upon with dismissive suspicion. This book is a collection of essays developed from two Society of Biblical Literature International Meetings, in 2002 and 2003. Within these two gatherings papers were delivered within the Whence and Whither? Methodology and the Future of Biblical Studies unit. Following an initial chapter by the two editors, the other essays are divided into those concerned with methodology, followed by studies on aspects of the Old Testament and the New Testament and early Christian writings, with an epilogue by Athalya Brenner. For this review, I will provide a brief critique of the introductory essay, then list the name of the author and title for all essays, with more detailed comments on a few. By this means I hope to indicate the scope of the writings, which are generally described as (post)critical discourse.

The first essay, by the two editors, Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, is entitled “Mastering the Tools or Retooling the Masters? The Legacy of Historical-Critical Discourse.” This essay serves as an introduction to what follows as it maps the critique of the historical positivism that lies behind historical-critical methods and traces the rise of
ideological criticisms such as feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern and their struggle to find a place within the biblical academy. The writers note that in its beginnings feminist hermeneutical studies continued to use historical-critical methods and that the focus at first was in reconstructing the past. Thus, early feminist criticism challenged the dominant paradigm but continued to make use of it methodologically. The major feminist contribution was that “difference with respect to the presumed masculinist signifiers had to be brought into the conversation” (17). The rise of postmodern and postcolonial studies provided a more serious challenge to the domination of historical criticism as the paradigm for biblical studies without entirely disengaging with past traditions.


These six essays establish the critical methodological concerns that are then taken up in the following analyses of biblical literature. The essays address the misconceptions of the historical-critical method, such as “the belief in the possibility of an unbiased presuppositionless search for truth” as well as “the recognition of the impossibility and undesirability of reaching the truth about a historical event or the meaning of a text” (Stenström, 43). Along with these false perceptions in the method, the essays raise ideological issues that the historical-critical method did not address, such as the significance of race, gender, and class and the possibilities and impossibilities of participating in biblical discourse that these factors can and do control. Martínez-Vázquez calls for a transformative imagination to develop new methods and theories of interpretation in order to deconstruct those theories and methods “that have been used to exclude and oppress the subalterns of society…. The deconstruction and decolonization of the scaffolds created space for the construction of a decolonial imaginary by providing the subaltern with a voice” (89).

The essays on Old Testament themes include: (1) Kristin De Troyer, “‘And They Did So’: Following Orders Given by Old Joshua”; (2) Judith E. McKinlay, “Sarah and Hagar: What Have I to Do with Them?”; (3) Madipoane Masenya (ngwaná Mphahlele), “Their Hermeneutics Was Strange! Ours Is a Necessity! Rereading Vashti as African-

In this collection, the essay of Roland Boer stands out as a dissenting voice. He challenges the single feminist reading of Ezra-Nehemiah by Tamar C. Eskenazi for being too limited in its scope and offers an alternative feminist analysis drawing on some Marxist categories. His analysis offers a broader vision of dissent and opposition within the postexilic community, and he critiques Eskenazi because “the exclusive focus on the question of foreign women neglects this wider matrix” (249). His approach maintains the feminist critique within the wider matrix of liberation hermeneutics, and the inclusion of his article indicates a willingness for self-criticism within this discourse.


Graham Brock’s essay I found the most provocative in this grouping. Using redactional criticism she briefly demonstrates how gender influences the narrative of Luke’s Gospel and how this continues in Acts. She then combines textual and rhetorical criticism to show how the Codex Bezae manuscript of Acts, “regardless of the other Western texts, displays enough variants in and of itself to reveal a pattern of alterations that clearly appears to lessen the female leadership presence in the text” (257–58). She provides six examples to prove her point: the linking of women and children (Acts 1:14); omitting the article so that the Spirit is poured out only on “some daughters” (Acts 2:17); the change in Acts 17:4 from “leading women” to “wives of the leading men”; changing the order of words so that Acts 17:12 reads “and many of the Greeks and prominent men and women” (Bezae), where Codex B has “a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men”; the absence in Bezae Acts 17:34 of the phrase “and the woman named Damaris” found in Codex B; and the consistent naming of the missionary couple “Aquila and Priscilla,” with the male named first where other major manuscripts place Priscilla first. Her study shows the value of textual criticism as a tool for the recovery of lost voices.

The opening editorial essay states that this volume is “an attempt to incorporate widespread interaction with the traditional historical-critical task, while at the same time
engaging that tradition of contesting scholarship” (28). In my opinion, this volumes
achieves this purpose in the depth of scholarship in these essays and the range of
methodologies employed. I highly recommend this work for all those seriously concerned
with the complex task of interpreting the Bible today in many locales and cultures so that
it can continue to speak with liberating power.