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Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism)

Mieke Bal

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Combining literary criticism and feminist analysis, *Death and Dissymmetry* radically reinterprets not only the Book of Judges but also the tradition of its reception and understanding in the West. In Mieke Bal's account, Judges documents the Israelite culture learning to articulate itself in a decisive period of transition.

Counter to standard readings of Judges, Bal's interpretation demonstrates that the book has a political and ideological coherence in which the treatment of women plays a pivotal role. Bal concentrates here not on the assassinations and battles that rage through Judges but on the violence in the domestic lives of individual characters, particularly sexual violence directed at women. Her skillful reading reveals that murder, in this text, relates to gender and reflects a social structure that is inherently contradictory. By foregrounding the stories of women and subjecting them to subtle narrative analysis, she is able to expose a set of preoccupations that are essential to the sense of these stories but are not articulated in them. Bal thereby develops a "countercoherence" in conflict with the apparent emphases of Judges—the politics, wars, and historiography that have been the constant focus of commentators on the book.

Death and Dissymmetry makes an important contribution to the development of a feminist method of interpreting ancient texts, with consequences for religious studies, ancient history, literary theory, and gender studies.

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