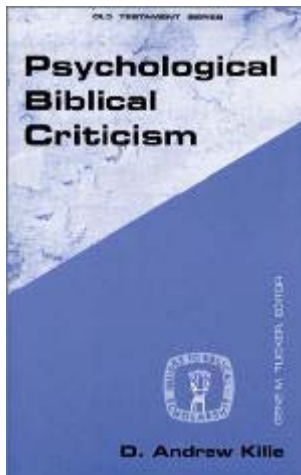


RBL 03/28/2002



Kille, D. Andrew Tucker, Gene M., ed.

Psychological Biblical Criticism

Guides to Biblical Scholarship Old Testament Series

Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001. Pp. xv + 161,
Paperback, \$21.00, ISBN 080063246X.

Carleen R Mandolfo
St Mary's College Of California
Moraga, CA 94575

D. Andrew Kille has written a timely and comprehensive (although succinct) account of the history and present contours of psychological biblical criticism. As a member of the steering committee of the "Person, Culture, and Religion Group" of the American Academy of Religion and a member, as well, of the "Psychology and Biblical Studies Group" of the Society of Biblical Literature, he should be well-placed to assess the current state of the field. The driving force behind this work seems to be Kille's concern that the (re)emergent field of psychological criticism is in need of greater visibility and coherence (xiii). This book's publication in the Guides to Biblical Scholarship series is apropos of this concern.

The greater part of Kille's work is a selective survey of three different psychological approaches as they have been brought to bear on Gen 2:4b-3:24, the story of the garden of Eden. He reviews a series of articles and monographs that utilize Freudian, Jungian, and developmental theories to reread this oft-interpreted text. Kille does not offer a psychological reading of his own, though he does critique and rank the effectiveness of the readings he surveys.

Chapters 1 and 2 outline the parameters of the methodology under consideration. Noting the negative assessments that psychological criticism has attracted (by R. Bultmann, for example), Kille goes to great lengths to point out the pitfalls of psychological applications to biblical texts: "One must apply psychological models with

great care, since failing to recognize historical or literary factors may lead to simply imposing the theory on the text and forcing it to fit the exegete's pet perceptions" (14). This caveat is repeated in nuanced ways throughout the book. Along these lines, Kille does well to situate psychological criticism within the broader purview of biblical studies, particularly in its connection to literary criticism. Kille correctly situates psychological criticism as a subdiscipline of contemporary literary theory, particularly reader-response and ideological criticism. As with these two approaches, one of the benefits of psychological criticism, when used responsibly, is to move analysis away from how texts work to what they work upon, namely, the reader, both as an individual and as a member of a larger social or ideological universe. This corresponds to Kille's focus on how psychological criticism can help readers apprehend the "world in front of the text," to borrow a distinction made by P. Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, and apparently Kille, "the movement of explanation, of analyzing the structure of the text, must reach its conclusion in appropriation," in other words, in the reader's ability to understand himself or herself in "front of the text" (25).

This leads to another caveat, which concerns the confusion of readings that conflate textual layers. According to Kille, one must be very careful to distinguish between the world behind the text (historical referents, etc.), the world of the text (structures of narrative, characterization, etc.), and the world in front of the text. Practitioners of psychological criticism, particularly those employing Freudian readings, are, apparently, prone to allowing this kind of slippage to occur. Too often, contemporary categories and models are applied to a text without proper concern for its contextual particularities.

After laying the hermeneutical groundwork for the garden of Eden story and establishing criteria for an "adequate interpretation" in chapter 3, Kille reviews representative psychological readings of Gen 2-3 in chapters 4, 5, and 6. Kille is not afraid to evaluate these different readings, noting that although the text veils a multiplicity of legitimate readings, some readings are better than others. As it turns out, some are much better than others. He uses a five-point Ricoeurian model by which to make his assessments: (1) "A more valid interpretation will deal with the text as a whole"; (2) "A more valid interpretation will deal with the text as an individual"; (3) "A more valid interpretation will account for the greatest number of factors found in the text and will demonstrate greater convergence between the aspects considered"; (4) "A more valid interpretation will enable the text to mean all it can mean"; and (5) "A more valid interpretation will enable appropriation" (i.e., the interpretation needs to lead the reader to a new self-understanding enabled by the encounter with the text).

In accordance with these criteria, the Freudian readings fare least well, breaking rules one, two, and three. In short, according to Kille, most Freudian interpreters are more interested in reading the text as a proof of Oedipal theory than they are in maintaining the integrity of the text and too often "understand their work to be the recovery of the (un)consciousness that lies *behind* the text" (76-78). Positively, Freudians do employ a

proper "hermeneutic of suspicion," recognizing that textual symbols rarely mean only what they appear to mean on the surface. One wonders if Freudians would have done better in a review of their readings of a different text (see, for example, Ilona Rashkow's Freudian readings of several Genesis texts in *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000]).

Jungian readings fare better. Unlike Freudians, Jungian readers do not understand sexuality or incest to be the main themes of the story. Their "coming to consciousness" framework is broader and takes into account the integrity of the text as it is, unlike the Freudians, who need to rewrite the story to make it fit an Oedipal model. A possible downside is that Jungian readings may be so generic and common sense that if one were to remove the Jungian technical vocabulary, "what remained might still be a credible and intelligible interpretation from the perspective of a common human experience of growth" (107).

Developmental readings, especially as employed by Lynn Bechtel, seem to fare best of all. According to Kille, Bechtel does a fine job of respecting the text as it stands, accounting for all the salient factors in the text, and not forcing psychological models onto the text. Bechtel's light touch when it comes to applying psychological theories (Kille notes that Bechtel's explicit references to developmental psychology are "quite general"), in combination with her willingness to use whatever methodological strategies best illuminate all aspects of the text, leads Kille to characterize her reading as "psychologically informed," rather than strictly psychological (123). Although one cannot help but applaud Kille's quite objective (given his admittedly somewhat arbitrary standards) assessment of these approaches, it is difficult not to find it odd that someone as obviously committed to the discipline of psychological criticism as he finds the best psychological readings those that are not "strictly psychological."

This book should be quite useful to those who are interested in pursuing psychological readings of biblical texts but are unsure where to start, as well as those who are looking for an overarching assessment of the field. Kille's bibliography is comprehensive and usefully organized. Included also is a glossary of psychological terms. Granted, what Kille offers is a very select review, but it is a fairly representative one, and his assessments, whether individual readers agree with them or not, highlight important issues and raise crucial questions regarding the legitimacy of psychological readings of biblical texts.